



MAR IVANIOS

PERSON, IMPACT AND
RELEVANCE

EDITOR
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MAR IVANIOS

Person, Impact and Relevance

Compendium of Essays

Dedicated to



Late Rev. Fr. Saimon Eluvathingal

A priest who through his beliefs, visions, words and actions
epitomized the true meaning of priesthood...
An enthusiastic and stalwart proponent of the Ivarian spirituality,
which is marked by an invitation to intimacy
with Christ and imitation of Christ...



TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Mar Ivanios: Person and Life

1. *Mar Ivanios. Remembering the Legend and His Legacy:*
H.B. Moran Mor Baselios Cardinal Cleemis,
Major Archbishop-Catholicos 17
2. *Making of Mar Ivanios. A Biographical Sketch:*
Dr. Asha Cyril 22
3. *Mar Ivanios. A Man after God's Own Heart:*
Most Rev. Dr. Philipos Mar Stephanos 30
4. *A Seeker of Wisdom and Truth:*
Dr. Antony Thomas 37
5. *Mar Ivanios. A Compassionate Father:*
Dr. Giby Geevarghese 44

II. Historical Overview and the Impact

6. *Historical context of the Reunion Movement:*
Most Rev. Dr. Thomas Mar Eusebius 55
7. *The Serampore Days:* Rev. Dr. Prabheesh George 59
8. *The Founder of Bethany:* Rev. Dr. Jose Mariadas OIC 70
9. *The Prophet of Reunion Movement:*
Rev. Fr. Saimon Eluvathingal 80
10. *Newman of the East:* Rev. Dr. Mathew Charthakuzhy 86

III. Mar Ivanios' Vision, Spirituality and Relevance

11. *Mar Ivanios and the Evangelizing Mission:*
Most Rev. Dr. Jacob Mar Barnabas 99
12. *Legacy of Mar Ivanios – A Reformer:*
Rev. Dr. Sunny Mathew 105
13. *Ivanian spirituality of the Imitation of Christ:*
Rev. Dr. Isaac Parackal OIC 112

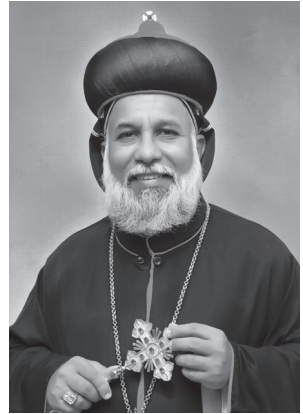


14. *Mar Ivanios and the Eucharistic Spirituality:*
Rev. Dr. John Kuttiyil 121
15. *Mar Ivanios and the Sacrament of Reconciliation:*
Most Rev. Dr. Thomas Mar Antonios 128
16. *“Realizing God is Nobler than Serving God”:*
Rev. Dr. Joseph Valamparambil 134
17. *Mar Ivanios and the Pursuit of Virtues:*
Rev. Dr. John Christopher OIC 144
18. *Mar Ivanios’ Devotion to Mother Mary:*
Rev. Sr. Giles DM 151
19. *The Importance of the Word of God in the life of
a believer according to Mar Ivanios:*
Rev. Sr. Dr. Jocelyn SIC 158
20. *The Prayer of Mar Ivanios:*
Rev. Dr. Abraham Charivupurayidom 163



FOREWORD

As the Malankara Syrian Catholic Church enters the last decade of the Centennial year of the momentous event of reunion, we cannot help remembering the Servant of God Mar Ivanios, a hero of epic proportions. He was exceptionally holy, and his spiritual legacy was perceptible to anyone who contacted him that the future generations may wonder if such a man ever lived on this earth! Even though he was born towards the end of the 19th century, at the height of the Victorian era, his life and vision remain quite relevant today, and he never ceases to fascinate us. The secret, I believe, is that he was born not to fulfil his purpose but to fulfil God's purpose through him!



Mar Ivanios is a man for all times. He was an icon of such immeasurable stature that the Malankarites always take pride in having him as their guiding beacon. His ascetic life was filled with the prophetic voice from heaven; his heart was an overflowing fountain of divine vision. It was a heart that was also burning and melting spiritually. And from this heart sprouted and developed the Malankara Syrian Catholic Church, a vibrant Catholic community in India and abroad. He ignited the light of goodness in the world. He was a person of enormous grace and tremendous poise, whose persona exuded an incredible inner fortitude and conviction. He was a towering intellectual figure and a simple and humble soul at the same time. He was a true *sannyasi* who embodied a profound approach to sharing God's love here on earth. He was a multi-faceted personality, a greatly respected spiritual leader, a profoundly wise person, a fervent promoter of unity and peace, and committed to eradicating poverty and illiteracy. His heart was full of compassion, and his hands were outstretched to the needy, irrespective of their caste or



creed. He was an insightful and illuminating visionary leader who walked ahead of time.

The radiating life of Archbishop Mar Ivanios has always been a passion in my life. As a seminarian at Infant Mary's Minor Seminary, Tiruvalla, I read the two volumes of his biography. This sunshine was unfailingly illuminating my spirit throughout my priestly training. The fact is that my passion and admiration for this eminent personality grew even more when I became a priest, a bishop, and later when I had the blessed privilege of starting my pastoral ministry in Thiruvananthapuram in 2007 as the successor of the great Mar Ivanios himself. Writing a book about this towering personality was always a dream of mine. And this dream was materialized in February 2021 with the release of the book *Daiva-sampaadanam*, a series of lectures titled 'Ivanian Yathra.'

It gives me great pleasure to know that St. Mary's Malankara Seminary has come forward to publish an English version of twenty papers on the Servant of God. This book entitled—*Mar Ivanios: Person, Impact, Relevance*—a vivid portrait of Mar Ivanios carries us to the various aspects of his life. I am sure this book deftly captures the Servant of God's luminous and enduring life and legacy.

I prayerfully remember Rev. Fr. Mathew Kandathil, who has breathed life into this idea and nurtured it into an initiative that would be a beacon for future generations. The twenty insightful and engaging essays present a wide-ranging study with biographical, philosophical, theological, spiritual, and pastoral discussions to familiarize Mar Ivanios and his enduring impact and relevance to modern readers. I consider myself fortunate to be among the many pilgrims of the *Ivanian Yathra: A Tribute to a Legend*.

The musings and contemplations of the contributors (bishops, priests, religious, and laymen) provide a comprehensive and rare picture of this eminent personality. I would like to record my appreciation for each contributor and everyone else whose untiring efforts and committed devotion have helped bring this into print. I also acknowledge and appreciate the wholehearted support of all the venerable priests and parishioners in the Gulf region. I congratulate Rev. Dr. Jolly Karimpil, the editor of the current volume, which celebrates Mar Ivanios, a legend, and his legacy. This book is a compelling and worshipful tribute to his sacred memory. It will be a useful source material to those who wish to



study Mar Ivanios and the history of the Malankara church. I also gratefully recall the unstinted support rendered and the strenuous effort undertaken by the Malankara Seminary Publications in bringing out this book promptly and in elegant shape.

The life of Mar Ivanios was a pilgrimage of love, truth, and unity. His was a life lived in fullness. May the holiness in his life illuminate our path and fill our soul with the love of God. As a light to spirituality, an expression of meekness, a trumpet of unity, and as an image of kindness, may he shine forever and ever as a sacred memory that cannot be erased by the change of time.

✠ **Baselios Cardinal Cleemis**

Major Archbishop – Catholicos



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My heart is overflowing with gratitude to the almighty God as *Mar Ivanios: Person, Impact, Relevance* is seeing the light of day. For the Malankara makkal's life journey, especially those in diaspora, Mar Ivanios is a guiding light to look up to. When the annual *padayathra* (foot-pilgrimage) from Perunnadu to the tomb of Mar Ivanios at Pattom in the year 2020 had to be cancelled in the wake of the pandemic, it shattered many a faithful for whom Mar Ivanios day was the much-awaited day in a year. This prompted me to discover a meaningful way to celebrate Mar Ivanios day and to offer a fitting tribute to Mar Ivanios. A series of 38 YouTube talks in Malayalam by luminaries from different walks of life was launched to celebrate the life of a legend. The overwhelming response that the digital talks on Mar Ivanios garnered propelled Moran Mor Baselios Cardinal Cleemis to document the heart-rendering and well-studied reflections in the form of a book. I consider this as providential as if heaven wanted us to go back to our source-experience, viz., understanding Mar Ivanios' heart and mind. This prompted me to launch twenty talks in English on the life, vision, impact, and relevance of Mar Ivanios with the title: *Ivanian Yathra: Tribute to a Legend*. This book is a multi-layered reflection on the life of Mar Ivanios, which would become a lens through which our children and youth would get to know more Mar Ivanios and his vision. My sincere thanks are due to His Beatitude Baselios Cardinal Cleemis for his constant encouragement and guidance. It would not have been possible to undertake this mammoth venture without the dynamism of and the untiring efforts of Fr. Jolly Karimpil, who selected the themes and titles of this study series and gave direction to this endeavor. I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Mr. Shibu Scariah, Sharjah, for his financial support in materializing this project. I wish you all a joyful reading.

Fr. Mathew Kandathil

Former Coordinator, MSCC - Gulf-region



PREFACE

Along with the undeniable and horrific consequences of global pandemic Covid-19, there appeared a new sense of appreciation and gratefulness; a new perspective on everything we have taken for granted for so long – about our lives, about the meaning of existence, and about those who have played a defining role building-up our lives. The Servant of God Mar Ivanios, both a missionary and a visionary, is the life-breath of Malankarites. The annual foot-pilgrimage (*padayathra*) of the year 2020 from Perunad to the tomb of Mar Ivanios at Pattom, a testimony of their love for their beloved Archbishop, had to be called off due to unforeseen circumstances. This led to an extraordinary disruption and anxiety in the hearts of many faithful who have etched this ‘padayathra’ into their soul so deep. Rev. Fr. Mathew Kandathil, the coordinator of the Gulf region, gave a new face to the commemoration of Mar Ivanios by launching an in-depth study on Mar Ivanios, his vision, impact, and relevance. That even corona virus failed to dampen the spirit of the Malankara Syrian Catholic community in UAE is primarily due to the charismatic leadership of Rev. Fr. Mathew Kandathil, who knows how to marshal the creativity, technical brilliance, talents, and efforts of the people. Two series of YouTube videos comprising 58 talks on the Servant of God Mar Ivanios, both in Malayalam and English, and a third series tracing the glorious history of the Church in India from A.D. 52 to 2021, are a testimony to Fr. Kandathil’s vision, commitment, and love for the Church. Moran Mor Baselios Cardinal Cleemis, Major Archbishop-Catholicos lauded these efforts, and he was so fascinated by this initiative that he decided to publish the talks in the form of a book, and to take the task of personally editing the first book in Malayalam - *Daivasampaadanam*. Malankara Seminary publications came forward to publish the present book, which is a collection of twenty talks on Mar



Ivanios in English. This book reveals the trajectory of Mar Ivanios' background that culminates in his vision of reunion, its pluriform impact, and enduring relevance.

This volume, arranged into three sections, provides gripping accounts of Mar Ivanios on shaping the Malankara Syrian Catholic Church as it is in the present. The first section focuses on the life of Mar Ivanios. His Beatitude Moran Mor Baselios Cardinal Cleemis describes Mar Ivanios in terms of the seriousness of purpose and depth of understanding, which is a compelling tribute to the Servant of God. Dr. Asha Cyril's article is biographical. She beautifully sketches a profile of Mar Ivanios. This is followed by the article by bishop Philipos Mar Stephanos which invites the readers to understand the person who attuned his will to God's will, and it traces how Mar Ivanios became a man after God's own heart. The following article by Dr. Antony Thomas brings to light Mar Ivanios' pursuit of wisdom and truth. Mar Ivanios' towering stature as an intellectual giant has been much discussed, but Dr. Giby Geevarughese's article takes us to an extraordinary journey into Mar Ivanios' heart. 'Mar Ivanios as a Compassionate Father' presents an area which was hardly touched upon in the books hitherto.

The second section features a historical overview. The article by bishop Thomas Mar Eusebius investigates the historical context of the Reunion movement. Rev. Dr. Prabheesh George in his article shows how the years spent by Mar Ivanios at Serampore turned out to become a watershed moment in his life as it reshaped his vision, life and mission. Rev. Dr. Mariadas OIC traces the history of the foundation of Bethany and notes that silence, contemplation, and service are culminated and fused in Bethany spirituality. It fosters an active attentiveness to God, joined with a prompt responsiveness to God.

The present volume is enriched by the talk of Late Rev. Fr. Saimon Eluvathingal, which was incidentally one of his last discourses, entitled: 'Mar Ivanios: The Prophet of Reunion Movement.' He argues that the annual celebration of Reunion should not be merely considered the commemoration of a chronological event in history but rather as a



kairological event, if we want to fathom the scope of reunion in its depth. Reunion, as envisioned by Mar Ivanios, is to be looked at as a ‘redemptive correction,’ a term coined by Fr. Saimon himself. How this would change our perception of Reunion forms the crux of his article. The following article by Rev. Dr. Mathew Charthakuzhy introduces to the readers two great personalities: Edward Cardinal Mooney and St. John Henry Newman. They placed great emphasis on knowledge and education along with the spiritual renewal of their communities. The author discusses their lives in relation to the life of Servant of God Mar Ivanios.

The third and the final section focuses on Mar Ivanios’ vision, spirituality, and the relevance of his ideas today. Bishop Jacob Mar Barnabas notes that Mar Ivanios’ outlook was not limited merely to the Syrian Orthodox Church’s reunion with the Catholic Church, but it was focused on all of humanity and all of God’s creation. He was convinced that evangelization is the primary objective of the Church. Therefore, he started focusing on the evangelizing mission immediately after the great event of Reunion in 1930. The next article by Rev. Dr. Sunny Mathew captures the legacy of Mar Ivanios as a social reformer. Mar Ivanios extended Christ’s embracing arms to embrace and uplift the poor and the marginalized who were reeling under centuries-old discrimination based on caste, creed, and language. The mission of the Church to bring about a society based on freedom, justice, and fraternity was repeatedly highlighted in his discourses and writings. Mar Ivanios saw education as a catalyst for social transformation. Rev. Dr. Isaac Parackal OIC shows that Mar Ivanios demonstrated a profound Christocentric theological basis. The keyword of Ivanian spirituality is imitation – imitation of ‘Jesus Christ.’ Rev. Dr. John Kuttiyil, in his article ‘Mar Ivanios and the Eucharistic Spirituality’, notes that Mar Ivanios drew up a sound Eucharistic theology, which was firmly grounded in the teachings of the Fathers of the Church of the Syrian Tradition and based on the liturgy of the Syro-Malankara Church. The next article, ‘Mar Ivanios and the Sacrament of Reconciliation,’ written by bishop Thomas Mar Antonios focuses on the analogy of bath (*kuli*), dear to Mar Ivanios, to describe the sacrament of reconciliation. The Holy Sacrament of confession is



the pool in which our soul takes a bath and purges itself. Article by Rev. Dr. Joseph Valamparambil is philosophical. It attempts to explain the meaning of the famous dictum of Mar Ivanios: ‘Realization of God is nobler than service of God.’ God-realization means self-realization because the self is a creature of God and the crown of creation, created in the image and likeness of God. A true seeker of truth finds his authentic self in God himself. In his article, Rev. Dr. John Christopher OIC explores how Mar Ivanios, throughout his illustrious life, was in constant pursuit of virtues. Marian devotion of Mar Ivanios became the subject of study in Rev. Sr. Giles DM’s article. Rev. Sr. Dr. Jocelyn SIC, in her article “The Importance of the Word of God in the Life of a Believer according to Mar Ivanios,” points out that Ivanian theology is deeply biblical. His writings and speeches were seeped in deep biblical spirituality, and they inspired the faithful to draw closer to the word of God. The final article by Rev. Dr. Abraham Charivupurayidom analyses the prayer of dedication composed by Mar Ivanios. The prayer reveals the importance attached by Mar Ivanios on the primacy of grace. A devout person expresses his total dependence on God and prays to obtain God’s grace in attuning his will to the divine will.

As the Malankara Syrian Catholic Church ushers in the last decade of the Centennial year of the momentous event of reunion, this book can be seen as a glorious tribute to the Servant of God Mar Ivanios of happy memory, who walked the untrodden path, achieved the unimaginable dream and lived the eternal vision. The twenty insightful and engaging essays present a wide-ranging study with biographical, philosophical, theological, spiritual and pastoral discussions with the aim of familiarizing the person of Mar Ivanios and his enduring impact and relevance to the modern readers.

As this book was still in its period of formation, the heart-breaking news of the demise of Rev. Fr. Saimon Eluvathingal, one of the writers of this volume, left us in deep shock. Fr. Saimon, a Syro-Malabar Catholic by birth, was ordained for the Latin Catholic diocese of Berhampur, and in the last three years, he rendered his commendable services to the mission diocese of Gurgaon as the mission coordinator. Through his



beliefs, visions, words, and actions, he epitomized the true meaning of priesthood. He was so fascinated by the Servant of God Mar Ivanios that he dedicated his time to undertake a serious study on the former's writings and works on him. It eventually culminated in fifty YouTube talks on Mar Ivanios' vision and spirituality! He also identified a pristine path of spirituality as envisaged by Mar Ivanios, and he preached Ivanian retreat to priests, religious, and laity. With earnest gratitude for Fr. Saimon Eluvathingal's contributions to the Malankara Syrian Catholic Church, we decided to honor Fr. Saimon's memory by dedicating this book to him.

We are so incredibly thankful to all our esteemed writers and readers for their unconditional support. I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Mrs. Agnes Antony, Rev. Dr. George Rajmohan, Bro. Keelath Thomas, and Dr. Anto A. Paul for their unabated dedication, willingness, and hard work in proofreading the text. No matter of admiration would suffice for the fascinating cover design by Bro. Dains Raj. I cannot fail to recount with deep affection and gratitude the encouragement and guidance of Moran Mor Baselios Cardinal Cleemis. I am particularly indebted to Mr. Shibu Scariah, Sharjah, for the financial support in publishing the book.

In the pages ahead, may you have a joyful reading of the ideas and thoughts of our writers. May the insightful and revelatory aspirations of Mar Ivanios guide you throughout!

Fr. Jolly Karimpil



**Mar Ivanios:
PERSON AND LIFE**

Chapter 1

Mar Ivanios: Remembering the Legend and His Legacy

Moran Mor Baselios Cardinal Cleemis

*(Major Archbishop-Catholicos of the
Malankara Syrian Catholic Major Archiepiscopal Church)*

(This article is an excerpt of the Inaugural address delivered
by Moran Mor Baselios Cardinal Cleemis Catholicos)

Praise be to the precious name of Jesus! It gives me joy to share with you the life of Mar Ivanios the Servant of God, as we celebrate the 90th Reunion anniversary of our ecclesial communion with the Holy See of Rome. This great reformer and ecumenist who worked for the Church in Malankara prayed for this worshipping community, took a heroic decision to enter into the fullness of Catholic communion. It is very fitting that our U.A.E. community organizes such a conference dealing with the various aspects of this fascinating personality to inspire the new generation of our Church everywhere. Therefore, I congratulate and thank all the organizers headed by Rev. Fr Mathew Kandathil, the Coordinator of the Gulf region and especially of pastoral coordinator of our U.A.E. missions. As I am given the topic to mention a few aspects of Servant of God, Archbishop Mar Ivanios, I would like to highlight a theme which is of much interest among all people who would like to know more about him.



Mar Ivanios, the Light

A light which was lit in the earthen lamp at Mavelikkara shone brightly in Malankara... A monk in saffron cloth who made his life a reflection of virtues... A noble prelate who held his hands to God in the thorny path of life... A great high priest who lived his life with joy amidst trials and tribulations... This humble personage of Malankara is known as Servant of God Archbishop Mar Ivanios of sacred memory. As an able administrator and ardent disciple of Christ, this vibrant Archbishop stood as a guiding light and pillar in the whole Church. With the enlightening words of the Divine Master deep down in his heart: “You are light of the world” (Mathew 5:20), this zealous priest gently reminded us: ‘let us be the light of peace to dispel the darkness of disharmony; the light of wisdom to dispel the darkness of ignorance and, the light of mercy to dispel the darkness of selfishness.’ His life was an open book that imparted lessons of sacrifice and faith to the world. Let us take a walk through his magnificent life of charity and zeal for Christ.

Light of Faithfulness

History usually depicts Mar Ivanios as a redeemer in the middle of lawsuits. Nevertheless, this holy soul was much more than that; he bravely led the Church through the rough and tough sea into the shores of spirituality. The life of Mar Ivanios still glows with radiance as a great model that strove to establish the depth, meaning, and greatness of Christian life by the ultimate sacrifice of his own life. His pioneering, exceptional, and unparalleled efforts to establish the depth, meaning, and greatness of Christian life made his life a role model for everyone. A glance at his life which championed lighting the lamp of faith, sacrifice, and holiness in this earthly journey, makes us proudly say: here is a cradle of the Christian life!

Just away from us in the recall of memory lane, this father asks us: where is the light of Gospel St. Thomas has entrusted you and me? Were you able to pass on this light of Gospel beyond the mere reading of it during the Holy Mass, Sacraments, and prayer meetings? Did this light get confined in the four walls of your comfortable life and its limitations? Did the light of the Gospel become fainter and fainter and lose its shine



in the New Age? Filled with the love of Christ, this high priest reminded us to become the Gospel of everyone and illuminate the world brighter and brighter similar to an earthen lamp.

A Lamp-post of Faith

The life of Mar Ivanios can be compared to that of an earthen lamp that gives light. His virtuous life did not confine to a single church; rather the heaven transformed it as a beacon of light for the whole world.

The life of Servant of God Mar Ivanios is truly an enlightening one. To understand the real sanctity of this life and holy soul, a glimpse at his life would be sufficient. History reveals the timeline of his journey from the pinnacle of power to the self-evident embracing of Christian poverty. At first, Mar Ivanios left behind all the attractive power and prestige and moved into the service of teaching. Later, he abandoned the secured post of a university professor and embraced the strict life of a *sanyasi*. For all of these, Mar Ivanios, a monk of extraordinary sanctity, sought inspiration and energy from the prayers he recited from dawn to dusk.

This Newman of India, a man of great determination, walked into a new horizon of spirituality. For this, he blended the long-cherished values of Indian tradition from Sabarmati and Vishwabharati. Likewise, he also accepted the asceticism and virtues of St. Basil and other Fathers of the Church. In addition to this, the rich and varied experiences of his life at Calcutta opened to him new doors of spirituality. With these new divine inspirations from heaven, the founding of Bethany ashram by His Grace was a new chapter in his life. The establishment of Bethany Ashram and Convent for nuns was a revolutionary approach by Mar Ivanios, because at a time when convent for nuns was not even in the thought of people, this great high priest went a step further by the establishment of one such convent. As per the direction and paternal blessings of His Grace Archbishop Mar Ivanios, Msgr. Joseph Kuzhinjalil founded the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary. Thus, Mar Ivanios stood as a lamp-post shedding the light of new spiritual insights and inspirations to the whole country of ours.



The Radiant Light of Malankara

In 1930, when Mar Ivanios reunited with the holy Catholic Church, Rome had granted permission to protect and propagate the traditions and uniqueness of this Church. In 1932, His Holiness Pius XI through *Christo Pastorum Principi* had elevated the reunited Syro-Malankara Catholic Church with a unique identity in the global Church. Thus, a Church that was established by an apostle following of the Antiochian tradition received its own identity through the Reunion movement led by this Servant of God, which still illuminates the Malankara Church. From a mere Church of passive readers of the gospel, His Grace transformed it into a Church that witnesses the gospel. In short, this little lamp has shone brightly and for that history is the greatest testimony.

A Lamp of Unending Oil

In the *Acts of the Apostles*, we read that every day by the inspiration of our Lord many joined the Church. Year after year, the way people are attracted to the Reunion movement also rests on the same Biblical foundation. Mar Ivanios never fell short in protecting the light of the Gospel from being put out. He protected it by the oil of sacrifice. Yet there is no wonder that there will be a group in the church that still belittles the members of different mother tongue and social strata who come to join the Church. They may speak of them with a lack of respect. However, to accept them wholeheartedly requires a person who has a big heart full of love. Without a second thought, we can acknowledge that His Grace has embraced and received everyone into his heart. His stint of service in the capital city of Kerala as the head of the Church is a remarkable example of this.

An Ever-glowing Lamp of Virtues

What has happened to the communities lit by Mar Ivanios? Have they been extinguished? In the words of authors, on 1953 July 15, the sun of Malankara had set. But this light has not slipped off from Malankara. I quote “Even after my death, I will continue to pray for the reunion movement,” said this great father, which was his promise to the



Church. Reading between these lines, we can understand this promise is an assurance that he will continue to pour oil into our lamps. Today, the Malankara Syrian Catholic Church continues sharing the message of Christ over the four corners of the world receiving its light and warmth from the lamp that was lit by this high priest.

The Light from Heaven at the Altar of the Universal Church

The intercession of the Servant of God, Mar Ivanios had showered on us abundant opportunities as well as responsibilities to animate the communities profoundly. The elevation of the Malankara Syrian Catholic Church as the Major Archiepiscopal Church was, indeed, the result of his prayers. In 2015, we were also graciously deputed to proclaim the Gospel and carry out missionary activities all over India. Another ecclesiastical gift was that one among us has been chosen as a member of the cardinals to elect the successor of St. Peter. We can affirm that the above-mentioned blessings have been received through the valuable intercessions and prayers of our beloved *Mar Ivanios Thirumeni*. It is much truer to say, the light of Malankara did not set in 1953; rather, it is shining with much more radiance in the whole world. Thus, over time without disappearing into the forgetfulness of history, Servant of God, Archbishop Mar Ivanios, still glows like a lamp of sanctity and resonance of gospel in our hearts.

We ardently look forward to and earnestly pray for that day in which, for Mar Ivanios, the light will be officially lit on the Altar of the Catholic Church! Let that light shine for generations! Yes, the life of the Servant of God Mar Ivanios was indeed an imitation of Christ following his Master's voice: "you are the light of the world." Listening to this voice, we the Malankarites who are fortunate to have the full communion with the Catholic Church should be able to carry out the missions that have been entrusted with us to proclaim the Gospel with light and to sanctify the world with light, and to transform our society with this light so that we could say Lord Jesus you are the light of the world. Mar Ivanios who is in heaven may intercede for all of us that we truly become the light of the world.

God bless you all!

Chapter 2

Making of Mar Ivanios: A Biographical Sketch

Dr. Asha Cyril

(Dr. Asha Cyril is a Malankara Syrian Catholic from Dubai community. She was awarded Ph.D. in 2015 by Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute for Medical Sciences and Technology, Trivandrum for research in Neuroimmunology. Currently Medical Post-Doctoral research and Medical Student training in progress at Mohammed Bin Rashid University of Medicine and Health Sciences, Dubai.)

Introduction

In the twentieth century, there was a man of sanctity and learning who conquered thousands of people and thus extended the kingdom of God on Earth. His zeal for spreading Christianity can be considered as equal to St. Francis Xavier. This man was none other than a poor Syrian monk who spent eleven long years in a forest contemplating the eternal truth and leading a life of prayer and penance. The ascetical life prepared him to be a missionary to the millions in India. He is the most charismatic and dynamic personality in our Malankara Church, one of the most outstanding churchmen born and lived in India.

Birth and Early Childhood

His Grace Mar Ivanios was born on 21st September 1882 at Mavelikkara, a small town in Central Kerala. He was the eldest son of his parents: Thomas Panikker and Annamma Panikker. He was born in



the famous ‘Mallitta’ Paniker family belonging to the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church. On 4th October 1882, he was baptized by his uncle Fr. Skariah Paniker and was named Geevarghese. It was from his uncle that he absorbed Christian zeal and passion. His mother Annamma Panikker infused the devotion to Blessed Virgin Mary, which influenced him throughout his life. The Panikker family was a traditional Malankara Syrian Orthodox family of priestly succession. He grew up in a family where prayer was an essential part of daily life. He used to attend Sunday - catechism classes diligently, and young Geevarghese showed immense interest in learning Bible verses which made him well versed with the word of God at a very young age.

Education

Young Geevarghese had a great thirst for knowledge and had a brilliant educational history. Perhaps, this training made him an educationist and thereby a significant contributor in the field of education. He considered education the best means for uplifting the people’s social condition, and this understanding led him to establish several prestigious educational institutions such as Mar Ivanios College. He received early education from the Protestant and the Government Schools, distinguished as an extraordinary ‘intelligent, observant and considerate boy.’ The Jacobite Metropolitan Pulikottu Mar Divannasios (*Valiya Pithavu*) was impressed with the courageous young boy and took him to Kottayam for high school studies. In 1897, at the age of 15, he began his high school education in M.D. Seminary High School in Kottayam.

Madras Christian College and CMS College, Kottayam

It was during these days that his inclination towards priestly life became evident and strong. A year after joining the M.D. school, he received Minor Orders. Seeing his spiritual enthusiasm and passion for the Church Bishop Pulikottil Mar Dionysios ordained him as a Deacon on 9th January 1900. Later, he completed his intermediate education in Fellow of Arts (F.A.) exam from CMS College, Kottayam, and then secured his B.A. and M.A. degree with distinction in History and



Economics from Madras Christian College in 1906. When he returned from Madras, he was appointed Principal of his *Alma Mater*, the M.D. seminary High School (1908-1913), and thus began his life as an educationist. During this time, he took the initiative in various projects for the renewal of the Malankara Church. He organized church communities and Bible conventions and instilled in the people the passion for Holy Sacraments. Because of this, he was popularly known as *Koodasa Semmasan* (Deacon of Sacraments).

Priestly Life

On 15th September 1908, Geevarghese Semmasen was ordained as a priest by Bishop Vattasseril Mar Dionysius. He was a priest with a vision and mission. Fr. P.T. Geevarghese was popularly known as M.A. *Achan*, as he was the first priest to take an M.A. degree from the Malankara Church. Because of his contribution to the field of education, he proved himself an exceptionally capable educationalist. During his priestly life, he became a famous orator and prominent leader in the socio-cultural and religious realms. The religious context in the Malankara Church at that time was that of spiritual deterioration and degeneration. The lust for power was creeping into the Church from every corner. Fr. Geevarghese was grieved deeply at this pathetic situation, and it aroused in him an intense quest for the renewal of the Malankara Church. At the same time, he took the initiative to empower the Malankara Church with hierarchical autonomy. To establish autonomy and peace in the Malankara Church, Fr. Geevarghese thought of erecting a Catholicate in Malankara. For this purpose, with the permission of the Metropolitan, he invited the unjustly dethroned Patriarch Abded M'seeho to Malankara. On 5th September 1912, the Malankara Catholicate was established.

Professorship in Serampore

In the same year, bishop Vattasseril Mar Dionysius was invited to attend a conference at Serampore, Calcutta. Mar Dionysius selected



Fr. Geevarghese to accompany him. At the conference, everyone was highly impressed by the scholarly eloquence of M.A. *Achan*. Dr. Howells, the Principal of Serampore College, was so impressed by his personality, especially by his proficiency in the English language, that he invited him to join as a Professor of the College. Though it was painful for him to leave his Church, the Spirit of the Lord led him to take up the professorship in Serampore College. The college paid him approximately Rs. 1500 as salary. Those days this was a considerable amount, and he thought of doing something good with this money. He spent all this money on the education of the young people of his Church. He felt that if there were enough well-educated people, especially a group of well-educated clergy in the Church, they could change the Church's destiny. He made use of this opportunity to empower the Malankara Youth. About 20 young people from Kerala reached Calcutta for higher education. Gradually, the number of young people increased, and some were sent to Allahabad and Madras Universities. He was also very keen on the empowerment of Syrian Christian women through education. He educated a group of young Syrian Christian girls with the help of the Epiphany Sisters of England in Serampore to achieve the same.

Serampore: A Turning Point

Fr. P.T. Geevarghese served as professor of History, Politics, and Economics from 1913 to 1919 at the University of Serampore, West Bengal. At Serampore, Geevarghese got more time for prayer and contemplation. It was during this period that he got inspired by the Indian culture and *sannyasa*. The monastic vision of St. Basil significantly influenced him. Besides this, his visits to the Sabarmati Ashram of Gandhiji and Santiniketan of Rabindranath Tagore gave him a new picture of Indian *sannyasa*. These experiences made him reflect upon starting an order of missionaries to carry out evangelization in India. Slowly the residence of Fr. Geevarghese and his followers at Serampore became an Ashram (Monastery), and they began to live a sort of religious life according to the monastic rules of St. Basil, adapting them to Indian culture.



Foundation of the Bethany Ashram and *Madhom*

On his return from Calcutta, Fr Geevarghese looked for a proper place to realize his long-cherished dream of an Ashram in a solitary and serene atmosphere away from the noisy world. One of his friends E. John Vakeel donated 100 acres (400,000 m²) of land at *Mundanmala* in Ranni-Perunad, at Pathanamthitta district in Kerala, which is the meeting place of rivers Pamba and Kakkat.

On 15th August 1919, he founded the Order of the Imitation of Christ (OIC). The first ashram of OIC was a small thatched hut made out of trees and bamboo branches. He searched prayerfully for a name for the ashram, and opening the Bible, the word “Bethany” struck him, and the order was also known as Bethany *Ashramam*. The life of the monks of the Bethany *Ashram* at *Mundanmala* attracted the ordinary people who were deprived of spiritual nourishment to *Mundanmala*. Eventually, the Bethany ashram became a place of pilgrimage and spiritual experience. Fr. Geevarghese envisioned the *ashram* as a shelter, also for the poor and the marginalized. Along with the ashram, he started a house for the orphans. Bethany Ashram turned out to be a source of spiritual inspiration and renewal.

A Monastic Bishop / Bishop of Bethany

Within no time, Bethany Ashram and its beloved founder came to the limelight of Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church, and Fr. Geevarghese O.I.C. was made a *Ramban* on 28th January 1925 at Tirumoolapuram Church. He was consecrated as the Bishop of Bethany on 1st May 1925. He received the new name Geevarghese Mar Ivanios. After the Episcopal ordination, there was a meeting to felicitate Mar Ivanios. He made an extraordinarily lengthy speech in which he referred to his childhood dream of a monastic life to attain spiritual perfection. In this meeting, Mar Ivanios expressed his desire that the Church might become one flock under one shepherd.

Breaking a time-honored custom in the Jacobite Church, on 8th



September 1925, Mar Ivanios founded a society of nuns, known as the Sisters of the Imitation of Christ or Bethany Sisters. Thus, the saintly soul wanted a spiritual renewal in the Syrian Orthodox church, which lost much of its spiritual strength due to repeated divisions and mutual quarrels.

Though he worked tirelessly for the Jacobite Church, he was deeply disturbed by the Church's inner conflicts and open rivalries. In 1926 a synod of Bishops was held at Parumala. The synod authorized Mar Ivanios to open negotiations with Rome for communion with the Catholic Church to establish peace in the Malankara Jacobite church.

Ecclesial Communion/ The Historic Event of Catholic Communion

Later the Malankara Orthodox Church stepped out from the venture of communion, but Mar Ivanios continued the efforts of communion. Finally, the dream of communion with the Catholic Church came true.

On 20th September 1930, Mar Ivanios made the profession of faith before Bishop Aloysius Maria Benziger OCD, the Bishop of Quilon along with Jacob Mar Theophilos, the suffragan Bishop of Bethany, Fr. John Kuzhinapurath OIC, Deacon Alexander Attupurath OIC, and Mr. Chacko Kilileth embraced and united with the Catholic Church. They are called the Five Pillars of the reunion movement. Later, in 1937 Bishop Joseph Mar Severios of the Malankara Orthodox Church and in 1939, Bishop Thomas Mar Dioscoros, the Metropolitan of the Knanaya Jacobite Church, joined the Malankara Catholic Church. In 1938, the missionary congregation of the Daughters of Mary was also founded. A good number of priests of the Orthodox Church also reunited with the Catholic Church, following Mar Ivanios, and became the first zealous missionaries. Most of the members of both the Bethany orders too reunited with the Roman Catholic Church establishing the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church in India.



Establishment of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Hierarchy

Mar Ivanios made strenuous efforts towards the building up of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church. He guided the Church in its commitment to evangelization. Pope Pius XI established the Syro-Malankara Catholic Hierarchy on 11th June 1932 through the Apostolic Constitution *Christo Pastorum Principi*. The Malankara Catholic Hierarchy was erected with Trivandrum as Archieparchy and Tiruvalla as its suffragan Eparchy under Bishop Mar Theophilos. His Grace Mar Ivanios was enthroned as its Metropolitan Archbishop on 12th March 1933 at the provisional Cathedral, dedicated to the Mother of God, at Palayam, Trivandrum. For the upliftment and the cultural development of the Malankara Catholic community, he made many historical visits worldwide. He met eminent personalities like American President Harry S. Truman, G.K. Chesterton, King George V., King of Belgium, and Bernard Shaw, among many other noteworthy personalities. He was famously known as ‘Newman of India’ and ‘the Pillar of the Church in India.’ And the University of San Francisco honored him with a Doctorate Degree in Law.

The chief motive of Mar Ivanios in his efforts for communion with the Catholic Church was to form a single fold of Christ. His motto was “*that all may be one*” (Jn 17:21). He used to pray in the late hours of the night, striking on his chest, for the pastoral needs of the parishes and mission stations and also for self-purification. Under his leadership, about 75 priests were reunited from different denominations of Malankara Church, and about a hundred and fifty parishes, including mission stations, were founded in Kerala. His relationship with the civil authorities was also highly commendable. He aimed at the overall upliftment of society through education. Because of this, he established about 50 schools and an A grade college named after his heavenly Patron – Mar Ivanios.

The Eve of the Earthly Life

Due to the heavy schedule of his life, he fell ill for more than a year. He realized that his earthly days are numbered. He had found a



suitable successor for the Malankara Church in Fr. Benedict OIC, the then Principal of Mar Ivanios College. Fr. Benedict Thangalathil was ordained an Auxiliary Bishop on 29th January 1953, as Benedict Mar Gregorios. Archbishop Mar Ivanios was called to eternal rest on 15th July 1953 and was entombed at St. Mary's Cathedral.

Mar Ivanios was declared a Servant of God on 14th July 2007, a day before the 54th anniversary of his death, by Moran Mor Baselios Cleemis, Major Archbishop-Catholicos. He is the first member of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church to be so designated.

Conclusion

The life of Mar Ivanios inspired thousands and thousands of people. Just like Moses and David, who were chosen to lead God's people, Mar Ivanios was the chosen one who was sent to lead a humble Church with a handful of members to a prominent community of more than 500,000 faithful across the world. The growth of the Malankara Syrian Catholic Church is a sign and miracle that the Lord gives to his people through the saintly life of Mar Ivanios. He was a mystic, and his life was a testimony of divine choice guided by the providence of God. He was a man who tried his best to follow the Indian way of life. As Mar Ivanios said: "Let us be proud of being Catholic and let our holiness be a good example and be a guiding torch to non-Catholics."

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Chapter 3

Mar Ivanios: A Man after God's Own Heart

Most Rev. Dr. Philipos Mar Stephanos

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This academic paper entitled, “*Mar Ivanios: A Man After God's Own Heart*” is an attempt to learn and share more about our most revered and legendary Archbishop who has made historical impacts in the life of the Malankara Catholic Church.

Servant of God Archbishop Geevarghese Mar Ivanios is the most fascinating person in the modern history of the Malankara Church. Most of us have not seen this great Archbishop who passed away in 1953. More than any other name, the name Mar Ivanios resounds in our Church. His name is inscribed in bold and golden letters in the annals of our history due to three reasons: 1. as the founder of Bethany Religious Communities; 2. as the architect of the Malankara Catholic Reunion Movement; 3. as the first Archbishop of our Church.

If I am asked: how would I describe the Servant of God Mar Ivanios in a short statement? My response would be: “Mar Ivanios was the most brilliant, historic, and charismatic leader of the Malankara Church in the 20th Century.” His intellectual brilliance, academic erudition, charismatic leadership, unique visions, creative thoughts, diplomatic



mindset, eloquent communications, indomitable determination, gallantry courage, radical faith and trust in God, sagacious wisdom, outstanding sanctity, all these unique features make Mar Ivanios, a legendary leader.

Brilliance

His outstanding education and erudition speak volumes about his brilliance. He was the first post-graduate priest among the clergy in the Malankara Church. His specialized academic excellence in history qualified him to be appointed as the professor of the famous Serampore University. He was an acclaimed academician. He had linguistic proficiencies in both modern and classical languages. He authored the Syriac grammar text for the universities of Calcutta, Madras, and Kerala. He had a research-oriented mindset. His knowledge in classical languages like, Hebrew, Greek and Syriac enabled him to discover untold mysteries of faith, scriptures, sacraments, and traditions. His remarkable knowledge in Church history empowered him to comprehend the historical evolution of the Church and society. He was a polyglot and was the approved translator and correspondent of the Malankara Church of his period.

Vision

The uniqueness of Archbishop Mar Ivanios was his clarity of vision. From childhood onward, he was clear about his “life goal”. He wanted to be a monk and priest. After becoming a priest, he continued to shape and enlarge his vision and mission. All his academic persuasions were in search of the truth. He analyzed the actual status of his ecclesial community and conducted holistic-historical and spiritual auditing. He identified pertinent issues and problems and their ramifications. He was in constant search of the true Church. The scandalous divisions and conflicts which were going on within his mother Church radically disturbed him. He was agonized by the existing nature of his Church – just a ritualistic inward-looking and non-missionary nature of his Church anguished him. He committed himself and endeavoured to find comprehensive solutions to the problems of his community. He identified and articulated six-fold vision statements.



1. Make every effort to put an end to the most scandalous conflicts and rivalries prevailing in his Mother Malankara Church.
2. The Malankara Church requires radical reformation and reawakening.
3. Reunion with the Roman Catholic Church will be the ultimate solution to the problems.
4. There is a dire need for better education and the formation of the clergy.
5. Holistic education of the laity, both spiritual and secular, are indispensable.
6. The whole Malankara Church needs to be empowered and awakened in regaining its missionary identity and thrust.

Product of History

Mar Ivanios is a product of history. His perceptions and perspectives were evolved from his historicity. He was a leader of his time and his leadership visions were solutions to the crises and uncertainties that prevailed in his community. His vocation was a creative response to the challenges encountered by the people of God. His mission was to liberate them from their historical bondages and to lead the flock to the green pastures of the Gospel.

As a historian, Mar Ivanios was well acquainted with the history of the Church. He has drawn immense inspiration from the extensive and complex theological and spiritual history of the universal Church. He was influenced by the worldwide renaissance and reform movements until his time. He was aware of the global contributions of the religious orders in the world scenario. He was enlightened by the missionary movements of the protestant churches and was motivated by the manifold evangelization activities in the Catholic Church. He dreamt that his Church also could involve in a similar fashion in India. He was familiar with the Jesuits who triggered the great schism within the St. Thomas Community in India. He was aware of the arrival and activities of the Carmelites who were sent to Kerala to heal the wounds of division created by the aggressive Jesuits and to achieve reconciliation in the Malankara Church.



Mar Ivanios was cognizant of a series of reunion attempts made in the history of the Malankara Church. Moreover, he was acquainted with the indigenous religious congregation, the CMI, started by St. Elias Chavara Kuriakose and their reunion efforts. Historical writings of Fr. Placid Podipara CMI, speak volumes about the backgrounds and the factors that contributed to shaping the vision of Mar Ivanios. Above all, Mar Ivanios was inspired by the great saints of the Universal Church. They are evident in his biographies, talks, writings, pastoral letters, and prayers. His acclaimed solutions were threefold. The Bethany movements he started, the Reunion movement he pioneered, and the evangelization endeavours he animated were ways and means to achieve his declared motto of “Realizing God is nobler than serving God.”

Relevance

There is no doubt that these visionary solutions and messages of Archbishop Mar Ivanios are still valid and relevant today. However, they are yet to be further interpreted and explained to the contemporary community.

As a charismatic leader of the Church, Mar Ivanios thought ‘out of the box’ to find solutions to the problems. Unfortunately, the Malankara churches encounter the same problems even now, after a century. In this situation, the Malankara Syrian Catholic Church as a significant family of the greater Malankara community has a divine mandate to work for the unity of the pan Malankara Churches. Mar Ivanios compels us to spell out our vision and strategy for a united Malankara Church for Evangelization. Along with Archbishop Mar Ivanios, great missionaries and reformers of the Church, have shown us how to dream beyond the *status quo* and find out innovative and creative solutions. The sacramental and structural evolutions that happened in the history of the Church will give us ample models for renewal and restructuring.

Ecclesiological Relevance

We must keep in mind that Mar Ivanios negotiated and pioneered



unity with the Catholic Church before the Second Vatican Council and it was only this Council that defined the Catholic Church as “Communion of Individual Churches.” The pre-Vatican understanding of the Reunion was a return of the schismatics to the Catholic Orthodoxy. But the ecclesiological teachings of the Second Vatican Council that the “Catholic Church is a Communion of individual Churches” opens tremendous new possibilities. The elevation of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church as a *sui juris* Major archiepiscopal Church is a brilliant example of the consequence of the renewed ecclesiology. The Post Second Vatican developments in the Church, especially its relationship with the world council of churches, dialogues going on between the Vatican and the different Christian denominations are significant. All the more, inter-religious dialogues promoted by the Vatican, open up greater avenues for the Malankara Church to explore possibilities of Pan-Malankara Ecumenical ministries.

Pastoral Care of The Migrant Faithful

Mar Ivanios compels us to be committed to the pastoral care of the Malankara Migrants. All the Malankara Churches are facing manifold issues related to migration. One-third of the Malankarites are living and working outside the proper territory of the Malankara Catholic Church. The same is the fate of other Malankara groups. The identity and mission of the Malankarites residing in diaspora situations are of great concern. They are not able to keep up the liturgical and spiritual patrimony and are not able to involve in the evangelization mission of the Church. Isolated individuals and groups living in the diaspora are incompetent to fulfil their mission when people are struggling for existential survival. Often, they lose their very Malankara identity.

Social Commitment

Mar Ivanios motivates us to be committed to the upliftment of the poor and the marginalized members of the community. Our society is still tormented with poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition, and homelessness. Casteism, racism, gender issues, ecological issues, etc., are vital issues and challenges of our time.



Structural/ Organizational/Institutional Relevance

The relevance of Mar Ivanios is to be viewed from the perspectives of the present time. In our profound prayers and reflections, we need to ask: Are the solutions presented almost a century ago by Mar Ivanios interpreted and made valid and relevant today? How do modern generations look at the contributions of Mar Ivanios? Are the religious movements and ecclesiastical structures constituted by Mar Ivanios functioning well enough to achieve the visions and goals envisaged by Mar Ivanios? Does Mar Ivanios solicit the contemporary members of the Church to think differently to find solutions to the problems facing our Church today?

Slavery to the Past History

If we evaluate the content of the discourses conducted during our common celebrations, we can observe that often it is focused on the notorious past. Among the new generation of our Church, there are strong tendencies of dislike to such unholy rivalries, divisions, and politics. They tend to dissect the dimensions of the past, present, and future of our ecclesial identity. Good many like to be healed from the wounds of the past. Especially, the generations who are not familiar with the typical Malankara history and culture, Malayalam language, oriental styles, and symbols, may find most of the conversations about the fights, divisions, and diplomacies in the Church meaningless and anti-Christian. They think that it is irrelevant to linger on the scandalous historical past. It is spiritual violence and torture to speak about the wounded spheres of ecclesial life. Many people prefer to engage in “the future-mission oriented discussions” rather than focusing on “the past enslaved sentiments.” We come across positively oriented young people keeping a distance from events and gatherings where the memories of our evil past are celebrated and perpetuated.

Conclusion

The Vision and message of Mar Ivanios are not ready-made packages of solutions for all time. Their meaning and relevance are to



be ever new discovered and articulated. In fact, his visions contain, communicate, and make effective the message of Jesus. It is only by the power of the Holy Spirit that the Malankara Church can fulfil this mission and can animate every new hermeneutics of his message according to the emerging challenges of time.

When we follow the footsteps of the legendary Mar Ivanios, he is inviting every Malankarite to be Godly in character. His message of realizing God and serving His people should be our primary commitment. Dedication to the mission of the Church should be of supreme personal disposition. The resolution passed by the first Assembly of Malankara Church to be an Evangelizing Church shall remain ever active without compromise and negligence. As the Second Vatican council exhorts, our Church must be in solidarity with the joys and sorrows, the grieves and anxieties, the dreams, and aspirations of every human person. Our Church cannot exist and function in isolation. We have to fulfil our mission in communion with the Catholic Church everywhere in the world. Issues and challenges emerging in the global scenario are to be considered seriously and we need to find solutions to them along with the Catholic Church and global community. A collective response to the tragic situations emerging from the pandemic COVID-19 would be an immediate mission opportunity.

In the history of humanity, we come across great prophets, saints, and sages, who led the people of God for certain distinctive and definitive missions. Similarly, God has elevated our most revered Mar Ivanios and endowed him extraordinary charisma to reform our Church and lead us into Catholic Communion. As we step into the Centenary decade of the anniversary of Reunion, we thank God for this legendary leader of our Church and rededicate ourselves to the most sublime values and ideals which he taught us and to follow his footsteps faithfully and creatively in our journey of personal and ecclesial life.

Chapter 4

Mar Ivanios: A Seeker of Wisdom and Truth

Dr. Antony Thomas

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“How much better to get wisdom than gold! To get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver” (Proverbs 16:16).

Introduction

A true sage is a seeker of wisdom and truth. This statement is very apt in the case of Servant of God Archbishop Mar Ivanios. This article entitled, “*Mar Ivanios: A Seeker of Wisdom and Truth*” is an attempt to make a journey to the life of the great sage of Malankara Catholic Church by ruminating over my childhood memories and stories of Archbishop Mar Ivanios narrated by my Grandmother and Rev. Fr. Philip C. Pantholil (Ayroor). Along with my personal experience, I have included reflections on various books on Mar Ivanios by outstanding



authors like Rev. Fr. Thomas Inchakkalody, Mr. George Onakoor, and Rev. Fr Philip C. Pantholil to substantiate the topic well.

Many Churches and its properties of the Malankara Catholic Church were the results of the vision of Mar Ivanios. For example, the site of St. Alberts Parish at Kattoor, Pathanamthitta, was initially chosen by Mar Ivanios, even before the formation of the Malankara Catholic Church. The Servant of God used to commute through the Pampa River (in those days, the Ranny - Kozhencherry road did not exist, and this waterway was the most sought-after mode of transportation then). He spotted a small hillock over the huge rock well known as *Kizhuka Para* (as it was called) and remarked that it was the right site for a house of Prayer. He shared the same thoughts with Fr. Mannil Pommelil Abraham *Kathanar* Potha, a senior priest of the Orthodox Church from the same region. Years later, after the formation of Malankara Catholic Church under the leadership of Mar Ivanios, the then retired *Kathanar* Potha, made his son purchase this plot and invited the Archbishop to view it as well as intending to join the newly formed apostolic Church. Mar Ivanios and Mar Theophilos visited the *Kathanar* who was mostly bedridden. Mar Ivanios was shown the land they purchased and the proposed site for the “house of prayer” beside the Pampa river. Mar Ivanios objected to the Church’s construction just beside the river as that site could be of use for an important institution in the future. He further recommended the area on the side of the hillock on the same plot for the Church. Coincidentally, the site that His Grace had mentioned for the foreseeable institution turned out to be the Ranny - Kozhencherry Road. The foresight of Mar Ivanios is praiseworthy and prevented a situation where the Church would have become a stumbling block for development.

1. Historical Background

It is necessary to place a person in the history to understand the meaning of his or her life well, because each person is the product of the history. Therefore, It would be helpful to analyze the world and national histories to get a clear picture of the socio-political situation where Mar Ivanios lived. The encapsulated history provides the ground for understanding the greatness of the legend.



1.1. Socio-Political Situation

- a. *The period of two world wars (1914-1945)*: It was a period of continuous wars and exploitation. The dignity of the human person was under threat. Religious teachings were questioned in many ways.
- b. *Great plagues and famine*: by 1930, the entire world witnessed a global recession. It was a time of less trade and industrial activity, and therefore, unemployment became common to all.
- c. *Holocaust*: The Nazi party under the leadership of Adolph Hitler began persecuting Jews. It was a hard time for the Church in Germany, Poland, and Europe. According to Pope Pius XI, “It was a fundamental hostility to Christ and His Church.”
- d. The fall of the Ottoman Empire of Turkey which even controlled the Greek and Syrian Churches.

1.2. The Scenario in India

- a. India was under British rule, and the freedom struggle was at its zenith by the Congress party following the preaching of non-violence by Mahatma Gandhi.
- b. Khilafat movement by Indian Muslims to restore the caliph of the Ottoman Caliphate too became part of the freedom struggle, and it ultimately played a role in the division of India.
- c. Many lives were lost during this period due to migration, hostility, famine, and war.
- d. The perennial impact of the caste system in society and overall illiteracy added further burden in the society.

1.2.1. Situation in Kerala

Kerala state was not formed then and, it was the erstwhile princely states of Travancore-Cochin and Malabar. The scenario in these regions was not significantly different, and the aftermath of all the above factors mentioned at both the national and international levels was evident.

- a. Growing resistance against the British colonial rule prevailed in all these states. Besides, the ruthless suppressive measures against freedom struggle and communist-organized Punnapra-Vayalar



- revolt by the Diwan of Travancore Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer added fuel to the fire.
- b. Though there existed a sound administration by the Travancore and Kochi rulers, the caste system with untouchability thrived during this period in these states.
 - c. The social reformation movement led by reformers like St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara, Sree Narayana Guru, Ayyankali, Sahodaran Aiyappan, and many others who followed the non-violent measures against these injustices was successful.
 - d. Malabar Rebellion, also known as Mapilla Lahala, started as resistance against the British colonial rule and the prevailing feudal system. They were in favour of the Khilafat Movement, and their movement turned violent in South Malabar. This movement resembled present-day terrorist activities. Incidentally, the year 2021 is the centenary of Mapilla Lahala (Malabar rebellion).
 - e. The role played by Mannathu Padmanaban as a social reformer in uplifting the Nair community and in opening the temples for all castes during this period is worthwhile to note.

1.2.2. Christianity in Kerala

- a. The aftermath of Synod of Diamper (1599) and *Coonan Cross Oath* (1653), resulted in the division in the Church and propagation of numerous faiths, and formation of different sects within one body of Christ.
- b. Protestant churches supported by the British and its propagation of the protestant faith initiated in the 16th century in Europe influenced the formation of the present-day Marthoma Church.
- c. Disputes in the Malankara Church between Orthodox and Jacobites reached their peak by 1911. Unfortunately, it still prevails in higher fervour.
- d. The Latin Rite and Syro-Malabar Catholics focused on progression under the Apostolic leadership irrespective of the adverse and unfavourable situations prevailing.



It was in this chaotic environment that Mar Ivanios stood strong to lay the foundation for the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church, realizing that the sublime goal of Christ cannot be accomplished through the branches cut off from the original tree. In addition, the role of the Church is to reflect the image and likeness of God and to bear fruits. These formed the pillars for the Reunion Movement with the Mother Church. Reflecting upon the current status of the Orthodox and Jacobite churches, we may wonder whether Mar Ivanios had already envisioned that the conflict would continue to fester?

A seeker of wisdom and truth in all perspectives finds the real treasure and sells everything to acquire it. That is exactly what His Grace did, leaving behind all that he had acquired till then; the accolades of being the first Malankara priest with a post-graduation (M.A.), Professorship in Serampore, and the founder of the first Christian Indian Sannyasa Monastery. Besides, he was the youngest and most promising Bishop of the Orthodox Church then.

2. Ivanian Strategies for the Posterity

Now let us reflect on the strategies pursued by Mar Ivanios, which will be an inspiration for the generations to come;

- a. To reunite with the Catholic Church, he approached Pope Pius XI at Rome through Archbishop Benziger of Kollam at a period when communication was not that easy.
- b. He fearlessly took the forefront to lead the Church, negating instances of a threat to his life.
- c. He built the right partnership with the right people at the right time. His rapport with the Maharajah of Travancore found him favour despite some differences with the Diwan Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer. His cordial relationship with Pattom Thanu Pillai, Sri Mannathu Padmanabhan, and various politicians of those days proved to be beneficial to lay the foundation of a strong community.
- d. His alliance with the peace-loving Hindu community and culture played a significant role in the formation of the religious community



- “Order of Imitation of Christ,” and this found support from various community leaders. Fr. Philip C. Pantholil, who was also the secretary to Archbishop, mentions the role of Kavumkottu Kuruppachan in the establishment of the ministry in a small village, Kadamanitta.

- e. Mar Ivanios was astute in financial management, which has helped build the Church’s financial backbone including the purchase of lands. We still build the churches, institutions, and even new dioceses in the land purchased in those days.
- f. He also had to circumvent numerous lawsuits against him and the Church and paved a smooth way ahead.
- g. His vision helped the Church focus on education to spread spiritual and scientific knowledge, gaining the respect of the entire nation.
- h. Likewise, his interests in community development, agriculture, and nature were also notable.

Mar Ivanios has shown admirable wisdom in the fearless pursuit to follow the Lord’s way, truth and life. We need to gain insight from this and continue to pursue the Ivanian legacy. In this article, we have reviewed the challenges faced during the Ivanian period. It is good to understand that this period was more challenging than the present day or as complex as today. How can we evolve and continue to pursue the Ivanian legacy in the current era?

- a. We need to focus on progress rather than sustainability. Rather than merely focusing on diocesan growth, we need to think as one Church and be concerned about the growth of our community.

Let us follow the footsteps of the Servant of God Mar Ivanios and continuously serve the children of God through our Church and Institutions.

- b. We need to understand our strengths in the field of education and pursue to provide excellent knowledge and wisdom to gain the respect of the entire community.
- c. We need to focus on the financial integrity of the community and the Church. Unfortunately, we have limited opportunity in gaining



a government job and the younger generation should be encouraged to widen the spectrum of career options rather than restricting them to a few common fields alone. This should be a part of our mission and growth of the institutions with a job opportunity for everyone. This will raise the financial integrity of the Church and the community.

- d. In addition, our new generation should be supported to participate in various political, cultural, and social movements positively.
- e. Our catechetical training should include sessions to understand other faiths and identify the false teachings, religious threats, and sweet poisons posed by the terrorist organizations.
- f. We need to be more specific, respecting the most valuable resource, the time.
- g. Effective management of our resource effectively and safeguarding a financial back-up should be given paramount importance.
- h. We could build the right partnerships with like-minded communities to work towards peaceful co-existence and prosperity.
- i. The teachings and history of this extraordinary legend, Mar Ivanios, as a great social reformer and promoter of peace, should be shared with all communities.

Conclusion

Finally, let us also focus on our role in the Gulf Region. Here, we share the same Church with other Catholic rites and communities. This can be the embodiment of a REUNION movement. But are we realizing these, or are we still chasing our Orthodox past? Our community celebrations, including Mar Ivanios day, should be co-celebrated with our Latin and Syro-Malabar brethren. This will help to raise the Ivanian perspectives on faith and mission to an extraordinary level. Everalignable gestures like sharing our *Neyyappam Nercha* with other rites, faiths, and nationalities will spread the miraculous sweetness of our faith like the Tuesday Bun of St. Anthony. Let us become ‘the Salt of the Earth’ and add flavour to the Ivanian Legacy.

Chapter 5

Mar Ivanios: A Compassionate Father

Dr. Giby Geevarghese

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Introduction

Every one of us has a role model in our lives, someone we like to imitate and admire. Malankara Syrian Catholics are blessed to have the best exemplar in the Servant of God Archbishop Mar Ivanios. He is the epitome of faith, integrity, courage, vision, and pastoral sensitivity. He is an ultimate role model for all human beings, who showed how to lead a life of sanctity, pray, and show kindness and tenderness to the needy. His Grace is an amazing individual with the knowledge of a lexicographer, tactics of a cross country runner, and perseverance of a hermit. All the qualities of a great father are harmoniously blended in the dynamic personality of His Grace Mar Ivanios. He is a compassionate father. He was affectionate towards kids, sympathetic to the poor, and liberator of the marginalized. Mar Ivanios is an icon of love, a beacon of



faith, and a caring and loving father, an epitome of forgiveness. His capacity for generosity knew no bounds. As a warm, generous, and kind-hearted person, I am sure his heart must be ten times larger than the average size. He was destined to be in this world, with the mission to care for the needy and the poor. He was chosen and set apart by the God Almighty to lead the Malankara Syrian Catholic Church with a dynamic and prophetic mission.

The personal aura of His Grace influenced many. The strength and self-confidence acquired from his experience, knowledge, and spiritual power was the cardinal trait of His Grace. Right decision-making ability, mindfulness, ability to work tirelessly, and the strong conflict resolution capacity are some other traits of the bishop. His outlook on life was unique. His advocacy was rooted not in the trends of the day or the fads and fashions of the moment but in his firm commitment to the gospels and the power from prayer.

Archbishop Mar Ivanios – A Compassionate Father

Having great care, love, and concern for children, he was always interested in guiding them. Bishop wrote many books for children to orient them in God's way. A few books are:

- *Baalapadom* 1926
- *Prarthana Sahayi* 1926
- *Love of God* 1927
- *Occasional Prayers* 1927
- *Kuttikalude swarga patha* 1929
- *Margaparakashika* 1929
- *Cheru Paithangalude namaskkara kramam* 1929
- *Bible stories for Children* 1934 (3 vols.)
- *Catechism Books 9 Volumes* 1934

In his Catechism book in 9 Volumes, the storytelling strategy



applied is impressive. It develops creativity, imagination, and compassion among children. It also inspires every child to be thankful to God for the wonderful blessings and opportunities. Let me give you an example. The bishop follows various creative strategies to teach the biblical story of a crippled man. He instructs the children to hold their hands behind, and then he asked them to enlist the difficulties they feel like e.g., they cannot eat, play, drink. When a mosquito bites, what will you do? Through these activities, he tries to make them realize the plethora of blessings that God has showered upon them and helps to develop empathy, compassion, tenderness and be thankful to the Almighty. These strategies are a boon to the educational scenario too. He presents his ideas through the means of questions to ponder on. He tells God has given two watchmen - Our eyes. Another question - God has given you ten servants - Our ten fingers. In his book *Kuttikalude Swarga Paatha* 1929, Mar Ivanios shows how divinity can be achieved. *Love of God* (1927) deals with the vast reservoir of love that God has in store for us. In his book *Occasional Prayers*, he reminds the children about the need to be thankful to God by praying in every occasion, in the beginning, and at the end of every activity that they do, like when they get up in the morning, before they start for school, before they begin their studies, after finishing their studies, before they eat, play and sleep etc.

Papamochanam, in 4 volumes (1923), emphasizes the importance of the sacrament of reconciliation, realizing the sin, correcting them, and not committing them again. According to His Grace, Holy Confession and Holy Qurbano are bath and banquet of our soul. *Cheru Paithangalude namaskara kramam* (1929), covers prayers for children.

Mar Ivanios had written many pastoral letters. In his pastoral letters, the bishop emphasized the need to be extra cautious in our children's spiritual growth and provide them with ample spiritual support.

Kunjangalkkayoru Sneha Kalpana (15th January 1942) is one of his pastoral letters in which His Grace says that the august presence of Jesus Christ blessed the holy family of St. Joseph and Mother Mary. So our families need to be blessed by the noble deeds of our children.



Holy Sacraments, published on 15th December 1934 calls the sacraments of reconciliation and Eucharist the bath and banquet of the soul. *Letter about January* - 6th June 1937 and a letter on *Vishwasa Parisheelanam* (6th Jan 1942) stress the significance of faith formation. This is a minute reflection of his books and Pastoral letters.

Let us have a glimpse into the journey of his life history, which is picturized meticulously in his book *Girideepam*. “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Mt 5: 6). Today Mar Ivanios is a shining light before the people of God.

Mar Ivanios – A Model for Student life

As a student, he stood first in his classes. He excelled in arts, sports, and all extracurricular activities. He was remembered as the favourite student of his teachers. And he was so special to everyone he knew. He was the captain of the football team in MD Seminary. Geevarghese used to kneel and pray at the Puthiakavu Jacobite Church on his way up and down to school every day. He was a voracious reader, and he refined his knowledge day by day. With his brilliance in studies, extraordinary courage, and humble behaviour, P.T. Geevarghese had become the apple of the eye of the teachers, schoolmates, and all his villagers.

Day in and day out, he was a strong follower of Jesus Christ and showed the path of Christ to many. As a student, he and his friends used to take bath in a stream near the seminary. There is a small rock by the side of it. He drew a cross on it and said to his friends to pray in front of the cross before jumping into the river. All his friends except one did the same, but the one who hesitated to pray got drowned and, Geevarghese saved him. After that, all his friends did obey what P.T. Geevarghese said to them.

These two instances throw light upon the prayerful life of little P.T. Geevarghese. His Grace followed these rituals of prayer and spiritual discipline until his last breath. In his death bed, he asked for a cross to be kept on both sides of his bed so that he could see Christ on the cross,



whichever side he turned to. Let us build our lives for the Glory of God through prayerful life and faith as shown by His Grace.

The Unconditional Love towards Poor and Downtrodden

Proverbs 19:17 says, “whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will reward them for what they have done.” Archbishop Mar Ivanios started an orphanage under the management of Bethany ashram. Irrespective of caste and creed, well-wishers began to bring children who had no parents or had no one to care for. When smallpox was spreading all over that place, they came to know that five children were in great distress because their parents had died due to the disease. The Ashramites took these children to the orphanage and brought them up. They paid particular attention to the formation of these orphans, especially in their education, character formation, and development of their artistic and aesthetic tastes. The seminarians, when they go to their native place for holidays, they used to take an orphan boy along with them. This approach was to develop a sort of emotional security, belongingness, and self-esteem. Many orphan children had different talents, they studied well, and they excelled in their personal and public life.

An Orphan boy later wrote a book titled *Mar Ivaniosinte Anaatha Balan* reflections of B.G. Jacob on the mercy that Mar Ivanios showered, and the way he was brought up as an orphan. I want to take an extract from the book and present it for you: ‘At a time when the rules and rites of discriminations were at their culminating sway, I, the one who was born and bred in a low caste, who managed to get literacy and, who became the orphan boy of the unparalleled great Mar Ivanios...’

Subsequently, the bishop started *Balikamadom* girls’ school at Thirumoolapuram for bringing up the neglected community. Another instance which occurred while going for begging alms, Achen cured a girl with mental illness of a high-class family. To show their gratitude, the family arranged a feast for the Bishop. After blessing the food, he hesitated to accept it since he had been fasting and told them to serve



this sumptuous food to the outcast child. The bishop made the outcast child sit on the decorated chair and fed him. He also went along with the outcast child to his hut received their hospitality in a *Chatti* (pot) of well water... which was the only food available in that hut. He advised Bro. Alexios to give them the money collected through begging that day.

As the Principal of M.D. Seminary, he gave special attention to the backward children and slow learners. Once a naughty boy became a nuisance to the teachers and other students. As the principal, Fr. Geevarghese punished and beat him, the boy turned towards Geevarghese achen and used abusive words. Later, achen called him and consoled him. The boy felt guilty and begged pardon. Fr. Geevarghse told him that the wound you made in my heart would bleed until you become a good boy. The boy promised to be so, and he never showed naughtiness again.

His Grace was a dedicated teacher at Serampore University. He worked overtime to pay fees for the students who were brought to the same college for studying. He was sponsoring so many students in such a way that they became ambassadors of Charity. All these instances show the love of His Grace towards Children. Mar Ivanios thus inspired the children to have compassion for the homeless, poor, marginalized, and downtrodden.

Archbishop Mar Ivanios – An Apostle of Forgiveness

While he was serving as a bishop an unfortunate incident occurred in his life. Some of his rivals played a prank by showing a mock cremation ceremony of the bishop - the coffin Procession. On the very same evening, the mastermind of this procession was stabbed to death. His Grace willingly forgave them, went to the victim's home, consoled the widow and her children and gave them financial assistance. This shows his ability to forgive and the willingness to help the needy. He had the heart to smile at his rivals too.

I want to mention one more incident. Bishop and Fr. Cheriyamadathil were going on a horse cart. I am happy to tell that Fr. Cheriyamadathil is my great grandfather, my mother is the grandchild of



Fr. Andrew Cheriyaamadathil. While travelling, they were trapped by bandits. They had only two options in front of them - fight or flight. Neither of them was possible at that time. The bandits snatched away the walking stick of the bishop. They did not do anything against these rogues but they were aware that they ought to suffer these atrocities as followers of Jesus Christ. Many events took place on different occasions, which shows the forgiveness of the bishop. His Grace showed that we could forgive those who break our hearts, pray for them, and take the responsibility to correct them.

Mar Ivanios - A Social Reformer

To improve the religious and social welfare of thousands of depressed and distressed classes, he established mission centers in many places. These depressed classes were down-trodden for centuries by the cruel hands of the caste system and its customs. They were poverty-stricken and living unclean lives in miserable huts. They had no education or any knowledge of health and hygiene. Mar Ivanios and his companions made an earnest and sincere effort to improve the conditions of these miserable people and their children.

Conclusion

All the above instances throw light upon the mercy, tenderness, and love of the bishop. He shows us the suitable model in every walks of our life. Prayer and faith will chase out fear, and it gives us the strength to take the risk. Then only will we get rewards and rich dividends. Through his tireless work, Mar Ivanios taught us that the doors of success are open to those who work till the end. His life teaches us that an effective leader, by the grace of God, can compensate for almost all the deficiencies. Jesus says, "The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. As a good shepherd, His grace knew the sheep, owned the sheep, catered the needs of the sheep, and had taken immense pain to save the sheep..."

His grace was a bishop with a difference, a radiant priest and multifaceted personality, whose life was tied to God, altar, church and community. Indeed, we are fortunate enough to have a good shepherd, a



Good Samaritan, and a radiant priestly personality. As we know, life is also an examination given by God... In his life, the questions given were very tough and complicated... Oppositions, miseries, financial crisis, conflicts, hurdles in reunion, illness etc. However, His grace faced all these challenges in God's way and successfully passed this examination with flying colours. Let us invoke God's blessings through the intercession of Mar Ivanios.

“O Lord, we are at your mercy; we have dedicated ourselves to do your will. Loving father teach us, to love you and love others, teach us to do your adorable will, May we live and glorify you, Lord, with our lives.” Amen



HISTORICAL OVERVIEW AND THE IMPACT

Chapter 6

Historical Context of the Reunion Movement

Most Rev. Dr. Thomas Mar Eusebius
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In this short essay, we shall expose briefly the historical background of the Reunion Movement, the 90th anniversary of which we celebrated in September 2020. It is not possible to explain all the aspects of the background of the Reunion movement in a short write up like this. Therefore, we shall touch upon only some of the very important aspects of the role fulfilled by Servant of God Mar Ivanios in this respect. What is truly consequential for us would be to see what message the ecclesial interventions of Mar Ivanios in history carries for us, the Malankara Catholics today.

We shall focus our discussion on two historical events, namely, the establishment of the Catholicate in the Malankara Church in Kerala in the year 1912 and the historical Reunion event of 1930. These are the two most important historical events for which Mar Ivanios was instrumental. Both these events are deeply consequential for us today. Most of us are aware of the major aspects of the history of the Church



in Kerala and in India – the arrival of St. Thomas the Apostle, the establishment of the St. Thomas Christian Church in our Land, its smooth continuation for almost fifteen centuries, the arrival of the Portuguese traders followed by Portuguese missionaries, the unfortunate misunderstanding of the vibrant Christian tradition in Kerala by the Portuguese missionaries, their attempt, in all their good intentions, to make our tradition more Latin, the Synod of Diamper in which this attempt at the so-called Latinization was almost complete, the opposition raised by one major group of the St. Thomas Christians against the Portuguese authority, and the consequent, unfortunate event of the *Coonan* Cross oath in 1653. With this, the division in the Kerala Church was complete - two groups, the old faction and the new faction, or the *pazhayakoottukar* and the *puthenkoottukar*, were formed.

But the history of the new faction after the *Coonan* Cross Oath was replete with further divisions. The *puthenkoor* faction, in search of a bishop to lead them, gradually ended up being subject to the supremacy of the Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch. This was another reason for further division in the Church. For quite some time, the *puthenkoor* group was ruled by the Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch. Through the Synod of Mulanthuruthy, the Patriarch tried to affirm his overall supremacy over the Malankara Church. And this was strongly resisted especially by one group of the *puthenkoor*. This group wished to have more autonomy for the Church in Kerala. It was at this juncture, that the role that Mar Ivanios played became more explicit. The then Metropolitan of the Malankara Church, Vattasseril Mar Divannasios, who had a lot of confidence in Rev. Fr. Geevarghese Panickerveetil, was entrusted with the task of initiating the steps for establishing the Catholicate in the Malankara. He went ahead with his project which bore fruit in 1912. The first Catholicos of the Malankara was consecrated on the 15th of September, 1912.

The establishment of the Catholicate in the Malankara, for which Father P.T. Geevarghese gave the lead and took the initiative, had a deep-rooted spiritual motive. It was not simply a matter of attaining worldly power and authority. On the contrary, it reflected the sublime understanding of what a Church is and what a Church should be; namely,



the Church is primarily missionary. The Church must have the opportunity to witness to the salvation which it experiences in Jesus Christ. Thus, the primary goal of the establishment of the Catholicate was not just to free itself from the supremacy of the Antiochean Patriarch, but rather to enhance the possibility of the Malankara Church for evangelization, to attain the authority and the possibility of witnessing to the beauty of the faith, to the possibility of salvation. This was the first consequential event that Mar Ivanios, his ingenuity, his creativity and his faith gave rise to.

But unfortunately, with the establishment of the Catholicate the crisis in the Malankara Church did not subside. The two factions, one admitting the overall supremacy of the Patriarch of Antioch which was called the '*bava* faction' or the Jacobite faction and the other faction, conceding only spiritual supremacy to the Patriarch of Antioch, wanting to be a more self-governing Church, namely, the '*methran* faction' or the orthodox faction, continued to be in clash. They fought over many issues, mainly worldly issues like the *vattipanam* (a reservoir fund which the Church enjoyed). They had many court litigations. Finally, the faction to which Mar Ivanios belonged realized, with his insights, that permanent peace can be established in the Church only by extending the horizons of our heart, by understanding the true reality of the Church, by bringing about universal experience of unity. So, the Church entrusted Mar Ivanios, who was already a bishop then, with the task of negotiating with the Holy See for a possible reunion. He went about seriously working on it. But in the meantime, the major court litigation was won by the *methran* group and most of the bishops of the Synod stepped back in their decision. But Mar Ivanios went ahead boldly, because he did not initiate this move for any material or worldly benefits, but for the cause of the Gospel, out of a profoundly spiritual insight. And we know, what happened on the 20th of September, 1930 – a very small group of people, under the leadership of Mar Ivanios, re-entered the Catholic communion of the Church of Christ.

Thus, two very important events in the history of the Malankara Church, namely the establishment of the Catholicate and the Reunion of the Malankara Church were realized by the Holy Spirit through the person of Mar Ivanios, through his leadership. He took the initiative for the



establishment of the Catholicate for fully realizing the missionary vocation of the Church. And he took the initiative for the Reunion Movement, because he was convinced that the Church has to be founded on the unity of the Holy Trinity. The values reflected in these two events were the most prominent aspects of his ecclesial, and Christian conviction, namely, as a Church, I cannot but evangelize, but the Church without unity is no Church. He stood for these values and he suffered for these values. And the wonderful Christian, ecclesial, spiritual beauty that we Malankara Catholics enjoy today is the fruit of the suffering that Mar Ivanios took on himself for the perpetuation of these spiritual values. Let us continue to propagate, to be witnesses of these Ivanian values, Christian values – uncompromising readiness for evangelization and a deep-rooted thirst for being in unity. Any sacrifice for the sake of these values is worth. We need to reaffirm our commitment to these values.

Chapter 7

Mar Ivanios: The Serampore Days

Rev. Dr. Prabheesh George
(Professor, St. Mary's Malankara Seminary)

Every year in July, we commemorate a great personality of our Church with many ecclesial activities - our beloved father-in-faith Servant of God Archbishop Mar Ivanios, whom we regard as one of the most outstanding personalities of the Indian Church. Among the different names attributed to Mar Ivanios, 'the father of the Reunion Movement' stands unique due to its ecclesiastical significance. It took him more than two decades of study, discussions, reflections, and prayers to reach the Catholic communion, and accordingly, the historical event of the Reunion Movement held on 20 September 1930 is marked in golden letters. Seeing his unique contribution towards the ecclesial communion in the 20th Century, the great English writer G.K. Chesterton described him as the Newman of India.

As we go through the pages of history, it is clear that the great schism in 1653 made a deep scar of division in the mystical body of Christ in India. The group that publicly renounced the relationship with the Portuguese missionaries eventually walked out of Catholic communion. This *Puthenkoor* community of St. Thomas Christians, later



known as Malankara Church, was sailing like a ship without a destiny. The unending disputes for power and quarrels for possessions were like rough waves that shattered the ship. This made them divided many times. Mar Ivanios was the person who took the initiative to heal this wound of division as well as to regain the missionary zeal of this apostolic Church. In this article, I would like to discuss the Serampore days of Mar Ivanios and try to show how such experiences shaped his ecclesial vision and missionary zeal. This will help us to appreciate the *Ivanian* vision and mission behind the Reunion Movement.

Let us begin our reflections by understanding the ecclesial situation at Kerala and Calcutta at the beginning of the 20th Century. During this time, there was a debate in the Malankara Church on Patriarch's temporal power over the Malankara Church. The then Malankara Metropolitan, Vattasseril Mar Divannasios, was hesitant to accept the claim. This provoked the then Patriarch Abdulla, who was on a visit to Kerala, to expel the Metropolitan from his throne. To come out of this crucial situation, the Metropolitan invited the ex-Patriarch Abded M'siho to Kerala, and the latter established the throne of Catholicos in the Malankara Church on 17 September 1912. The mastermind behind the Metropolitan was none other than Fr. P.T. Geevarghese Panikarveetil, the principal of M.D. Seminary High School Kottayam. Mar Ivanios recalls such events as follows: "Even before Patriarch Abded M'siho set out for Malankara, we had correspondence with him. We made it clear in those letters that the erection of the Catholicate was imperative for the firm establishment and the growth of the Malankara Church." This young priest was enthusiastic about working for his mother Church. He wanted to renew the ecclesial vitality of this apostolic Church for fulfilling the divine goal of Evangelization of India. He dreamed of developing his school, a prestigious educational institute of the Malankara Church, into a college. At the same time, his heart was broken many times while seeing the conflicts and quarrels between leaders. He narrated this with tears in his autobiography: "These experiences have enabled us to observe and smell the stench of the filth that lay accumulated at the bottom of the Malankara Church." He was in search of finding a way out to renew his mother Church.



Calcutta was one of the important Christian centers of that time in India. The foreign missionaries considered Calcutta as the center of their missionary activities. Catholic Church and Anglican Church had sent missionaries regularly to this ancient city. The missionary activities were organized by the archdiocese of Calcutta on the Catholic side and leaders of High Church on the Anglican side. It is important to mention that the Christian university of Serampore, run by the Anglican Missionaries, was a prestigious Christian university of that time. Hence, many loved to study and teach there.

From this ecclesial background both in Kerala and Calcutta, let us see how Mar Ivanios was brought to Serampore. In 1910, the Anglican Church convoked a missionary conference at Edinburgh to discuss missionary activities worldwide. It was the first international Conference on a Christian mission to discuss the division among the Christians. Representing Indian missionaries, Dr. Howells, the principal of Serampore College, presented India's mission report in the Conference at Edinburgh. The delegates from all over the world seriously deliberated on the issue. They concluded that for the universal realization of the Christian mission, communion between different churches was the need of the hour. This would ensure the cooperation between various missionaries working in the same land. Thus, this Conference proposed communion for the mission.

The Conference went further from theory to praxis. The delegates proposed to convoke follow-up conferences at the regional level to bring this message of ecclesial communion to the grassroots level of mission work. Thus, a students' Conference was proposed to convene at Calcutta, and the organizers in India thought of inviting the leaders of Syrian Churches in Kerala. Rev. Dr. Mott, an American missionary, was the main organizer. The primary purpose of this Conference was, as Mar Ivanios narrates: "to think seriously about the steps to be taken for the propagation of the Good News, all over India." The Conference's theme attracted the mind of Fr. P.T. Geevarghese, who was seriously thinking about evangelizing the whole of India. Since the Malankara Metropolitan Mar Divannasios was invited, Fr. P.T. Geevarghese, the right-hand man of the Metropolitan, got the opportunity to accompany him to Calcutta. He attended this Conference not merely



as a secretary instead as a theological expert from the Malankara Church. We could reasonably presume this because his interventions in the Conference were so rational and theological as to get noticed by Dr. Howells. Being impressed by this educated young priest from Kerala, Dr. Howells, without a second thought, invited him to join the theological faculty of Serampore College. Mar Ivanios had already known this institution. He says: “We learned more or less about the Serampore College that it was one of the European Protestant Institution, where there were ample scope and encouragement for the study of English language and the sacred Theology.” Mar Ivanios was filled with mixed emotions as he received this invitation. He says: “Dr. Howells, who worked relentlessly for the progress of the Serampore College which shone forth as the sole Christian University in India, asked us whether it would be possible for us to leave our native place and go over to Serampore as professor of the college.” Though it was an honour for Fr. Panicker, he did not take this invitation seriously until he received the invitation in writing after returning to Kerala.

Deciding to leave Kottayam to Serampore was like a spiritual agony Mar Ivanios had gone through in his life. He recalls those dark days as follows: “Truly speaking, we were disturbed concerning our going to Serampore College or not. Often, this very thought had been disturbing our mind. We regretted for several days that we could not decide on any one of the two. This agitated state of mind affected not only our appetite and activity but also our peaceful sleep.” He spent many sleepless nights because his nightmares were filled with M.D. Seminary School and Mar Divannasios on the one side and Serampore College and Dr. Howells on the other side. As the days passed, his heart was leaning towards the Serampore College, thinking that “During our stay in Serampore, we would be able to fulfill whatever others expected us to do for the prosperity of the Malankara community.” As he got permission from his beloved Metropolitan, finally, Mar Ivanios said the definite yes for leaving Kottayam to Serampore. He writes:

Our appointment as Professor of a First Grade College in a city quite close to the capital of the then Indian Empire did not make us infatuated to ignore our community or to forget our obligation



towards it. We firmly believed that the growth and the prosperity of our Church depended to a certain extent on the formation of its clergy and their erudition in Theology. Hence, our long and earnest desire to start a Theological College for the clergy of the Malankara Church. Perhaps our stay in Serampore would accomplish this desire.

Mar Ivanios believed that the academic link with the Serampore College would lead the M.D. Seminary to a glorious future. These thoughts inspired him to decide in favor of accepting the invitation of Dr. Howells.

History proved that Mar Ivanios was right in his decision. In 1913 Fr. P.T. Geevarghese reached Serampore and stayed in the College Hostel with students. Before reaching Calcutta, he got assurance from Dr. Howells for all arrangements that would help him to lead a life suitable to a Syrian priest. Mar Ivanios wrote in *Girideepam*: “Dr. Howells had assured us that there would be convenience at the College Chapel for teaching the catechism of the Eastern Church and to conduct the divine worship according to the traditions of the Syrian Church.” He taught Syriac and Eastern Theology. He also served as the Secretary of the Higher Theological Department in the college.

During his days in Serampore, his mind was anxious to bring many young men and women from Kerala, especially the young seminarians, to give them higher education. He brought them to Calcutta and found places for them in different universities. He approached Bristol Sisters for the young women from Kerala, thinking they would be given good English language training and religious formation. But many might find it challenging to meet the expenses. In that case, Mar Ivanios thought of spending his salary on it. He wrote: “If that wouldn’t suffice, the College authorities could be consulted, and some appeals could be sent to benefactors.” Thus, he spent a considerable amount of money every month for their stay and study in Serampore. Besides, he spent his income on those students from Kerala studying in Allahabad, Calcutta, and Madras. Such was his contribution that the Metropolitan appreciated him for spending colossal money “equal to the amount of Vattippanam.”

As a guru, he interacted with his disciples and motivated them to be educated for serving their Church and community. He was like a



vigilant pastor who took precautions “lest our Deacons and the other Syrian Christian students might be influenced by false teachings and led astray from the true faith, the College being an institution of the Protestants.” He took special attention to teach them Syriac, for, as he penned in his autobiography, “the Liturgy of our Church, its theology, philosophical expositions, history, etc., are all written in Syriac. Hence, working knowledge and expertise in it are inevitable to our priests.” It is a great contribution of Mar Ivanios to the Syriac literature in India that he took all the troubles to convince Sir Ashutosh Mukerji, the Vice-chancellor of the University of Calcutta, and Dr. Howells, the principal of Serampore College, to approve Syriac as an optional subject in the above-mentioned University and College. Following this, the University of Madras also accepted this ancient language of Christianity as an optional subject of the curriculum of Bachelor’s and Master’s Degree. Most contemporary people forget this historical fact when they appreciate Mar Ivanios for preparing Syriac Grammar Book, which he compiled during his Serampore days.

The vision and educational attempts of Mar Ivanios during the Serampore days are innumerable. Many leaders of Malankara Church got higher education only because of his efforts. He ardently wished to have educated priests and young men and women for the upliftment of his community. His whole life in Serampore was because of this purpose. He spent his time, money, and contacts to achieve this goal. He was proud of seeing his disciples coming out with flying colors. Among them, Deacon John Kattumangattu secured M.Sc. in Natural Science, whereas Deacon Geevarghese Thacheril, who secured M.A., became a professor in Serampore College. The educational contributions of Fr. P.T. Geevarghese Panicker to the Malankara Church were immense, for he launched an educational revolution by becoming an instrument of higher education for many. Even those who oppose his Reunion Movement would accept this education revolution in Malankara Church by Mar Ivanios. It is to be noted that somehow, we forget to incorporate his educational contributions during Serampore days with his academic contributions after the Reunion.

Now let us turn our thoughts to his life in Calcutta. He was the



first priest from Malankara to get the privilege of teaching in one of the then reputed Christian colleges in India. Though being a professor at Serampore College was a prestigious status, Fr. Geevarghese never took pride in it. He led a simple life and used to spend his time sharing his knowledge with his students. He loved his students and stayed with them like a Guru imparting true knowledge. At the same time, he was like a student searching for wisdom. His evening walks were in search of wisdom.

At the same time, there are many untold stories of Mar Ivanios while he was in Calcutta. We proudly remember St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta for her humanitarian service to the poor and needy in the slums of Calcutta. Unfortunately, we forget the similar service rendered by a Malayali priest in the second decade of the last century. Fortunately, we had an eyewitness for such humanitarian works of Mar Ivanios, and it was his most trusted deacon Jacob who later on accompanied him while reuniting with the Catholic Church. The first foreign biographer of Mar Ivanios, Margaret Gibbons, in her book *Archbishop Mar Ivanios: Apostle of Church Union* writes: “Then there were his visits to the sick of the Calcutta slums. Taking that same deacon with him he used to go at frequent intervals to the crowded dwellings of the wretched and the unfortunate, where babies suffering from malnutrition were to be found.” This good Samaritan with a long beard touched many hearts as he was pouring out the compassionate love of God to those underprivileged. The narration continues: “He would wash the smelly little bodies, bathe them in oil and give them back soothed and refreshed to their poor mothers.” He was like modern Francis Assisi, who kissed the smelly wounds of Lepers. “Moreover, in his ruthless efforts after self-conquest, he would force himself to kiss the scrofulous eruptions that disfigured the burning skin of those pitiful little ones before he applied the salves, he had brought with him.” These untold narrations make us feel proud of this great man who put into practice the slogan “manava-seva Madhava-seva” five decades before Mother Teresa’s active presence in Calcutta. Now it is clear that it was not accidental that Mar Ivanios instructed Serampore to his assistance to build an orphanage before constructing the Ashram at Perunad. He was like a vigilant pastor who always had compassion for



the poor and needy. His attempts to feed thousands after the Reunion with the help of Catholics from other continents were actual signs of his humanism.

During his stay at Serampore College, he read many books on Indian culture and spirituality, which gave him a better understanding of the real soul of Indian heritage. Mar Ivanios, through his constant study and dialogue, embraced the centuries-old rich traditions of our motherland. It is because of this great openness he always placed the cultural patrimony of our country at high. His knowledge was not constrained to the four walls of libraries. His dialogues with Hindu leaders in Calcutta enlarged his spiritual and cultural horizons. He never missed a single opportunity to talk with any Hindu leader. Being a genuine seeker of truth, his thirst for wisdom never ceased. He took all the trouble to visit the Shanthinikethan of Sri. Rabindra Nath Tagore, who won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1913, and Sabarmati Ashram of Mahatma Gandhi, who was the forefront fighter of the Indian freedom struggle. These two ashrams, lead by two great personalities of India, were centers of Indian culture and spirituality. These ashrams explored the rich spiritual traditions of the Indian culture. They also provided space for all those who sought truth in the serenity of Indian tradition. Moreover, such ashrams helped people to explore the rich spiritual wealth of our land. Adopting meditational methods and a lifestyle suiting to our mother nature helped many to attain peace of mind as well as to see the supreme realities with genuine heart.

The visit to such ashrams was a pilgrimage for Mar Ivanios, who was aspiring for monastic life. The experiences and dialogues in these ashrams widened his mind to be proud of our land's rich cultural and spiritual traditions and created in him a passion for ashram life. His aspiration towards *sannyasa* became stronger during this time. He wrote in his autobiography: "The desire for Sannyasa was in us from our tender age. However, it can be said that it was when we were at Serampore College the thought strongly pulled our mind to the decision that a religious order must be established with the conviction that genuine devotion to God is the basis of the spiritual growth of both individual and community." With this deep conviction, in Serampore, he started to live a quasi-ashram



life renouncing all the world's pleasures. He was training his body and mind to get true knowledge from above.

As Mar Ivanios began to lead an ashram style of life, some of his beloved disciples also accompanied him in the path of *sannyasa*. One among them was Deacon Jacob, who later on became the Bishop of Bethany with the name Jacob Mar Theophilos. Mar Ivanios did a detailed study on religious life in the West and *sannyasa* life in the East. He narrates such attempts in *Girideepam*: “We used to visit many Ashrams of both the Roman Catholics and of the High Church in North India and held discussions with their superiors and gathered knowledge from them. During this period, we read many books regarding *Sannyasa* and its rules and regulations.” Thus, he was convinced that “It is only through founding an institution by chosen people, who have chosen the service of God as their life principle and who are nourished by an ardent devotion to God, could bring about development to the Syrian Community and effectiveness to the work of evangelization.” With the permission of the Metropolitan Fr. P.T., Geevarghese started to live a *sannyasa* life together with his companions in College Hostel. He writes: “Immediately, the Deacons and I started observing them. They were only the trivial and insignificant practices of Sanyasa. The deacons had to observe the following rules strictly: to attend the prayers of the Hours at the proper times, the daily meditation, and the examination of conscience. Besides these, from the time of the prayers of the Suthoro, till the morning prayers and meditation were over, grand silence was to be kept by all.” Thus, before founding the Bethany Ashram at Mundanmala in Kerala, Mar Ivanios and his collaborators had initial training in *the sannyasa* way of life. At the same time, he was also convinced of the need for having religious women in Kerala. It is because of his conviction that “the women of our homeland would progress spiritually, educationally and socially from women having higher education and training in religious life.” That is why he brought many young women from Kerala. The first one among them was Ms. Achamma, daughter of Adv. E.J. John. Later on, she was known as Mrs. John Mathai. Moreover, Mother Edith of Barisole Convent promised him to give training to these young girls in English as well as in religious life. He sent them to Diocesan College at Calcutta and Convent



at Barisole for higher education. For the education of girls, Mar Ivanios got assistance also from Rev. Fr. Alexander Kaniyanthara, who was studying at Bishop's College Calcutta. When convent life for girls was unheard in the Malankara Church, Mar Ivanios dreamed that as they complete their higher education, he will go to Thirumoolapuram with them to start a school for girls.

At the end of 1918, Fr. Geevarghese was convinced of starting an ashram for men and a convent for women for the intellectual and spiritual renewal of the Malankara Community. Soon his thought went in search of finding a suitable place to found this new ashram. Initially, he thought of leaving to north India somewhere in Punjab so that he could freely continue his evangelization works. But by the providence of God, his thoughts anchored at Muandamala in Pathanamthitta when Adv. E.J. John offered 100 acres of land from his property near Vadasserikkara for establishing a new Ashram at Perunad. As an initial fund for the landscaping of the new ashram, he received contributions from his well-wishers in Calcutta and Kerala. To register this new land in government, Mr. Mammen Mappila gave unconditional support to Mar Ivanios. It was Mathai Panikker, the younger brother of Mar Ivanios, who first visited the place and identified the plot for the new ashram. Moreover, his father gave him the amount to be remitted in government treasury for the registration of the land. Thus, everything was arranged for starting a new ashram in Kerala, and thus Mar Ivanios said adieu to Serampore in 1919.

As we put a curtain on the last scene of Serampore days, we can say that it was a period of preparations of Mar Ivanios. He prepared himself intellectually, mentally, and spiritually for the cause of Evangelization of India, a concept so dear to his heart. For him, those were days of dialogues and experiments with different traditions of spirituality as well as ecclesial living. He was deeply convinced of his future mission and had a clear vision of his life. That can be summarized in five points:

1. The God-given mission of Malankara Church is the evangelization of India.



2. For the Evangelization of India, we need many young men and women “who have a true devotion to God and genuine love for him to lead men to God.”
3. For that, Mar Ivanios proposed the famous slogan, “To possess God is nobler than to serve God.”
4. He determined to begin an Ashram for giving training to genuine evangelizers for India, synthesizing western monasticism and Indian *sannyasa*.
5. He had an ardent desire to begin a religious congregation for women to aid the missionary works in India, especially in situations where the men could not get access or cooperation in the work of evangelization.

In conclusion, we could say that the Serampore days of Fr. P.T. Geevarghese were like a spiritual refinery that purified him with the fire of God’s love and zeal for missionary work. God was preparing him as an instrument of Catholic communion in India. Serampore formed him a great personality of the Indian Church as a holy sage (*sannyasi*) and as an ardent missionary. It is a fact that any endeavor with long preparations will produce innumerable fruits. That is what we see in this life. Let us thank God for giving him as our beloved father in faith. Now it is our turn to walk in his path to serve God and his people.

Chapter 8

Mar Ivanios, the Founder of Bethany

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Bethany Ashram, officially known as the Order of the Imitation of Christ (OIC), serves as a milestone in the history of the Malankara Church and to the Christian community. It is the fruit of the arduous efforts put in by the servant of God Mar Ivanios, and it also points towards his visionary (*Sannyasa*) mission. Its characteristics include a perfect blend of ancient Christian tradition and the spiritual heritage of India, which in turn is a culmination of east and west. This paper examines the three-pointers towards the establishment of the ashram. The first is to understand what prompted Mar Ivanios to lay the foundation to Bethany. The second endeavour is to comprehend his preference to adopt the elements of Indian asrama life (Indianization). The third is to fathom the uniqueness of the Bethany Spirituality.

In his autobiography, *Girideepam* Mar Ivanios recollects his fondness for monastic life in his childhood which was next to nil in Malankara Church in those days. This affinity towards religious life, which was even relatively unknown to him, makes it evident that God had placed this ardent wish in his heart at a tender age itself. And it took quite a long time for this fondness to take a definite shape in his life. His



Serampore days were a crucial period, and his childhood inclination towards the life of *sannyasa* took shape into a clearly defined conviction during this period.

Young Geevarghese was widely acclaimed for his intellectual acumen and mastery of the English language. He was appointed the Principal of M.D. Seminary High School in Kottayam just before his ordination as a priest, which took place after a month. He was the first to accomplish a Master's Degree among the priests in Malankara Church, and therefore, he was fondly called M.A. Achan by the people.

Fr. P.T. Geevarghese was a renowned figure in Kottayam at that time, and the year 1913 became a turning point in his life. Dr. R. Mott, a protestant missionary, came over to India and organized a conference for the Christian youth in Serampore, West Bengal. This was the first-ever conference for the Christian youth nationwide. The youth in the Malankara Church also received the invitation, and a group of fifty got ready to attend the conference in Serampore under the leadership of H.E. Vattasseril Mar Divannasios, the guru and mentor of Fr. P.T. Geevarghese. Mar Divannasios took Fr. P.T. Geevarghese along with him, as he needed a good translator who was well-versed in English and Malayalam. Thus, Fr. P.T. Geevarghese also accompanied the group to Serampore as a translator of the entire group, especially of Bishop Vattasseril Mar Divannasios.

The Significance of Serampore

Mar Ivanios' arrival in Serampore, which appeared to be a normal event in his life, became a watershed moment that reshaped his vision, life and mission, and turned out to be a decisive moment in the course of the history of Malankara. Serampore is a small town located on the west bank of the Hooghly river, a branch of India's holy river Ganges which is about 20 k.m. north of Calcutta. Serampore was a Danish colony from 1752 to 1845, after which it was sold by the Danish Governor to the British East Indian Company. The bank of Hooghly was famous for the cultivation of jute, an important natural fiber in terms of cultivation and usage. It was in huge demand those days, and therefore



around 300 Jute mills were operating in that area alone. This attracted many Europeans to Serampore. East India Company came to Serampore mainly to export jute which meets all the standards for safe packaging material because of its being a natural and renewable product. Serampore and regions nearby were flourishing, and after few years, European missionaries landed there. They converted many people into Christianity and started many churches there.

The Danish missionaries founded the first Christian University in India that is today known as Serampore College. Religion was one of the faculties in the college besides the secular subjects. When Mar Ivanios spoke on the stage on different issues, his proficiency in English was noted by people present there. It also grabbed the attention of Dr. Howells, the then principal of Serampore College. He was incredibly fascinated by the personality of the young priest Fr. P.T. Geevarghese and by his proficiency in the English language. When Dr. Howells extended him an invitation to join the faculty of Serampore College, Fr. P.T. Geevarghese was not able to decide on his own because he was the Principal of M.D. Seminary High School, a prestigious school of the Malankara Orthodox Church. M.D. school was experiencing financial hardships and Fr. P.T. Geevarghese was entrusted with the task of rebuilding the institution.

Another concern was ongoing litigation – the Vattipanam case – in the court. Fr. P.T. Geevarghese was actively involved with the Bishops of Malankara Orthodox Church by helping and advising them with the proceedings of the case. With all the concerns, he asked Dr. Howells to approach his mentor – Bishop Vattasseril Mar Divannasios for taking a decision. It was not an easy one to make; however, the salary of 1000/- and a stipend of 500/- per month, in addition, was too good to refuse at a time when the M.D. Seminary High School was struggling even to pay the meagre salary of Rs. 4/- to its teachers besides the huge debt. Mar Divannasios saw this as an easy solution to overcome the financial strains of M.D. school and to upgrade it to a college in the future. And thus, it was decided to send Fr. P.T. Geevarghese to Serampore college.

Fr. P.T. Geevarghese reached Serampore and in no time earned the distinction of being a leading professor. His life at Serampore, which is the turning point of his ideological growth, became a God-given



opportunity to analyze the ecclesial life of his Church in Kerala. It was a Church whose spiritual life was marred with civil litigation, hatred, power politics, and internal fights. For instance, to fully appreciate the beauty of a church in all its grandeur and exquisiteness, one needs to step out and get the outside view. And this is precisely what happened in the life of Mar Ivanios. He had to step outside his Church and native land to get a picture of the Malankara Church and its situation. He spent seven glorious years teaching in Serampore, and it was also a learning period for him; he studied, observed, and contemplated more and more about his Church. He observed that on the one hand, the missionaries travelled thousands of miles to come to India to preach the Gospel, and on the other, the St. Thomas Christians, the proud inheritors of the apostolic faith since 52 A.D., have somehow failed to proclaim the Gospel. Jesus founded His Church and commissioned his disciples to go into all the corners of the earth and preach the Good news to the whole creation (Mark 16:14-16). As far as we are concerned, we were lucky to receive the light of the Gospel even before the Europeans, yet we failed to spread it outside Kerala. We have kept the priceless treasure of the Gospel and buried it beneath the soil. If many are yet to hear the saving name of Jesus, we are to be blamed. We neglected the God-given duty. Mar Ivanios realized that the St. Thomas Christians failed to take Jesus' mission commandment (Mt. 28:20) seriously. And he was also convinced of the lack of spiritual flavor and fire in the Malankara Orthodox Church, which in turn resulted in the internal fights, turmoil, and litigations.

What could be done to rectify it was the persistent thought that captured the imagination of Mar Ivanios in his stay of seven years at Serampore. Mar Ivanios decided to do something to recollect the spiritual energy to regenerate his mother Church. How did he accomplish this? The trajectory of the development of his reflections consists of three phases:

i. The program of education: The lack of quality education among most of the clergy and laity prompted him to impart the same to the young people and clergy. He believed that a group of well-educated clergy and laity could change the fate of the Church. To achieve this goal, he brought many young people to Serampore to provide them with



the opportunity of a good education. All this was made possible by the money he earned as a salary. Out of the fifty young people who were directly under his training at Serampore University, thirteen later became *Malpans* (teachers) in the Seminary, and six students, Bishops in his Church. They went on to become the pillars of Malankara Orthodox Church. This project of education was not limited to Serampore University. He sent young people to other Universities such as Calcutta University, Jadavapur University, Allahabad University, Madras University, and this instantly became a milestone project for the education of the youth. He also sent some girls to Barisole (now in Bangladesh) for higher education which was indeed a revolutionary act in that context. The first members of Bethany Convent were from this group. This project garnered its own results, and now clergy started enjoying certain credibility as educated people. Though this attempt had made its own impact on the church life, the desired goal remained as a distant dream.

ii. Evangelizing Mission: Mar Ivanios was of the conviction that Malankara Church has forgotten and forsaken its God-given mission - evangelization. It was like the salt in Jesus' parable, the salt that lost its saltiness and was thrown out and trampled underfoot, and like the lamp, which was kept under the bushel basket (Mt. 5:13-14). He realized that though the Christians of Kerala and India at large received the Good News from St. Thomas, the Apostle, in the first century itself, it failed in preaching the Good News to the people in their motherland, whereas the European missionaries came all the way from Europe after the 16th century and they started doing what the Christians of the land could not do during the previous centuries. His exposure at Serampore and interaction with foreign missionaries there helped him to grow in the conviction that missionary activity is the very life of the Church and its foremost duty. A Church that forgets this mandate is no more a living Church. Hitherto, he had thought that education is sufficient to revitalize the Church in Malankara and to restore peace. However, the problems in Malankara Church were not resolved. Peace was thwarted due to internal conflicts, divisions, and legal battles between the two factions - Orthodox Syrian Church, to which Mar Ivanios belonged, and the Jacobite Syrian Church. Realizing that education is not enough to resolve this



problem, he now thought of starting a missionary society, with the aim of sending the missionaries to all over India to preach the Gospel. This is the second phase of his search into the causes of the problems in his Church. He thought that perhaps a Missionary Congregation is the answer and the need of the hour in his Church. He even decided where exactly he must start his missionary endeavours. He thought of choosing Punjab as his mission field. He speaks about this in detail in *Bethany Yogam Report*, a short historical account of Bethany, published by Ranni-Perunad Ashram in 1930. However, one of the prominent lay leaders of the Malankara Church and a close aide of Mar Ivanios, Advocate Mr. E.J. John discouraged him from going to North India, when his presence and services were much needed in Kerala for his Church.

Moreover, Mar Ivanios realized that unless and until an ever-burning God-experience is acquired, the missionaries themselves might go after worldly pleasures and values over time. “Saintly deeds come from saintly people.” Therefore, saintly life is more important than charitable works. He spent days and nights in prayer and contemplation before he could take a decision. He understood that being a Christian means being a missionary, who preaches the good news of salvation. Missionary is called to give Jesus to others. But no one can give what he does not have. Therefore, the very first step in this process is to have the person of Jesus. And this is how the famous dictum of Mar Ivanios was coined: “having God is nobler than serving God.” This means that without having a real God experience, one’s works cannot be from God or for God.

iii. Monasticism: Mar Ivanios got all his answers through monastic life. He grew in the conviction that through a life of prayer, meditation, and austerity, one can have a true God experience. One must be in constant touch with God. And this led to the establishment of monastic (*sannyasa*) life in Malankara Church. The underlying belief was that only a *sannyasi* (monk) could become a good missionary in the true sense. The life of *sannyasa* (monasticism) itself is the proclamation and witness of Gospel values. He started practicing monastic life in Serampore itself on an experimental basis around the year 1917. First, he began to practice an austere life and dedicated hours in contemplation



and meditation on the word of God in a small Chapel, and later, he rented a house outside on the banks of river Ganges. This third and last phase of his search for the solutions to the problems that gripped the Church gave birth to a new life in the Malankara Church.

In 1919 he returned to Kerala and started living a monastic life or *sannyasa* life in a place called *Mundanmala*, (Perunad today) in the district of Pathanamthitta, which was the foundation stone of the Bethany movement and a new chapter in the annals of the Malankara Orthodox-Jacobite Church. In 1925, Mar Ivanios established the Bethany *Madhom* (convent) for women who were willing to lead a monastic life. Thus, the two monasteries or *sannyasa* lives were introduced in the Malankara Church – Bethany Ashram and Bethany *Madhom* (convent). All this was upon a singular aim of rejuvenating the Malankara Church with its spiritual upliftment. Mar Ivanios also established Bethany churches in several parts of central Travancore, and the members of Bethany Church were not allowed to get involved in any litigations or conflicts which were going on in the Malankara Church. The main concern of the members of Bethany churches (*pallies*) was to lead a spiritual life which was a new lease of life ushered in Malankara, which had been deeply divided into two factions and had turned into a highly turbulent world. For instance, during the lent season, people used to go to *Mundanmala*, where the first Bethany Ashram situates, and they would spend the entire Holy Week there in praying, fasting, meditating, and listening to the exhortations of Mar Ivanios. It unleashed a wave of spiritual renewal across the Malankara Church. This was precisely the intent of Mar Ivanios behind the foundation of Bethany Ashram and Bethany *Madham*. This should be considered as a highly significant milestone in the path of the spiritual journey of the Malankara Church.

Indianization

The Orthodox Church is a very traditional community that is proud of its glorious heritage and Syrian tradition. In 1925 when Mar Ivanios was ordained as a Bishop, he made a historically significant speech that lasted for two and a half hours. In that speech, he officially



put forward one of his main ideas - 'Indianization of the Church.' He addressed the importance of bringing in many Indian elements to the Church because the Church still appeared to be foreign to our motherland. This might not have been easy for the people of those times to comprehend. But this Indianization had already started in the Bethany ashram. Before the institution of the ashram, he had consulted many people which even included Mahatma Gandhi - the Father of Nation and the Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore, the great poet who also penned our National Anthem. They encouraged him to give an Indian face to Christianity and go ahead with the Indian Christian monastic movement. Following their advice, he took the Indian word '*ashram*' along with the biblical word Bethany. He combined these two concepts and named the movement - Bethany Ashram. He preferred the 'saffron' colour as the official dress of his monks to show that it is from Indian spirituality.

Why Indianization?

In celebrating Christmas, we celebrate the great event of God becoming man, the Incarnation. When God became man, he became just like us, and he lived among us. St. Paul explains the reality of Incarnation in his letter to Philippians (2:6-7): "who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness." This is known as Christ Event. And this is what the Christians strive to do. Therefore, wherever Christianity went, it identified itself with the local culture, the local language, local traditions. For instance, when Christianity arrived in Rome, Roman Church was born, when it went to Greek, the Greek Church came, when it went to Russia, Russian Church, Ethiopia, Ethiopian Church, and so on. But when Christianity came to India, it did not become an Indian Church, but instead a Chaldean Church or an Antiochene Church. Mar Ivanios, therefore, observed that if that persists, the non-Christian brothers and sisters in India will never accept us and will rather consider us as 'foreigners.' So to be one with the nation, we should be proud of being Indian, and it was also very much essential to adopt the culture, languages, habits of the land and which are not against Christian faith and theology. It was a novel way of



thinking, in fact, a very authentic thought, which is indeed per the Catholic faith and the Second Vatican Council. Four decades before the Second Vatican Council, Mar Ivanios understood the relevance of such a vision. He took appropriate steps towards Indianization or inculturation - to become one with the culture, become one with the traditions of the nation where Christianity exists. When Mar Ivanios founded Bethany Ashram, he had this conviction. Accordingly, he chose the vestment of a Hindu monk in Bethany Ashram. He advocated a simple life, vegetarian food, and all those traditional elements which were not against Christianity were adopted as values of Bethany Ashram.

Bethany Spirituality

Bethany spirituality is a unique spirituality. It is a blend of three different lines of spiritualities. The first element is the Eastern Syrian Spirituality. The Eastern Syrian Church has monastic spirit and tradition. The second element of Bethany spirituality is Indian *Sannyasa* or Indian monastic life. And the third element is the Western Christian spiritual traditions. Mar Ivanios was greatly influenced by Saints Francis of Assisi, Therese of Avila, Little Therese of Lisieux, John of the Cross, Alphonsus Liguori, Ignatius of Loyola. He incorporated the virtues practiced by these saints in Bethany Ashram. And he also made sure that the Bethanian spirituality is rooted in these elements.

Bethany means “house of consolation” in the bible. In the Gospel Bethany indicates the nature and charism of the Congregation founded by Mar Ivanios, giving supreme importance to prayer and activities. Bethany is modelled upon Martha, Maria, and Lazarus. Martha was a woman of great faith and an epitome of hospitality and service. She received Jesus in her house. The value of hospitality is significant to Indian ethos. In ancient Hindu scripture, we find an adage ‘*Atithi devo bhava*’ meaning ‘the guest is equivalent to God.’ Indians are well-known for treating their guests with the utmost respect. Christian life or the monastic life is a life of service. The second person in Bethany is Mary. She was a woman of spiritual acuity and devotion. She sat at the feet of her master Jesus, ever-willing to listen and to ponder over what Jesus said. Bethany spirituality prioritizes the inner attentiveness to God as the “one thing necessary” (Lk.10:42). The reflections on ‘*vedas*’ or scriptures



are known as ‘*upanishathu*’ that is to sit by the side of Guru (master). The third person is Lazarus, who was resuscitated from death by Jesus. The raising of Lazarus, which was the greatest miracle recorded in the Gospels, helps one to know the divinity of Jesus. It invited everyone to believe in Jesus, who is the resurrection and life. Lazarus’s resuscitation showed that Jesus has power over death. Jesus calls out Lazarus from the dead. While Martha is the symbol of service and Mary is the symbol of meditation and prayer, Lazarus symbolizes silence. He is not seen uttering a word in the Gospels. The Indian value of ‘Mauna’ or silence can be noted in the life of Lazarus. The most basic spiritual practice is learning silence. What the Christian spiritual tradition teaches us, though, is that the practice of silence is the prerequisite for coming to know God. All these elements – silence, contemplation, and service - are culminated and fused in Bethany Spirituality.

Bethanian spirituality, as envisaged by Mar Ivanios is one of the most influential and pervasive spiritual outlooks for India. It fosters an active attentiveness to God, joined with a prompt responsiveness to God. Those formed by Bethanian spirituality are often called “contemplatives in action.” Like Mary and Lazarus of Bethany, they practice a rich inner life of silence and contemplation, and like Martha they are deeply engaged in God’s work in the world.

The founding of the monastic communities in the Malankara Church by Mar Ivanios was ultimately the consequence of his zealous vision of following Jesus Christ in his life of prayer and action, realized in the oriental monastic tradition and Indian *sannyasa* and aimed at the evangelization of India through the spiritual renewal of the Malankara Church. Mar Ivanios spent long hours in meditation and prayer in the Ashram. He was always concerned about the Church and finally he became convinced that the Reunion with the Catholic Church is the only solution which can save our Church from the problems it had been facing. In 1930, along with all the monks from Bethany Ashram, he left Mundanmala and joined the Catholic Church. In short, the ‘*Punaraikyam*’ or Reunion Movement became possible only because of this monastic life or Bethany Ashram and the history is witness to it. Bethany Ashram which Mar Ivanios founded is actually an inheritor of a unique tradition established in Malankara Church. In divine providence, Bethany thus became the cradle of the Reunion Movement.

Chapter 9

Mar Ivanios: The Prophet of Reunion Movement

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Reunion, a significant milestone in the Church's history, is also a secular event where the Malankara Church entered into communion with the Catholic Church. This Reunion with Catholic Church is the fulfillment of the divine call to come together with the Universal Church to build the mystical body of Christ. Therefore, this sacred act is where three parties are actively involved (two parties on earth and one party in heaven who gave His signature on this amusing unifying act through the leadership of Mar Ivanios, the Servant of God). For a better understanding, this entire paper could be condensed into three points:

- i. A rereading of the historical Reunion: Discovering the mystical dimensions of Reunion that took place under Mar Ivanios as a spiritual way of perfection for the Universal Church. It will also be helpful to understand it as a redemptive act inspired by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, this revelation of God is not only conferred to the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church but also to the entire Christendom.



- ii. Understanding the spiritual thrust that inspired Mar Ivanios to prepare himself and the community for this historic ‘Reunion.’
- iii. Revisiting and discovering the mystical truth behind the act of ‘Reunion’ and to define the same from its very core.

1. A Rereading of the Historical Reunion

The Malankara Syrian Catholic Church has ushered in the centenary decade of Reunion movement. It is appropriate to look at the event from two vantage points:

- i. **The Chronological approach:** The Greek word ‘chronos’ denotes time. An event takes place in historical time, and it is once and for all. If an event is considered from the chronological view, it becomes an event in the past, and it can only be commemorated. Here, the event taking place is confined to that particular time, space and place. If we approach the Reunion as an event in the past, i.e., chronological approach, then it becomes a befitting commemoration. The same event is commemorated year after year as a token of gratitude to all those involved in it, and it becomes an anniversary. Here, the historical act is recalled, and there is no personal involvement taking place. Hence, it hardly inspires anyone.
- ii. **Kairo-logical approach:** In Greek, other than the word ‘chronos’, the word ‘kairos’ is also used to denote the concept of time. It is a salvific time or an appropriate time for action. When we approach the event of Reunion from this concept, the act of Reunion does not remain limited to the time of its occurrence but it unfolds in front of us every day. This approach does not confine an event to a particular time, space, or place. Reunion anniversary, according to this approach, remains no more as commemoration (*anusmaranam*) but as re-enactment (*punaraa-vishkaranam*). Here the spirit of the event transcends time and space, and therefore, people become part of the same event. The same concept is used to redefine the Christ event. Though Christ event took place 2000 years ago, it remains not in the past but in the present. One who commemorates that act transcends time and space and rediscover or re-enact the whole act in a bygone era.



From the narrative of the gospels, it is very evident that the Christ event could be witnessed from different perspectives. For instance, St. John addressed a different community compared with the recipients of the synoptic gospels or the Pauline mission. Hence, the Johannine community was able to go deep into the mystery of salvation attained by Jesus Christ. Similarly, 'Reunion' is also looked upon differently on each anniversary.

Though the event of Reunion took place in a bygone era, it unfolds continuously and becomes more relevant to the contemporary time. We passionately assimilate it and hand it on to the next generation. The act is understood more clearly now than it took place in history for the people involved in it by leaving its impressions on the future generation. The 90th anniversary of the Reunion, which we celebrated in 2020, is to be understood from this perspective. We revisit and rediscover the historical 'Reunion' as an event that happened in our midst: it is not confined or subject to any particular time or place.

The centenary decade of the Reunion movement is a decade where we are aware of this unfolding and respond positively and creatively to it in the 'present.' 'Reunion' enters through a 're-enactment,' without losing the essence of the original experience and passing on this experience to the present generation and for a wider group of people who were not a part of the source experience. Therefore, the centenary decade gives us the immediate impetus and context to look at the 'Reunion' from different angles and approaches; it helps us interpret and relive it, especially from the dimensions of mission of evangelization.

As it is already mentioned, the children of Syro-Malankara Catholic Church (SMCC) have their roots in the act of 'Reunion' and therefore they know more than those who participated in the historic 'Reunion.' They see the act and its impact together now and create new shades of meaning and understanding.

But again, the question, 'what was the question to which 'Reunion' was an answer?' remains unanswered. To answer that, the autobiography of Servant of God, Archbishop Mar Ivanios, has to be read meditatively. It will bring us to a continuous understanding of the Ivanian Vision on Reunion because we become part of the same.



Undoubtedly, the 'Reunion movement' is the 'source experience' of the SMCC. The centenary decade should lead us to develop missiology that takes the 'Source Experience' seriously. There should be a serious soul-searching into identifying the core elements of the 'Source Experience' of the foundational years of Malankara Catholic Church.

2. Spiritual Experience of Mar Ivanios

As Mar Ivanios reflected upon the situation of Malankara Church in Kerala, which was marred by turbulences, litigations and intense factional disputes. The plight of the Church thoroughly disheartened him. He wrote, "these experiences have enabled me to see and smell the stench of filth that accumulated beneath the Malankara Church." He also noted that the accumulation of the filth might have had started since the *Coonan* Cross oath. It was relatively easy to ignore the issue and pass by, but he decided to address the issue. He asked the fundamental question, 'how did this filth get accumulated and what is the solution to counteract or remove this filth from the Church?' He found out that each and every member of the Malankara community was responsible for letting the filth creep inside the Church.

To become a true apostle of Christ, he chose '*sannyasa*' and the path of self-purification. He started advocating and practising asceticism to renew the Church. He opined that holiness is the sole attraction of the Church and began to read the history of the Church without prejudice. He discovered that disobedience, rebellion and division perpetuated in the Puthenloor Community are the ultimate reason for filth. The spiritual thrust in Mar Ivanios to perfect his obedience and grow in holiness propelled him to think about 'Reunion.' He looked at the situation of the Synod of Diamper, Coonan Cross oath, the aftermath and subsequent consequences with an ascetical mind. He realized the deep longing in the heart of the Puthenloor community to rectify the black mark in the history of the '*Marthoma Nasranis*.' This desire led to the *Coonan* Cross oath. Their strong aspiration to bring out changes in the situation and the subsequent ordaining of the Bishop by laying hands of 12 priests was also an attempt towards the same. Later, the separation of '*pazhayakoottukar* (Old Faction) and the



puthenkoottukar’ (New Faction), the introduction of Jacobite liturgy, and bringing hierarchy into Malankara were also attempts to rectify the wrong.

In the early 1900s, Abdullah Patriarch began to stake claims of the temporal authority over the Church and its possessions, together with the spiritual patronage of the Malankara. Resisting this ended up in the declaration of a ban upon opposing faction. This led the *sanyasi*, Mar Ivanios, to understand that every correction need not be liberating; sometimes it only covers up the real issues. A real correction has to be redemptive; a correction that redeems the person who is willing to correct. Such a redemptive correction will set the people free, and they receive a new identity which would bring peace, tranquillity, and prosperity for the generations to come. Redemptive correction is that which took place in Christ event.

3. Redemptive Correction

Long years of *sannyasa*, silence, prayer, and contemplation helped Mar Ivanios to understand that behind every division and schism in the Church, there is disobedience. In the year 1653, when the first great division took place among the St. Thomas Christians, which divided them into *pazhayakoottukar* and *puthenkoottukar*, we can note disobedience. The Protestant Reformation, the great schism in 1054, the Council of Chalcedon, etc. are ample proofs for us to maintain that disobedience results in division. And if we go back to the Garden of Eden, we can see the first disobedience by Adam and Eve. Sin, according to St. Ambrose, “is disobedience with respect to the celestial commandments.” If the first parents’ disobedience separated humanity from God, Jesus, through His obedience to the Father, reunites humanity with the Father. In the process, He rectifies the sin or a mistake committed by Adam and liberates humanity. The correction that redeemed humans is the redemptive correction. Mar Ivanios began to experience the Christ event, especially from a missiological perspective through his ‘*sannyasa*.’ He came to the conviction that the Malankara Church requires a redemptive correction. The disobedience of 1963, even though it was not intended to be against the Pope but rather against the Portuguese authority who were imposing Latinization over the St. Thomas Christians,



needs to be corrected. In order to overcome the divisions and to establish peace, we need to enter into the obedience of Christ. How? The answer is to reunite with the Catholic Church. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he considered 'Reunion' as the only way to free the Malankara Church from the filth that had accumulated here for three centuries.

Conclusion

I consider the redemptive correction as the spirituality of 'Reunion.' And this Reunion granted the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church to spread its mission world-wide and bring everybody into the realization that we need to perfect our obedience and purify ourselves to remain united with the Lord and to stay away from any filth.

Chapter 10

Mar Ivanios: Newman of the East

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Servant of God Archbishop Mar Ivanios was an illustrious spiritual personality and a creative genius of the St. Thomas Christians in the 20th century. He also had a wide range of relationships with renowned luminaries of his time from around the globe. The extent of this relationship was expanded beyond religious realms to include political, cultural and social dignitaries of his time. Because of his special vocation to enjoin a broken link of the Indian Church with the Universal Church for many centuries, his life is also compared to that of many other legendary figures in the Catholic Church. The Syro-Malankara Catholic Church reaped abundant fruits when his multifaceted personality came into contact with similar people of his time. In this article, I want to introduce to the readers two of such personalities: Edward Cardinal Mooney and St. John Henry Newman. Their life is discussed here in relation to the life of Servant of God Mar Ivanios.

Archbishop Mar Ivanios was helped by many people in his attempt to come into communion with Rome. He was also inspired by the life and work of many others who chose the difficult path to Reunion before him. The more we read and study the life and work of Mar



Ivanios we stand in awe and wonder for the accomplishments he has achieved in a short amount of time. Most of the Syro-Malankarites are aware of the epithet of Mar Ivanios as the “Newman of the East”. The relationship between Mar Ivanios and Edward Cardinal Mooney is less explored by many of the biographers of Servant of God Mar Ivanios. As the Apostolic Delegate to India during the time of Reunion, Cardinal Mooney was the person who connected Archbishop Mar Ivanios with Rome. The historical reunion of 1930 was the result of so much prayer and study, bringing abundant blessings to a divided Church. The present evangelical witness of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church stands as proof for the above statement. This fact may remain as long as the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church continues to witness Christ through her missionary as well as communion activities.

Edward Cardinal Mooney was born on 9 May 1882 in the small village of Mount Savage, Maryland in the USA. A few years after the birth of Edward, the Mooney family moved to Youngstown, Ohio because of the mining work of his father. He lost his father Thomas Mooney while he was in primary school. His mother Sarah Mooney opened a small bakery to support the family. Young Edward and his siblings helped their mother in delivering the baked goods to the customers. He continued his school education at St. Charles College in Ellicott City. This school was similar to the minor seminary, preparing the young students with the intention of giving them a basic orientation to priestly life. He continued his priestly formation at St. Mary’s Seminary in Baltimore. Later on, he was sent to the Pontifical North American College in Rome for his theological studies and was ordained to the priesthood there by Cardinal Pietro Respighi on 10 April 1909. When he came back to his diocese, he was appointed professor of dogmatic theology at St. Mary’s Seminary in Cleveland while serving as the founding principal of the Cathedral Latin School. From 1922 to 1923 he was appointed pastor of St. Patrick’s Church in Youngstown. He was called back to the North American College as professor and spiritual director and during this time he was raised to the rank of a Domestic prelate in 1925.

During Mooney’s stay in Rome, Cardinal Pietro Gasparri, the then Secretary of State noticed the extraordinary leadership qualities in



Mooney which resulted in his appointment as the Apostolic Delegate to India with the title of Archbishop. This appointment came into effect on 21 January 1926 and he had his offices in Bangalore, South India. This is a historically important period for the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church. As an experienced and respected Bishop who had a big influence in Rome, Mooney greatly helped Mar Ivanios in his attempt to come into communion with the Catholic Church. One of the reasons for the failure of reunion attempts for many centuries was the lack of someone like Archbishop Mooney to apprise Rome of the sincerity of the Malankara Church of her reunion attempts. The historical reunion of 1930 is also recorded as a great achievement in the priestly ministry of Cardinal Mooney. The friendship developed between Cardinal Mooney and Archbishop Mar Ivanios continued until the death of Mar Ivanios in 1953.

Archbishop Mooney was transferred to Japan as the Apostolic Delegate in 1931 and then called back to the United States in 1933 as the Bishop of Rochester New York. The height of the successful priestly life of Cardinal Mooney was his appointment as the first Archbishop of Detroit, Michigan in 1937. In Detroit, he was instrumental in strengthening the spiritual life of the people of his Archdiocese. His care reached all areas including in starting new parishes and in the building of the Sacred Heart Major Seminary for the formation of priests. It was Pope Pius XII who elevated Archbishop Mooney to the status of Cardinal in 1946. Cardinal Mooney's nationwide influence could be seen from his benedictory prayer at the second inauguration of President Dwight Eisenhower. He died in Rome of a heart attack while he was there to attend the conclave which elected Pope John XXIII.

There is a privately circulated amusing story related to the life of Mar Ivanios and Cardinal Mooney in Detroit. In one of his American visits, Archbishop Mar Ivanios was staying with Cardinal Mooney. During this time, Mar Ivanios became sick and was admitted to the hospital. The doctor came to treat him was Protestant and Mar Ivanios insisted that either he needs a Catholic doctor, or the protestant doctor must kiss his cross. The protestant doctor happily kissed the cross and the issue was thus immediately solved. Since such a wish is unusual for the



American community, this story widely spread among the priests of the Archdiocese of Detroit. This may seem entertaining for many of the readers of this article even today but what Mar Ivanios was trying to show that he was Catholic in every sense. (I came to know of this story from a priest during my ten-year priestly ministry in the Archdiocese of Detroit).

The second person we see briefly in this article is the life of St. John Henry Newman of England. As we have seen at the beginning, Archbishop Mar Ivanios' life is compared to the life of Cardinal John Henry Newman because of the similarities in their faith journey. Newman, who was recently canonized, and Mar Ivanios, whose canonization process is going on, walked similar paths in coming into communion with the Universal Church. Cardinal Newman does not need much introduction as he is known as a theologian, literary genius, and a holy man.

The Church of England is indebted to King Henry VIII (1491-1547) for its origin.

Pope Clement VII sent a letter to King Henry against divorcing Catherine of Aragon to marry Anne Boleyn. He ignored the warning of the Pope and married Anne (and married four more times) and thus incurring ex-communication from the Church. Then he started his own Church known as the Anglican Church which was formed in 1534. Cardinal Newman, who began his ministry as an Anglican priest, came into communion with the Catholic Church as a result of his study and prayer. It was a decision that resulted in losing him everything at the beginning. In every area of life, Mar Ivanios resembles that of Cardinal Newman and still, there should be more studies in this area.

John Henry Newman was born in London on 21 February 1801, the son of John Newman and Jemima Fourdrinier. His parents were members of the Anglican Church who actively participated in the faith life of the Church. In addition to Newman, they had five other children. From a young age, Newman excelled in his studies. At the age of fifteen, in 1816, Newman's parents sent him to the prestigious Oxford University to study. In 1818 he was awarded a scholarship of sixty pounds per year for nine years from Trinity College. As a student, Newman avoided



regular night parties in college and found time to walk and play the violin in his spare time. After successfully completing his studies he was appointed Fellow and Teacher at Oriel College. During this time, he continued his studies for the priesthood in the Anglican Church and was ordained a priest in 1825 at the age of twenty-four.

In 1828 Newman was appointed the parish priest of St. Mary's Church at Oxford University. During this time, Newman and his friends began to study the various aspects related to the Church with the purpose of reforming and rejuvenating the Anglican Church. They studied in depth the writings of the early Church Fathers such as Origin, Tertullian, Athanasius, Chrysostom, Augustine, and Jerome. Their intention was to establish the apostolicity and the authenticity of the Anglican Church.

This group of scholars sought to bring back the Anglican Church to its root. Eventually, this group came to be known as the "Oxford Movement". From 1833 to 1841, under the leadership of Newman they published 90 theological treatises entitled "Tracts for the Times. Because of these writings, the philosophy of the Oxford Movement came to be known as "Tractarianism". Each essay begins by addressing their intended audience: *Ad Clerum* (to the clergy), *Ad Populum* (to the people), or *Ad Scholas* (to scholars). In addition, this group of twelve began to translate and publish the writings of the Church Fathers. They called it the "Library of the Fathers," which was a collection of 48 volumes.

Cardinal Newman's search for the source of the Anglican Church was slowly leading him to the Catholic Church. Newman became a Catholic on 9 October 1845, and later on, he was ordained to the priesthood on 30 May 1847. It is difficult today to understand how challenging Newman's conversion to the Catholic faith in the nineteenth century was. His friends told him that his decision to become Catholic was suicidal. In the cultural and political environment of that time, Catholics were excluded from many occupations. Most of the Anglicans considered Catholic as second-class citizens.

Newman's communion with the Catholic Church resulted in the abandonment of his family and friends. One of the most heartbreaking of such a relationship was of his sister Harriet Mosley, who stopped



relating to Newman for the rest of her life. But for the Catholic who were a minority in England, Newman was a great gift from God. As a result of Newman's conversion to the Catholic Church, many people from the Anglican community joined the Church. However, some Catholic leaders have criticized him for not actively intervening in the conversion of Anglicans to the Catholic Church.

Cardinal Newman realized that his communion with the Catholic Church was an important step in his life. During a voyage to Sicily in 1833, he felt that God was intervening in his life. He contracted pneumonia on the way and became seriously ill. Seeing death face-to-face helped him to better understand the meaning of life and to find his special vocation. "I'm not dead. God has a mission for me" Newman later wrote. Due to this near-death experience, his life was completely changed, and God opened new avenues for him. On his return voyage to England, he later wrote the famous poem: "Lead, Kindly Light."

Some people argue that Newman's communion with the Catholic Church was the result of his studies on the Fathers of the Church. It is true that he has studied the Fathers and read so much on the history of the Church, but people close to him say that he relied more on prayer for making this important decision in his life. It was God's grace that gave him the light he needed to see things clearly and to make a firm decision. After all, he was the leader of an influential movement in the Anglican Church at the time and also a well-known personality in England. He wrote in a meditation book: "My God, I will never forget this truth - you are not only my life, but you are also the only life! You are the way, the truth, and the life. You are my life and the spirit of all who live. All human beings, everything I know, everything I encounter, everything I see and hear, live only through you. Those who do not live in you do not really live properly."

In 1850, Pope Pius IX restored the Catholic Hierarchy in England. After the division of the Church in 1534, the Catholic Church in England functioned without a hierarchy and was a missionary Church under the guidance of the Propaganda Congregation. There were large protests in England against the restoration of the Catholic hierarchy. Newman delivered several speeches in Birmingham explaining the position of the



Catholic Church against the anti-Catholicism of English Protestants. These sermons were later published as *The Lectures on the Present Position of Catholics in England*.

One of the greatest achievements of Newman's life was the establishment of the Catholic University of Ireland. On 15 April 1852, Archbishop Paul Cullen of Armagh (later Dublin) asked Newman to give several lectures on education in Dublin in conjunction with the Irish Bishops' Project. Newman not only delivered lectures but also was appointed as the first rector. The purpose of this new university was to provide higher education for Catholics. Later, its activities have been halted for many years. But now University College Dublin is the largest university in Ireland with 15,000 academic staff and 32,000 students.

Newman's lectures on education in connection with the establishment of the University of Ireland were later published as a book: *The Idea of a University*. In this work, he analyzes how education should be from a Catholic perspective. This book is still a masterpiece of higher education. He explained that proper education requires teachers who can make a personal impact on students. He argued that the primary goal of a secular university was not the moral or religious, but intellectual and pedagogical formation of the students.

In 1867, Pope Pius IX announced the convening of the First Vatican Council. The Pope personally asked Newman to attend this Council as an official theologian of the Church. But he could not attend due to ill health. Towards the end of his life, he spent his time rewriting his earlier writings in light of the Catholic faith.

In 1877 Newman was elected the first honorary fellow of Trinity College Oxford, where he studied. After a long time away from Oxford, Newman happily returned and was warmly received by the University. Newman considered this as a great honour since the treatment of the English Catholics has not changed much during this time also. Newman's greatest recognition came on 12 May 1879 when Pope Leo XIII made him Cardinal of the Church. It was true that he was openly opposed by those outside the Church, but secretly opposed by some inside the Church. The Pope made this decision on his own and was praised by many as a



bold selection. At the same time, the Pope approved both of Cardinal Newman's conditions to accept this recognition. The first was permitted to remain a priest even after his elevation as a Cardinal. The second was a waiver on the condition that non-bishop Cardinals should stay in Rome. The Pope allowed Newman to stay in his oratory in Birmingham.

Cardinal Newman remained active until the end of his life. Newman died peacefully as a Catholic on 11 August 1889 in the Birmingham Oratory. There are a lot of books he has written and there are a lot more written about his life. In addition, many movements have sprung up around the world based on his ideas. He became an inspiration to many Catholics around the world. Now, John Henry Newman remains one of the greatest and undisputed geniuses of the nineteenth century. Over the years, his popularity and relevance have been on the rise. His place in the history of English literature, in the history of ideas, and in religious debates has become clearer and more defined.

Cardinal Newman was the first person from England to be canonized by the Catholic Church in the last three hundred years. Newman was beatified by Pope Benedict XVI during his apostolic visit to England on 19 September 2010 in Birmingham. On 13 October 2019 Pope Francis canonized Newman during the Holy Mass at St. Peter's Square, Vatican. The Crown Prince Charles represented England and also wrote a beautiful article about Cardinal Newman in the Vatican's official publication, *L'Osservatore Romano*. Time has proved that Newman succeeded in winning over the hearts and minds of the people of the Anglican Church. Pope Francis used excerpts from Newman's writings several times during his sermon. Pope concluded his homily with a quote from Newman's poem: "Let us pray to God to turn us into divine light in this world of darkness."

It must now be clear to the readers and members of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church how much the life and works of Cardinal Newman are parallel to the reunion efforts of Servant of God Mar Ivanios. Both of them were trying to reform the Church in which they were born. Cardinal Newman spent almost two decades in studies in order to elevate the spiritual life of the Anglican Church. Servant of God Mar Ivanios was an eminent and saintly priest of the *Puthenkoor* sect who



spent his time and talent in improving the spiritual and liturgical life of the Orthodox Church. This part of his life is well known to the Syro-Malankarites and there is no need to repeat all those history here. His effort to educate the youth and the establishment of the two Religious Orders are a few examples among them.

Mar Ivanios' insights in the area of education were similar to that of Cardinal Newman. The educational institutions started by Mar Ivanios stand as evidence of his visionary outlook in this area. Many institutions, including the Mar Ivanios College, which he started in the name of his heavenly patron, still exist today as the sign of his educational vision. Moreover, both Cardinal Newman and Mar Ivanios faced great opposition and were not afraid of their detractors. They had the strength of the truth by their side and hence nothing to fear. Their friends abandoned them, and their supporters discouraged them but both of them gave up all the honours and recognition they could have received from their Church. That is why Servant of God Mar Ivanios is known as the "Newman of the East".

Like Newman, Mar Ivanios was led into the Catholic Church by his studies and deep prayer. Moreover, both received great recognition in the Catholic Church. Newman had great influence and access to the influential people in the Church including the Holy Father. Servant of God Mar Ivanios was able to go directly to the Pope, talk to him, and get things done at a time such access was almost impossible. In certain areas of ecclesial life, Mar Ivanios achieved greater heights than Cardinal Newman. He was the founder of two prominent religious communities in Malankara and was instrumental in starting many others. As the head of an Individual Church in the Catholic communion, he brought the light of the gospel to many people.

The canonization of St. John Henry Newman should work as a great inspiration and model for the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church in her efforts to raise Servant of God Mar Ivanios to the veneration at the altar in the Universal Church. As a Church, we must pray more fervently and may seek the intercession of St. John Henry Newman. Both Cardinal Newman and Archbishop Mar Ivanios were the pioneers of the great



movements in the history of the Catholic Church. They were able to make decisions according to conscience, not afraid of obstacles, and still, stand as symbols of extraordinary courage. They were willing to pay the price for standing for the truth. They placed great emphasis on knowledge and education along with the spiritual renewal of their communities. We can pray through the intercession of St. John Henry Newman and Servant of God Mar Ivanios and continue imitating their work of reunion and evangelization.



**MAR IVANIOS' VISION,
SPIRITUALITY AND
RELEVANCE**

Chapter 11

Mar Ivanios and the Evangelizing Mission

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Introduction

The 90th anniversary of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church is an occasion to thank God for bringing the Church to the present state and assessing the attainment of Reunion's vision. Therefore, a better understanding of the evangelizing mission of the prophet of Reunion, the Servant of God Archbishop Mar Ivanios, is imperative. This article attempts to provide an enhanced picture of the vision of Reunion and the Evangelizing mission of Mar Ivanios.

Prophet and Visionary

History shows that the Lord God commissioned prophets and ambassadors to lead the world. Mar Ivanios was the commissioned prophet or 'the Moses' in the history of the Malankara Church in India. It was the reply from the Lord God to the prayers of the people. In one of his speeches (at Kothamangalam), Mar Ivanios 'Pithavu' said:



Your parish priest, in his speech, said, it is I who broke the rope on the Coonan Cross (bent cross). It is not true. The tears of our forefathers that fell on the ropes tied to the Coonan Cross slowly tore the ropes. We must see the Reunion in a new light as a divine act by Apostle St. Thomas (*Viswasadhorani* 155).

This quote shows that Servant of God, Mar Ivanios is a prophet from God. The two essential characteristics of a Prophet are:

1. The relationship between God, the sender, and the prophet who is sent (the emissary).
2. The prophet should have deep roots in the life situation of the people.

Both these characteristics are strongly present in Mar Ivanios. He had the prophetic vision to see beyond what lay at the surface. This prophetic vision constantly challenged him, as it paved the way for the transcending vision and compelled him to follow it. At the beginning of his autobiography titled *Girideepam*, Mar Ivanios exclaims, “These experiences have enabled me to see and smell the stench of the filth that is accumulated at the bottom of the Malankara Church...” His experiences led him to question the problems of the Church strongly. The same vision enabled him to reflect upon the situation of his Church. He felt that the Malankara Christian community, founded by St. Thomas, the apostle, had gone astray from the mandate of the Lord. He laments:

It is a fact to be admitted that the great lamp lit as directed by the Saviour Jesus the Messiah in the year 52 A.D., still remains the same as in the beginning without shedding light or vigour to the shady dark surroundings. Many have come from foreign lands for the spiritual advancement of the land of Bharath. They spent their health and wealth to spread the Gospel in our country. In spite of witnessing their zealous missionary work and their pointing out the unforgivable lethargy of our ancient Church, we did not wake up and rise up (*Girideepam* 66).

The Malankara Syrian Church has to answer in the future for the infidelity and the spiritual ignorance towards our native land – India caused by the lack of zealous evangelization. Otherwise, the whole Indian



society would have gained spiritual enlightenment long back. Leave aside the lethargy and the disinterestedness of the past in this matter. The old generations may not have been able to do some things effectively because of the adverse circumstances. But now is the right time to make amendments. Therefore, necessary steps need to be taken to ameliorate evangelization in India. He shoulders the responsibility to rectify it and also searches for ways to fulfill the same. Mar Ivanios affirmed: “The most important duty of Christianity is to spread the Gospel. Its characteristic trait is to manifest Saviour Jesus the Messiah to all. It ought to consider the growth of the Community. The lack of schools is not a serious impediment for evangelization. Whether we have the M.D. Seminary, the school of Theology for the Clergy or whatever else, evangelization is inevitable for the glory of the name of God. We could believe those institutions and other endeavours for the timely needs of the Church and for its growth would be provided through other means. There are other people and facilities for the same” (*Girideepam* 67). Mar Ivanios felt the need to rectify this situation and realized that a missionary congregation is an answer to it. His withdrawal to *Mundanmala* has to be seen as the preparation for the new evangelization. He believed that self-evangelization through self-purification is the right way to achieve this goal.

When he spent time in prayer, he might have felt that the situation could be changed only through a redemptive correction. The Reunion was the first step towards that redemptive correction. This is clear from the Tripunithura speech of Mar Ivanios (*Viswasadhorani* 140).

1. Reunion of all the Malankara factions/churches to the Catholic fold.
2. Reunion of all the Christian denominations/churches to the Catholic fold.
3. Reunion of the people of all religions, creed, and caste to the Catholic fold.
4. Then making the hearts of all Catholics as dwelling places of the Holy Spirit.
5. Finally, the whole world would turn into one great Catholic World.



As Malankarites, we must pray and work towards the attainment of these goals. The Reunion is not merely a historical event in the past, but a movement that lasts till the end of the world. It is also clear that the objective cannot be achieved only by human efforts, but the Grace of God is necessary to bring it to fulfillment.

Since Mar Ivanios understood evangelization as the primary objective of the Church, he concentrated on it after the Reunion. He went to different places and visited the house of the poor and the lower class. He received them into the Church and worked for their upliftment. The evangelization mission of the Archdiocese of Trivandrum was initiated by the Servant of God Mar Ivanios himself. When he realized the deficiency of priests for evangelization, he invited priests from the Syro-Malabar Church and some religious Congregations to entrust the missions of the Malankara Church. The starting of the Marthandam mission (Tamil Nadu), and the foundation of the D.M. Congregation by Msgr. Joseph Kuzhinjalil as per the directives of Marthandam blessings of Mar Ivanios are few examples. The Eparchy of Marthandam is the result of his vision and prayer. The Ivanian vision of evangelization consists of the following aspects:

1. Deep faith in God: Mar Ivanios surrendered himself to God. He was in a deep relationship with the one who called him.
2. He was concerned more about the well-being of his people. Therefore, he could see the filth and smell the stench accumulating in the Church. He invites our attention to pray for the conversion of the people so that they may become the children of God.
3. He was disturbed and frequently questioned the prophetic vision. The celebration of each anniversary of Reunion must bring this question to whether we are disturbed with the same prophetic vision entrusted to us by Mar Ivanios.
4. He was ready to take up the cross and purify himself to purify his Church. Though we say many things, the maximum we would do is to reveal the activities of the Church in front of the media, when the primary concern should be to purify ourselves to purify the Church.



5. Mar Ivanios was ready to leave everything for the sake of having an answer for the questions that he asked (Prophetic Vision). When he felt that only a redemptive correction could save the situation, he left everything and embraced the Church of Christ. He left professorship and everything in Calcutta to withdraw himself to the *Mundanmala*. The contradiction is that many of us are reluctant to lead a life of a true Christian as many things chain us.
6. Mar Ivanios gathered people and preached the Gospel to them. He identified himself with them and worked for their well-being. He considered them as equals in the Church, which is not easy for us. At times, the traditional communities and institutions show reluctance to admit the new converts. Therefore, the Reunion reminds us about the timely need to transform our hearts to Jesus Christ.
7. ‘Punaraikyam’ of all people into the Catholic Church is our goal. He gave his life for this purpose. Before his death, he said that he would continue this ‘punaraikyam’ mission in heaven. He is doing it! All our missions in the Church, like Gurgaon with mission centers in thirteen states, Pune with mission centers in four different states, the diocese of Marthandom, Parassala, and Muvattupuzha that are actively engaged in the evangelization mission are examples of the heavenly intercession of Mar Ivanios.

Conclusion

Mar Ivanios is a prophet, visionary, and model for all of us. All the Malankarites should feel proud of being a Malankara Catholic. We are called to follow in his footsteps. Our ‘Padayatra’ (foot-pilgrimage) every year is only a symbolic gesture of what we live. We travel in the path that was shown to us by the Servant of God, Mar Ivanios. In his speech at Kothamangalam, Mar Ivanios said: “To all the Catholics I want to say this: “You should not be satisfied by saying that you are the children of the Holy Catholic Church. You have to purify your lives to be



a model for all non-Catholics in Kerala. The Church of the Lord should never be despised through your lives.”

This advice of the Servant of God Mar Ivanios is relevant for us. The children of the Malankara Catholic Reunion movement have a great responsibility to be the light of the world and salt of the earth. Our goal is attained only when all hearts are prepared for the Lord. The Centennial decade of Reunion should help us to be active and zealous missionaries who are ardent in spirit. May the Lord help us through the intercession of the Servant of God, Mar Ivanios, in realizing the vocation to be missionaries in this world.

Chapter 12

Legacy of Mar Ivanios – A Reformer

Rev. Dr. Sunny Mathew

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In the twentieth-century history of the Indian Church perhaps no one who had been more influential than Archbishop Mar Ivanios. Indeed, he was a multi-faceted personality. Certainly, his main contribution was his efforts to put an end to the divisions in the *Puthenkoor* Community and his pioneering of the reunion movement resulting in the establishment of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church as an individual *sui iuris* in Catholic communion. This treatise is an attempt to look into the contributions of Mar Ivanios for the upliftment of society as a whole.

There are many churches or better ecclesial communities that have little aptitude for social work. Some communities at the best take care of their own flock and their openness to other people are very minimal. However, the mainstream churches like the Catholic church, Orthodox churches and the churches in the Anglican communion have social work as one of the main tenets of their ecclesial life. They all believe that without active involvement in society and contributing to the growth and development of humanity as a whole, there is no existence for the Church. Hence, first, let us see the theological basis of Church's social ministry and then we will proceed to see how the Servant of God Mar Ivanios tried to live up to his divine mandate as a social reformer.



The Gospel anecdote of Jesus curing a woman who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years offers a key lesson for us in this regard. The incident is reported by Luke in chapter 13. Watching Jesus curing the woman on a sabbath day, the leader of the synagogue grows indignant. He says to the crowd: “There are six days when work should be done. Come on those days to be cured, not on the sabbath day” (v. 14).

Jesus is trying to bring the leader of the synagogue and the crowd to the proper understanding of what the sabbath is. He asks them, “Does not each one of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his ass from the manger and lead it out for watering? This daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound for eighteen years now, ought she not to have been set free on the sabbath day from this bondage?” (Lk. 13:15-16). Both these are rhetorical questions and the answer is clear in the questions themselves.

Jesus asks them to understand what the sabbath is. God created the world and everything in it, and he found all that he created good. Then on the seventh day he rested. That is the sabbath. When the created world was in good order, in a state of perfection, when God saw everything good, it is then that God took rest. However, ever since man sinned and thus put the world in chaos and imperfection, God is constantly trying to bring the world back to its pristine glory and perfection. But, this time, God wants to do this work not all by himself but taking man into confidence. He tries to involve human beings also in his attempt to bring order and joy to this world. Wherever and whenever the world is imperfect, whenever human beings are suffering and are not able to experience the joy of the children of God, God does not rest; rather, God cannot rest. So, let us say, as long as this world is imperfect and undergoes the pain of sin and all the attendant sufferings, God is trying to bring it back to its lost glory.

In other words, God is constantly on an attempt to establish his kingdom. We also pray every day in the Lord’s prayer, “thy kingdom come.” What is God’s kingdom? St. Paul puts it beautifully in the following words: “The kingdom of God is not a matter of food and drink, but of justice, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” Let us take note of the first word, the kingdom of God is a matter of justice (Rom. 14:17).



We know that the perfect manifestation of the kingdom of God will take place at the second coming of our Lord. Until then the whole creation is groaning in labor pains for the manifestation of the great redemption (Rom. 8:22). This is the great sabbath for which we are all preparing: the sabbath when God will have completed the work of salvation in the person of Christ. This sabbath will not be a sabbath of resignation in the face of suffering and pain, but a sabbath of great manifestation of the glory of God in Jesus Christ. Until that day dawns, we are all participating in the redemptive work of Christ in establishing justice, peace and joy in this world.

The social work of the Church should be seen from this point of view. This vision gives a totally different outlook for all our social work in this world. This is what differentiates the social work undertaken by a Christian from that by a philanthropist. The social commitment that the Church takes is not to be seen in itself but as an attempt to establish the kingdom of God. For, where there is no peace, there is no kingdom of God, and where there is no justice, there is no peace.

Mar Ivanios, although primarily a prophet of reunion, was very much conscious of the necessary relationship between justice and peace in the church and in civil society. Even before he reunited with the Catholic church, he had a clear understating that unless the Church took care of the here and now (*hic et nunc*) of the faithful, the faithful could not grasp the great truth about Jesus Christ. First, the people should come to an understanding that Jesus Christ is Emmanuel, the Lord who is with them in their daily life, the Lord who is concerned with them even in their mundane preoccupations.

The first area on which the attention of Mar Ivanios fell was education. According to one study available online, literacy in India as a whole at the turn of the twentieth century was 5.35% and in Kerala, it was 11.15%. In 1931 it was 9.50% and 21.34% respectively. That means, in the whole of Kerala, if ten people were taken, only two were simply literate. The percentage of people with college or even high school education was appallingly poor. The case of women was still worse. If literate women formed 3.15% in 1901 in Kerala, it was just 11% in 1931. The matter was further complicated because, in a caste-ridden society,



women in the lower strata only were allowed to go for work; and that was mostly menial works or at the most farming. Mar Ivanios understood that unless women were educated and meaningful job opportunities were created for them, it was not possible to bring them into the mainstream of the society; and unless women were empowered in families, it would not be possible to bring in any substantial change in the human development index as a whole. In *Girideepam* he wrote: “Prosperity of any community depends upon the character formation of its women.”

While he was a well-respected priest of the *Puthenkoor* community and was functioning as the principal of M.D. seminary, he accepted an invitation from Serampore college to become a professor. More than anything else, the motivating factor was the prospects of taking at least a few youths to Serampore and providing higher education to them. Indeed, he took many young men to Serampore. But, the important thing is he did not neglect the womenfolk, too. He took some young women also to Serampore. Some of these women later became nuns, and it was these nuns who later helped him establish the Thirumoolapuram Balika *Madham* Girls’ High school. These women were the pioneer nuns in the first indigenous women religious congregation started in the Orthodox Church. The rationale was simple. He was convinced that unless women were educated and made catalysts of change, a transformation of society was impossible. In the pursuit of educating women, he did not adhere to any paternalistic or patriarchal mindset. Rather, he wanted women themselves to spearhead the movement. He wanted them to be leaders and contributors, and not just remain at the receiving end.

If this happened in the central Travancore before the reunion, he did the same through Msgr. Joseph Kuzhinjalil in the southern Travancore after the reunion. We have to be mindful that Marthandam where Msgr. Joseph Kunzhinjalil started the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary was part of the erstwhile princely state of Travancore and not part of Tamilnadu at that time. Education index in the southern Travancore was very low at that time. Mar Ivanios thought that in certain areas women could fair well than men. He specifically identified two areas: the education of women and health care. Unless women themselves



came forward to teach women, it would not be an easy task, he often told.

No wonder, in 1961, the literacy rate in Kerala rose to 55.08%. Certainly, Mar Ivanios played a substantial role in this achievement. During his tenure as Archbishop of Trivandrum, 78 primary schools, 18 middle schools, 15 high schools, two teacher training institutes and one university college were instituted.

Mar Ivanios did not want to keep the light of the Gospel for the traditional Syrian Christians alone. Rather, everyone was welcome to the all-embracing arms of Christ. Many of the underprivileged people in the southern Travancore were reeling under caste discrimination and the domineering attitude of the so-called high caste people. It was a cause of great anguish for Mar Ivanios to see the pathetic situation of the people that his exasperation was expressed in a prayer which can be seen in *Girideepam*: “O Lord, God of creation, many people who are created in your image and likeness are perishing in ignorance and darkness”. He realized that education was the only magic wand that could change the lots of such people. There were schools and colleges in Trivandrum at that time. But, it was so unfortunate that the people at the lower rungs of society, especially in terms of caste, were not admitted to any of those institutions. Mar Ivanios asked the priests and nuns to start schools and other institutions along with churches so that the living standard of the people would improve. He himself took initiative to begin schools and colleges like St. Mary’s at Pattom and Mar Ivanios College at Nalanchira, Trivandrum. In these institutions, students from all walks of life were given admission. The Bethany sisters started a school precisely for the lower caste students so that they could be offered an atmosphere of study free from all kinds of discriminations. Weaving and tailoring institutes were also begun for vocational training. In order to take care of children from very poor families, many boys-homes were started, although in those days they were called orphanages. In these institutions, children belonging to all castes were admitted if they were economically poor and if their parents could not afford to take care of them.

He was a regular visitor to the slums in and around Trivandrum.



He loved the poor people there, entered into their houses and he ate whatever was served to him. He motivated them to send their children to schools and colleges and promised to give admission to their children in the Malankara Catholic institutions. This all happened when the caste system was at its peak in the first half of the twentieth century.

Coming to the role of the laity in the church, it was Vatican II that opened the eyes of the western Catholic Church to the role of laymen and women in the Church. Until that time, the laity was only an appendix. However, in the Syrian Christian tradition of Kerala, the situation was totally different. Both in the *Puthenkoor* and the *Pazhayakoor* community, the laity had a substantial and inalienable role to play. Mar Ivanios was well aware of this. When he started the reunion movement, he understood that without the participation of the laity, it would not be a movement of the Church. Hence, he made it a microcosmic representation of the whole Church to reunite with the Catholic Church. Although it was not preplanned, he let Mr. Chacko Kileleth join with him on his trip to Quilon to reunite with the Catholic Church. He used to call the laity as the children of the Church, almost in a similar way as the children of God. In his circulars, he constantly exhorted his priests to respect the laity and to recognize their due role in making the Church what it is. Once a young priest reportedly told Mar Ivanios, “*idavaka bharanam*” (governance of the parish) was not easy as he thought it to be. The Archbishop is said to have told the young priest that governing and ruling would be tough, but serving the parish should not be that difficult.

The greatest contribution of the Archbishop was that he sent the message from the top to the bottom in the *Puthenkoor* community that the time of conflict and strife was over, and that establishing peace in the society should be the main concern of the Church. He proved to the general public that Christian message was still capable of making one renounce power, position, wealth, influence and everything else for the sake of establishing peace and harmony. He believed that the true patrimony one left for the future generation should be one’s genuineness in his search for peace and truth.

The contributions of Mar Ivanios to the growth and welfare of our society should not be overlooked even as we admit that he established



a name first and foremost as a humble seeker of truth and as a prophet of unity. He truly understood the inner connection between justice and peace. All his social interventions were truly motivated by his search for truth and were an attempt to bring justice and peace in our society. When he left *Mundanmala*, he left behind all the material possessions, as did St. Francis of Assisi. So that he could proclaim to the society at large and the Christians in particular: “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have, I give you”, the peace of Christ.

Chapter 13

Ivanian Spirituality of the Imitation of Christ

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Introduction

Spirituality is the bridge that connects human with the divine. Human beings have devised various means and paths to quench their inner emptiness that is felt in their lives. Of these numerous paths, spirituality is one of the beautiful paths.

There have been many saintly personalities, who have enlightened the lives of many by the spirituality they have formed. Mar Ivanios, the prophet of reunion movement, was one such exemplary figure who transformed and illuminated many. The spirituality lived and shared by Mar Ivanios has great religious and social implications and expressions. The Ivanian spirituality has at its helm, Jesus Christ himself. If a Christian is one who follows Jesus Christ, then there is no better way of following him than imitating him.

1. Mar Ivanios: A Great Visionary

Mar Ivanios was a man with vision and mission. He led a life of austere sanctity following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. He realized the life of true religion or a *Sanyasi* is the life of Jesus Christ and in



Jesus Christ. So, Mar Ivanios perfectly portrays that the ultimate end or goal of every person is to become one with Christ or Christ Himself.

The spirituality envisaged by Mar Ivanios is perfectly conveyed in the charism of Bethany Ashram, the religious congregation founded by him. It is to follow Jesus Christ both in his prayer life and action. Mar Ivanios realized that following Jesus Christ and being a true witness to his life is possible through *Sannyasa*. It is because, according to Mar Ivanios, Jesus Christ was the first *sanyasi* who appeared on earth. So, the spirituality that Mar Ivanios practised and gave to his fellow faithful was to be true imitators of Christ in every aspect. He realized that our vocation was to become a Christ in these modern, turbulent times.

2. Crux of Ivanian Spirituality: Jesus Christ

If we could summarize the entire spirituality of Mar Ivanios in a single word, the aptest word would be *'imitation.'* The keyword of Ivanian spirituality is imitation, but it all revolves around the person - 'Jesus Christ.' The very concept of imitation is both static and dynamic in nature. In the static sense, it only means a kind of 'resemblance' as in the sense, the human being is an imitation of God because he/she is created in the image and likeness of God. In the dynamic sense, imitation means doing what the other person does and take the other person as a 'model' before us.

In short, imitation is an innate aspect of human life, but all of us have the potential and also the responsibility to transform this imitation into dynamic activity. We are living in a society that has achieved tremendous growth and progress in all aspects. Ours is a society plagued with a race of imitating successful men and women, celebrities, sportspersons, saintly figures, and even priests and religious. We imitate both interiorly and exteriorly because none of us wants to be left far behind in this race.

Here, is the relevance of Ivanian Spirituality that gives us the life of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the perfect model for our imitation. Mar Ivanios, in his book '*A Guide to the Malankara Sannyasa*' says, "Christ is the end and the means of our perfection." The crux of Ivanian Spirituality is the *person* of Jesus Christ. Living as Christ involves



identifying oneself with Jesus Christ in all the aspects. As the true picture of Jesus Christ can be drawn only through the Scripture, the Bible becomes the backbone of Ivanian Spirituality of Imitation of Christ.

Jesus Christ lived a life of perfect service and perfect prayer. He did not compromise one for the other. Jesus balanced both aspects of prayer and service in his life. Therefore, Mar Ivanios popularized and shared with us the true model for our imitation i.e. Jesus Christ. The true imitation of Jesus Christ is following both his prayer life and active life. This is the *charism* undertaken by every Christian.

One can be a true witness to Jesus Christ by following in the footsteps of his life. We may often limit ourselves to being exterior imitators of Christ. But, the most important aspect is to be interior imitators of Jesus Christ.

The Golden rules

As I already pointed out, imitation is an innate ability of human beings. The first lessons learnt by a baby are through imitating his or her parents and surroundings. Imitation can become the easiest way for learning something. Mar Ivanios in his spiritual treatise inspires us to make this imitation a dynamic activity rather than a passive, static one through the means of imitating Jesus Christ perfectly. But, in this process of imitation, there lies a danger of leaning towards either prayer or service more than the other. It is the danger of going to the extremity of prayer or service.

To be fully involved in prayer alone would result in the decline of our missionary and apostolic spirit because Mar Ivanios specifies in the charism of the *Order of the Imitation of Christ* that this imitation is aimed at the renewal of the faithful and evangelizing India. On the other hand, orientation towards service alone too would not serve the purpose because that would make us stoop to mere social workers. Social service is something beautiful and valuable, but that alone does not fulfil our charism of following Christ.

So, there is an urgent need to maintain equilibrium between the two in our lives.



As like all matters, we need to follow the golden rule of discretion and prudence. This golden rule is a *clarion call* to avoid and to beware of mere exterior and ritualistic imitation of Jesus Christ. Fellowship with Christ for certainly includes being made like him.

One can be an imitator of Christ only by concrete obedience to the word and will of the Lord. Therefore, what is vividly expressed is the need for an interior imitation rather than just an exterior imitation.

The great philosopher Aristotle says that virtue lies in the middle. Virtue is not in either of the extremities. Therefore, flawless imitation of Christ lies in the fact that we could prudently and with discretion learn to draw the line between the two. Mar Ivanios wants us to know about where we should act prudently and with discretion so that neither prayer life nor active, apostolic life is compromised for either one of them. Famous saint cum philosopher Augustine says, “God who created you without you, will not save you without you.” This implies that our salvation demands our response to the God’s offer of salvation. So, Mar Ivanios reminds us that our salvation and life-fulfilment is in imitating Jesus Christ in everything - thoughts, words, and deeds.

Bethany: The Cradle of Ivanian Spirituality

The crux of Ivanian spirituality is Jesus Christ who lived a life of perfect equilibrium between prayer and action. Jesus did not compromise one for the other but balanced both in his personal life. Mar Ivanios practised the spirituality of imitation of Christ because Jesus is the perfection, exemplified in living as his Father wills.

Mar Ivanios who is one of the most influential figures of the 20th century Catholic Church, especially concerning India, paved the path for the establishment of an indigenous religious congregation in the Malankara Church. He named his religious congregation as ‘The Order of the Imitation of Christ.’ It is more popularly known as ‘Bethany Ashram’. The Ashram got the name Bethany through divine inspiration to Mar Ivanios. It is because Bethany in the Bible occupies a special place in the life of Jesus Christ. In the scriptures, we can see numerous occasions where Jesus collaborated with the Bethany Saints Martha, Mary and Lazarus. There are many meanings to the word



‘Bethany’ but a few of the most popular ones are ‘house of consolation’ and ‘house of response.’

Bethany indeed was a house that often Jesus visited and spent time with. We could even see an instance in the Bible where Jesus weeps at the death of Lazarus (John 11: 28-37). So, in short, Bethany remains one of the most cherished and loved places in the personal life of Jesus. The saints of Bethany have some special characteristics that were seen in perfection in the life of Jesus Christ. Mary is seen as the symbol of prayer and the contemplative life because in the Bible we could see Mary choosing to sit at the feet of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, Martha is an excellent example of service and that too can be seen in the Bible, where she frantically tries all that she can to serve Jesus Christ. Lazarus is seen as a very good friend of Jesus Christ. It is on his death that Jesus is seen weeping in the Bible. So, each of the Bethany saints becomes an example or model before us to imitate Jesus Christ in our lives. Mary teaches us how to lead a prayerful, contemplative life while Martha becomes a model of selfless service. Lazarus lived a life of perfect witness to the Son of God. In our quench to imitate Jesus Christ in our lives, Mar Ivanios gives us the example of the Bethany Saints.

Imitation is an innate characteristic of human beings but it needs to be facilitated by some other means. The imitation of Jesus Christ is vividly detailed in the life of Bethany saints because each of them is a personification of a virtue that is perfected in Jesus Christ. Among the saints of Bethany, there is a harmonious collaboration and cooperation. As music is the harmony between the notes, Ivanian spirituality is the harmony between these characteristics of Bethany saints in our lives. The success of imitating Jesus Christ in our lives will reach its best only when we can harmoniously blend all these components of prayer, service and authentic witness. This harmonious blend helps us to transform our inner process of imitation, from a mere static state to a more dynamic one.

All human beings have a large reservoir of unfulfilled potentiality. It is the responsibility of every person to transform these potentialities into actuality. The grace of God must also be complemented by our efforts. This participation is in sincerely imitating Jesus Christ who prayed to his heavenly Father and also went along serving humanity and being an authentic witness to *Abba*.



Social Implications of Ivanian Spirituality

Ivanian spirituality is the imitation of the life of Jesus Christ. Just as Christ was fully human and fully divine, so did Christ give equal importance to prayer life and active service. In the Eastern Church, imitation of Christ is also understood by the usage 'life in Christ'.

To live in Christ is to be identified with Jesus Christ both in his life of prayer and action. Our vocation is to harmoniously blend into our lives, the specialities of the Bethany saints. And, the utmost care has to be given, to ensure that one is not left out, for the other.

The present-day society deals with several problems and difficulties. The corona pandemic has halted the lives of people, especially social life is at a standstill. People go about distancing themselves from others, as much as possible, their face and emotions are somehow hidden, behind their face masks. Falsehood, deceit, and dishonesty grip the society, but there is still hope and faith that we will fight back all the adversaries. Our service is all the more needed in these tough times. St. Martha of Bethany gives us an example of selfless service. She goes out of her comfort and strength to take care of the other and to love Jesus Christ. True and genuine service is that which is given in the times of hardships. In the Bible, we see an instance where Jesus praises a poor widow who put her small, insignificant sum of money in the offertory.

It is because she offered all that she had from her poverty. "For all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on" (Luke 21: 4). So, true imitation of Jesus Christ or the perfection of Ivanian spirituality is not in our service given when everything is good and beautiful. The real question before us is: Can we serve others out of our nothingness? Is this the radical nature of our imitation of Christ in these present times?

However, care and attention have to be given so that we do not become mere social workers. We must never forget that we do have a responsibility towards God. Our prayer and contemplative life are as crucial as a life of action and service. The contemplative life and life of service are the two sides of the same coin of spirituality especially about Ivanian spirituality of the Imitation of Christ. Jesus Christ often withdrew into solitude from his public life because, without prayer, life becomes



like a desert. Our social life may multiply like the sand in a desert but our heart can become dry and barren. Jesus Christ also praises Mary in the Bible saying that she has chosen the better part.

A closer look into the picture of Bethany in the Bible we could see Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus, not at all concerned or bothered by the complaining of her sister. Martha is surely an example of selfless service, but she complains about her sister. Mary does not judge or gets disturbed and she continues sitting at the feet of Jesus in prayerful contemplation. This is a great lesson that Mary gives us in these modern times where the so-called spiritual or prayerful people find fault with others. There are ‘new-age mystics’ around us who disregard and disrespect others because they do not pray as much as they do. There are ‘so-called spiritual greats’ around us who belittle others, engaged in apostolic activities, serving the community and the society in different fields, going out of their comfort zones to help and serve the community. Here, St. Mary becomes an example of a true mystic, a prayerful person. Our social lives are disturbed, our personal life is stuck with so many problems and difficulties, but it is very much important to continue being at the feet of God.

The teleological character of the imitation of Christ is to be a true witness of Jesus Christ. It is the call to be an authentic Christian. To be an authentic Christian means to die to ourselves and to live for Christ or a better life in Christ. After Jesus raised Lazarus from death, he led a life worthy of Jesus Christ. He lived and died as a true witness to Jesus Christ. As human beings, we live in a web of relationships. We are all related to one another in some way or the other. So, the question before us is: are we really honest? Am I trustworthy? Am I true to myself?

The bitter truth of these present times is that everyone is suspicious about the other. Famous philosopher Descartes talks about doubt as the starting point of certainty or knowledge. But, nowadays, people love to remain in the abyss of uncertainty. Hence, the imitation of Christ becomes highly relevant in our lives in this society. It is the spirituality of being truthful and unflinchingly honest to someone or something. The Ivanian spirituality of the Imitation of Christ begins at the death of the individual. It is in this spirit that St. Paul says, ‘it is no



longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me' (Gal. 2:20). The imitation of Christ is understood as 'living in Christ' as far as the Eastern spirituality is considered. To be 'in something' means to be conformed to what the thing is. It is possible only when one goes out of one's way that we conform to the other. It involves a radical change of our being to something new. It is ceasing to exist and new existence at one and at the same time.

Therefore, Ivanian spirituality of Imitation of Christ has a far-reaching impact in the society. It inspires us to be an authentic human being and also to be a faithful Christian. The imitation of Christ helps us to be a better person in all walks of our life because as Aristotle says human being is political by nature.

Human beings cannot but be involved in society. As there is no existence of an individual apart from the world, the process of imitating Jesus Christ brings about a radical transformation in society.

Conclusion

Mar Ivanios is one of the most influential figures to have graced the Church. His life and work have inspired millions and millions. His contribution to the renewal of the Malankara Church, the far-reaching efforts in the establishment of the *Order of the Imitation of Christ* have dramatically changed the vibe of the Catholic Church in India, especially in Kerala. Of all his contributions, the most noteworthy is the profound popularity and momentum he could give to the spirituality of the 'Imitation of Christ'.

Imitation of Christ as a spiritual exercise and life vision can be dated to many centuries back as far as Mar Ivanios is concerned. But, Mar Ivanios is credited with giving an indigenous touch to the age-old spirituality of the Imitation of Christ or living in Christ. At the individual level, it is aimed at becoming Christ in these present times and a wider perspective it is for the renewal of the Church and evangelizing India. Mar Ivanios spread the spirituality of the Imitation of Christ through Bethany Ashram that has the life of Christ, as the basis of its charism.

Christ himself is the foundation, on which Christian life is founded and built upon. Anything to last longer must be built on a strong foundation.



There is no better foundation than ‘*Imitating Christ*’ to enrich our lives physically and spiritually. Imitating Jesus Christ radically in our lives would necessarily imply that we die to our former selves and begin our existence afresh. As the famous philosopher Martin Heidegger says, there is no existence for us apart from the world. We are beings in the world. The world or society becomes the locus of all philosophy, theology, and spirituality. Hence, the Ivanian spirituality of the Imitation of Christ is not at all an otherworldly spirituality blind to the world. Christ was both, fully human and fully divine. Therefore, the Imitation of Christ encompasses a radical transformation of both our political lives and our spiritual lives. People constantly seek role-models to imitate them, to get inspired by them to live a successful life. But, it often comes at the cost of sacrificing so many values, morals and principles. In this context, through the Imitation of Christ modelled after the saints of Bethany Martha, Mary and Lazarus inculcating the characteristics of prayer, service and witness, we constantly evolve and transform into Jesus Christ. As Teilhard de Chardin says, “Christ is the endpoint of our evolution”. Human beings are still evolving in many aspects of our existence in this world.

So, let us strive to fulfil our transformation and evolve into the endpoint or the destiny of our life, i.e. Jesus Christ. It is achieved through the Ivanian spirituality of the Imitation of Christ, for Christ is both the *means* and the *end*. He is the *Alpha* and the *Omega*.

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Chapter 14

Mar Ivanios and the Eucharistic Spirituality

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The early twentieth century was marked by an urgent need for a spiritual revival in the Malankara Orthodox Church. Lawsuits and other disputes thwarted the peaceful and spiritual atmosphere of the Church. The dispute over authority between the supporters of the Metropolitan and the supporters of the Patriarch was continuing in the Malankara Church during that period. Due to the continuous internal conflicts and litigations in the Church, the people lost their spiritual fervour and their faith had become cold and lifeless. Mar Ivanios was aware of this critical situation of his mother Church which inspired him to pursue opportunities to uplift the spiritual condition of the Orthodox Christian faithful. Mar Ivanios was aware that the Eucharistic celebration is seen as the foundation and very centre of all Catholic devotion. He was impressed by the spiritual progress of the Catholics of Kerala, especially the *Pazhayakur* Syrian Christians. Their spiritual growth was rooted deeply in Eucharistic faith. Whereas, in the Orthodox Church, the faithful received Holy Communion rather rarely. The legal minimum of once per year was observed by most, usually on Holy Thursday. During his seminary life itself, Mar Ivanios (P.T. Geevarghese Shemassan) prepared for a spiritual revival in the Church by writing sermons and preaching



retreats. Understanding this critical condition of the Mother Church, as a *shemassan*, he moved from parish to parish to promote catechesis on different sacraments.

Before his priestly ordination, Mar Ivanios was called ‘*Koodashashemassan*’ due to his enthusiasm to teach the faithful about the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. Mar Ivanios had a great devotion to the Holy Eucharist. He says “we can offer to God no greater honour than worthily participating in the Holy Sacrifice.” In his book *Love of God*, he says: Holy Qurbono is the greatest sign of God’s love towards mankind.” The Orthodox Church shares the same faith in the Eucharist as the Catholic Church. One of the reasons that persuaded Mar Ivanios to embrace the Catholic Church was that the Eucharistic faith is strongly guarded and devotedly practiced in the Catholic Church.

Mar Ivanios’ devotion to the Eucharist was especially noticeable in the manner in which he celebrated Holy Qurbono. Concerning the celebration of the Holy Qurbono, it is attested that People from miles away gathered to attend the liturgical services beautifully performed by him. Even in the wilderness of Perunad where his monastery was located, people crowded to take part in his Eucharistic celebrations and other liturgical celebrations which were exquisitely performed.

Eucharistic Vision and Full Communion

Mar Ivanios’ Eucharistic vision led him to communion with the Catholic Church. Full communion with the Catholic Church involves a common celebration of the Lord’s Supper (The Second Vatican Council’s decree on ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio* 13-18). The concept of the communion of Churches is anchored in the holy sacrament of Holy Eucharist. Pope Benedict XVI says:

The Church is not born as a simple federation of communities. Her birth begins with the one bread, with the one Lord. She becomes one not through a centralized government but a common centre open to all because it constantly draws its origin from a single Lord, who transforms her by means of the one bread



(Eucharist) into one body. Because of this, her unity has a greater depth than that which any other human union could ever achieve. Precisely, when the Eucharist is understood in the intimacy of the union of each person with the Lord, it becomes also a social sacrament to the highest degree.

So the unity of the Church is needed for the true celebration of the Lord's Supper. Separation from the body of Christ is considered a great sin by Mar Ivanios. His precise convictions and visions on Eucharist led him to communion with the Universal Catholic Church.

Renovations in the Eucharistic Liturgy

Mar Ivanios pioneered many renovations in the Church, including the Divine Liturgy. One of such renovations is the use of vernacular language in the liturgy. The priests in the Malankara Church previously celebrated Qurbono in Syriac only. But in 1919 itself Mar Ivanios translated the Syriac *Thaksa* into Malayalam and started celebrating Holy Qurbono in Malayalam so that people could understand the Qurbono with ease and participate fully. In the Latin Catholic Church, the priests were allowed to celebrate Holy Eucharist in the Latin Language only. In the Latin Church only after the second Vatican council in 1965, permission was given to the local churches to celebrate Mass in the vernacular languages.

Another renovation was the institution of daily Holy Qurbono. In the Orthodox Churches, Holy Qurbono was celebrated only on Sundays and on days of importance. Daily Holy Qurbono was not part of their tradition. However, Mar Ivanios, while he was in Perunad Mundanmala, promoted the daily celebration of the Holy Qurbono and encouraged both young and old to attend daily Holy Qurbono. In the monastic rule, he wrote "on all days... after the morning office, a Divine liturgy shall be celebrated at which the brothers who are not priests shall assist. Liturgy with more solemnity shall be celebrated on Sundays and important feast days." Why did he promote the daily celebration of the Holy Qurbono? In his own words, "if anyone wants to remain in true devotion or to grow spiritually, he has to receive the Holy Qurbono daily. This is inevitable to grow in sanctity. One has to rectify his life to receive Holy Qurbono every day."



Mar Ivanios illustrated the relationship between the sacrament of Penance and Holy Qurbono using a simple metaphor “*kuliyum unum*” a bath and banquet. For the spiritual growth, one has to receive Holy Qurbono daily and in the same way, one has to examine his life daily. He ought to wash in repentance. For that, he admonishes that one should make his confession every week.

Another notable change Mar Ivanios brought in the liturgical tradition is the adoration of the blessed sacrament. Reserving the Blessed Sacrament for adoration was prohibited in the Orthodox Church. It could be reserved in case of need for the sick only. Mar Ivanios wrote a book on the divine Eucharist called the *Holy Qurbono: an Appraisal and Meditation*. This book, drafted in the form of a conversation, is intended to be an aid for the monastics to better understand the Holy Qurbono. This is the most important book for a proper understanding of Mar Ivanios’ understanding of Eucharist. Strikingly the theology of Eucharist that Mar Ivanios shared in this book is in harmony with the theology of the Catholic Church. This book was written in 1925 while Mar Ivanios was still in the Orthodox Church. In his book *Holy Qurbono* he states regarding the adoration: “It is right to bow down before the Holy Qurbono and to worship and adore Jesus, the Messiah who abides in the Holy Qurbono. It ought to be done so.” To the question “is it idolatry to prostrate before the Holy Qurbono and adore and worship it?” he responded that “since prostrating and adoring before the Holy Qurbono is prostrating and adoring Jesus, it is not idolatry. But it is befitting to the glory of God and acceptable divine worship to God.” He was not antipathetic towards the traditions of the Western Church.

The Holy Qurbono and its Other Names

In his book *Holy Qurbono*, Mar Ivanios lists 25 names of the Eucharist and their explanations. 1. Qurbono; 2. Qudasa; 3. The mystery of life; 4. Emmanuel; 5. Holy Communion; 6. The Mystery; 7. The Lamb; 8. The Pasch (Passover); 9. The bread of the Presence; 10. The Heavenly Manna; 11. The Heavenly Table; 12. The Sweet Fruit; 13. The fruit of life; 14. The Lord’s Supper; 15. Thirst-Quenching Drink;



16. The First Fruit; 17. The First Born; 18. The Eucharist; 19. The Purifying Burning Coal; 20. The Sacrifice of Atonement; 21. The Free Will Offering; 22. The Memorial of Our Lord; 23. The chalice of salvation; 24. The Liturgy; 25. The Perfection of Perfections.

Some of these names were already in use and other names he discovered from the Syriac documents. This shows his special interest and devotion to the Holy Qurbono.

Bread and Wine Required for the Celebration of the Holy Qurbono

Mar Ivanios differentiates between the Eucharistic bread used in the Eastern Tradition and Western traditions. In Oriental Churches, *Hammira* (leavened bread), made of wheat flour, is used for celebrating Holy Qurbono; whereas *Patira* (Unleavened Bread) is used in the Latin Church. The wine used should be from the fermented juice of the fruits of the grape. Like in most liturgical rites, water should be added to the wine, while in the Armenian Rite wine without mixing of water is consecrated.

Mar Ivanios teaches that the Lord instituted Holy Qurbono for two purposes: 1. to celebrate forever the memory of the Lord in the form of a sacrifice; and 2. to give us the holiness and grace which the Lord merited for us through his sacrifice.

Real Presence of Jesus in Eucharist

Let us see how Mar Ivanios perceived the most important topic in the Eucharistic Theology namely the Real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. We all know that the Real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist is an inexhaustible mystery that the Church can never fully explain in words. To explain the real presence of Jesus in the bread and wine of the Eucharist, the Catholic Church explained it using the philosophical terms, substance and accidents. In the act of consecration during the Eucharist, the ‘substance’ of the bread and wine is changed by the power of the Holy Spirit into the ‘substance’ of the body and blood of Christ.



The mysterious change of the reality of the bread and wine began to be called ‘transubstantiation’ in the Catholic Church. This terminology is used to explain the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Whereas, in the Orthodox Church the bread and wine are believed to become the real body and blood of Christ through the operation of the Holy Spirit. It never described exactly how this occurs and when it occurs (as it was formulated by the Catholic Church), rather it preferred to state simply that it is a mystery. Mar Ivanios who was aware of the theory of transubstantiation, remains silent about it. He describes this change in his terms: there are two parts for any sacrament. There is an internal invisible and external visible part. In the Holy Qurbono, the externally visible part is the bread and wine and internal invisible part is the sacred body and blood of Jesus Christ. Mar Ivanios does not use any philosophical terms to explain how this change takes place in the sacrament. About the change that happens in the Eucharistic celebration, he is convinced. In tune with the Syriac tradition Mar Ivanios uses the expressions like “is formed,” “becomes” and “makes” etc. to bring out the idea of change. In one place as an answer to the question how the bread and wine become the body and blood of Jesus, he answers by saying: “by the action of the Holy Spirit, the holy body and holy blood of Christ are formed in the bread and wine.” By pointing out the prayer of Epiclesis used in his Church, Mar Ivanios indicates the real change in the bread and wine in the words of the Qurbono “May the Holy Spirit come upon this bread and make it the life-giving Body, the redeeming Body, the true body of Christ our God.”

Sacrificial Nature of Holy Qurbono

Mar Ivanios explains also about the sacrificial nature of Holy Qurbono: He says: “The sacrifice of Jesus the Messiah which was completed through his death on the cross and his ascension is being offered by Jesus the Messiah eternally before God the Father in heaven (all that God does has an eternal impact). The Church on earth, in union with Jesus the Messiah, joins this eternal, everlasting sacrifice in heaven, in offering the sacrifice of Jesus the Messiah before God the Father...



Through the Holy Qurbono, the holy Church participates in the eternal sacrifice in heaven and offers before God the Father the sacrifice of Jesus, along with Jesus the High Priest.” This means the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross is an eternal sacrifice that does not come to an end. The reality of this sacrifice transcends time and space.

Conclusion

Mar Ivanios had a deep faith in the Holy Qurbono. Perfectly in accord with the teachings of the Fathers of the Church of the Syrian Tradition, he drew up a sound Eucharistic theology based on the liturgy of the Syro-Malankara Church. It is noteworthy that Mar Ivanios has an originality of his own. It is very much rooted in the oriental tradition and very much in tune with the Catholic faith.

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Chapter 15

Mar Ivanios and the Sacrament of Reconciliation

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Mar Ivanios, whom the Holy Episcopal Synod of the Malankara Syrian Catholic Church declared Servant of God as part of the canonization process, led a saintly life serving God and man alike. This Ivanian Yathra (Ivanian Pilgrimage) is a journey with Mar Ivanios and an attempt to imitate him in our life. We are all on our journey towards eternal life and heaven, and knowing this saintly soul would enhance this journey to a pilgrimage.

This article attempts to present Mar Ivanios' reflections on the Sacrament of reconciliation to the English-speaking youth and children. I shall limit my study to a booklet written and published by Mar Ivanios with the title *The Sacrament of Confession: A Meditative Study* in 1923. This work is not a theological discourse but a meditative study aimed at preparing people to receive the sacrament of Confession.

Sin is the Misuse of Freedom

God, who is Love, has created humans for love. But without freedom, it is not possible to love. Therefore, God created human beings



with the gift of freedom. Mar Ivanios writes, “The greatest quality God has given to human beings is his intellect to discern good from evil and the freedom of will to do either good or evil.” Intellect and will are two faculties of the soul. By intellect, we know, understand, memorize and also discern between good and evil. By free will, we make a decision to act or not to act. With the help of freedom, we can choose between good and evil. God respects human freedom. But the exercise of freedom does not imply that one can act upon his inclination. Human freedom is limited; it is a gift and a responsibility of the man towards himself, others, and most importantly, towards God.

God desires the man to choose the gift of freedom and opt for the good. The Lord says, “I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live” (Deut. 30:19). But freedom also means man can choose evil. In the Garden of Eden, the first parents Adam and Eve, who were given the gift of freedom, chose to disobey. Mar Ivanios notes that they used their freedom of will to commit evil, leaving aside good. According to him, sin is nothing but “an abuse of our freedom of will.” It is a voluntary decision to disobey God and to choose human will over the will of God.

The wickedness of sin reveals its actual colour at Mount Calvary, where Jesus Christ, the Holy One, bore our sins, paid the price for our sins, and died for our sins. Mar Ivanios invites us to meditate upon the agony of Our Lord at Gethsemane, his scourging, crucifixion, and death. Even after death, the body of the Lord was pierced by one of the soldiers with the lance. Mar Ivanios writes: “A miracle happens there; a river of salvation flows from the wound, which washes and purifies thousands of souls... the Lord of heaven and earth for the sake of man, suffered and died on the cross and opening his heart, he shed even the last drop of blood for the love of us, sinners.” Jesus Christ saves us by his precious blood. “The blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin” (I John 1:7).

The Power of the Sacraments

The sacraments spring forth from the Sacred Wound of the bosom of the Lord. The sacraments derive their power and efficacy



from the pierced heart of the Lord. Mar Ivanios affirms that it is not enough for us that the Lord has shed the blood, but its sanctifying power has to work in our soul. “The blood ought to flow into your soul and sanctify you.” Referring to Paul’s statement, “I am completing what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions in my body” (Col. 1:24), Mar Ivanios points out: “What is lacking is that you should use that effective medicine and attain salvation and sanctification. This is what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ. You have to complete this in your body. How could you do this? The stream that flew from the Sacred Heart of the Lord – the stream of grace – should flow to your soul. The Sacraments are the channels for the same. The Sacrament of Confession is the most important of these that opens the path to the other sacraments.”

In order for humans to receive the forgiveness of sins, Christ entrusts the authority to his apostles to forgive sins and to bind and loose them (John 20:22-23). To execute the authority properly, the Church insists on the Confession of each individual. This practice of confessing sins and absolving them existed from the early Church period and is evident in Acts 19:18. This could also be seen in the Fathers’ writings, who lived in the first four centuries and in the subsequent centuries too.

Preparation for the Sacrament of Confession

Mar Ivanios teaches the faithful how to prepare worthily for the Confession. He invites them to engage in a diligent examination of conscience. For it is our conscience that knows whether we have sinned or we have acted against the love of God and the love of neighbour. This has to be carried out carefully. An examination of conscience should begin with invoking the Holy Spirit to understand the sins we committed. In order to do a serious examination of conscience, according to Mar Ivanios, two essential qualities are required - truthfulness and humility. These two qualities are necessary for the validity of our Confession. He who decides to grow in holiness should examine his life daily. Mar Ivanios strongly recommended weekly Confession.

Mar Ivanios speaks about four characteristics of great sorrow that make us the inheritor of the remission of sins. First, our sorrow



should be sincere. As soon as we identify our sins, we need to repent upon them as we offended God and our brothers through them. Repentance and heartfelt sorrow are necessary to obtain absolution of sins. To turn towards God is conversion. Just as water is inevitable for baptism, repentance over sins is indispensable for Confession. He reminds, “unless your external weeping and tears are the fruit of the deep sorrow of your spirit, they are of no avail.”

Secondly, stressing the supernatural dimension of sorrow for sins, Mar Ivanios encourages the faithful to earnestly entreat the Holy Spirit to receive his heartfelt sorrow. He draws our attention to the heartrending grief of the prodigal son, who cried out: “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son” (Lk. 15:21). The prodigal son becomes aware of the seriousness of his sin, and his heart is filled with sorrow. This is the supernatural sorrow, a gift of the Holy Spirit, which fills my heart with “a sorrow for having insulted the Lord, who is worthy of my perfect love and devotion and who deals with me with immense mercy, in spite of my doing great evil through my life.”

Thirdly, contrition over all the sins, especially the mortal sins. Mar Ivanios points out: “just as life and death cannot together exist in one, so also sin, which kills your soul and the grace, which vivifies it, cannot exist together.” Fourthly, the sorrow about our sin should be so intense that we resolve not to commit any mortal sin even if one promises to give everything to us. This would be a sign of our loving the Lord above all.

Mar Ivanios calls mortal sin a fatal disease. And he says that the Lord has shown us the best medicine (*siddhaoushadam*) – that is, the sacrament of Confession. After having prepared intensely to make Confession, the next step is approaching a priest and confessing the sins. Mar Ivanios teaches us that the priest is the representative of Jesus Christ. In Confession, Lord Jesus Christ himself comes near us through the priest to forgive us from all our sins. He gives three reasons for what we ought to confess our sins to a priest:

- a. This is an important means of dissuading us from committing sins.



- b. The priest is a man of God, whom God has appointed to help us. We could confide our secret thoughts and our anxieties to him as to a trustworthy friend.
- c. Confession helps us to make reparation for our sins.

Mar Ivanios urges the faithful to confess as if this were the last Confession in their life. He believed that this thought helps one to make the Confession adequately.

The Bath and Banquet of The Soul

Mar Ivanios uses the analogy of bath to describe the cleansing of the soul effected in the sacrament of Confession. As hard work in the field of play can dirty our bodies, so does sin dirty our souls. Just as a bath is necessary for the body after a long tiring journey or activity, cleansing of the soul is also essential to wash off all the accumulated sins. “The water for the bath of the soul is the sacred blood of Jesus Christ. The ‘pool’ where it is collected is the ‘holy confession.’” The Holy Sacrament of Confession is the pool in which our soul takes a bath and purges itself. He exhorts the faithful to enter into this pool with firm faith, hope, love, respect, humility, and courage. The certitude that one will obtain not only absolution of the past sins no matter how grave they are but also grace for a holy life in the future helps us grow in hope and joy. Cleansing from all our sins through this bath (*kuli*) enables us to receive the banquet (*Unu*), which is the Holy Eucharist, in a worthy manner.

After we make a sincere confession and receive absolution of sins, our hearts are overwhelmed with the outpouring of mercy and love of the Lord. This calls for heartfelt praise to God and to love God intensely because of His unconditional love.

According to Mar Ivanios, after Confession, we receive the purification necessary to partake in the Lord’s banquet, viz. Holy Qurbono. Jesus said, “those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in him. Whoever eats me will live because of me.” And the flesh and blood which Jesus gives us through the Holy Qurbono or through the



sacrament of Holy Eucharist is our banquet, and we have to receive the Holy Eucharist with a worthy heart and soul. Therefore, Mar Ivanios warns us against receiving the Holy Qurbano without proper preparation. He advises us to prepare diligently in order to receive the Holy Qurbano, as if this were our last reception of the Holy Qurbano. The Holy Qurbano is the food, the banquet of our soul. Mar Ivanios tells us to sanctify our life and to be on a pilgrimage to be with Jesus, and in that pilgrimage, we have to take our bath in the pool of Sacred blood of Jesus Christ, which is the sacrament of Holy Confession, and we need our food on the way of our pilgrimage that is the banquet, and we are nourished by the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, which is the Holy Eucharist.

Mar Ivanios notes that when we receive the Holy Qurbano, the eternal, the truly holy, and Jesus the Messiah of perfect love comes to dwell with us. We become one with Him. He abides in us, and we abide in Him. And this is what we are created for. Awareness of the true goal of our life should motivate us to die to sin and live a life pleasing to God.

Chapter 16

“Realizing God is Nobler than Serving God”

Rev. Dr. Joseph Valamparambil
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Introduction

In this paper we shall pay attention to the thrust of Mar Ivanios’ God-seeking, articulated in the famous dictum of “Realizing God is nobler than serving God.” This discourse is a humble attempt to approach this theme which is characterizing the whole mystical and spiritual vision of Mar Ivanios. Of course, this paper is limited in its scope and depth. I would like to call the attention of readers to this vision from some anthropological parameters in the human search for truth and for God.

Nuances of Serving and Realizing: Why Realizing is Preferred to Serving?

Before going to the discussion on realizing God, we would like to refer to the understanding of ‘serving God.’ Normally ‘to serve somebody’ means to do something in view of giving pleasure or satisfaction to somebody else. If we want to analyse the term, then we have to acknowledge that there are some basic dispositions in the relation



between the one who serves and the one who is served. The first among them is a dualistic understanding of the reality and therefore the result is a detached disposition to the other. That means I am doing something for somebody else who may not be in a relation to myself. Therefore, it can be a deed in a detached way without any interest from my part. There is therefore a danger of doing something for the sake of doing. It can then be only a duty which is done for the sake of duty which may not affect myself, my person and my being in any way.

If the service is done with a detached way without any relation to the other, then the question is why or for what do we do this service? It may be out of duty-sake, due to fear, or due to some other interests. Only when the service is rendered out of a relation, then it is no more service, it can be called then as love.

We may have to see this in the light of some ways of truth-seeking in the history of humankind. In the western tradition, the truth was something outside and the statement I make about that thing should be in conformity with the thing outside. Here, the truth property of the statement or the thing outside is more important than the relevance of the truth for me and my life. Therefore, it is a detached and not-interested search for the truthfulness of the proposition. Here the truth outside is in no way related to me. Therefore, truth-seeking becomes a mere academic and intellectual research which has nothing to do with the being and life of the knower or the seeker. In God-seeking it is a possible danger that we may have to face. In other words, we face a danger of indifference in our intellectual researches when we seek the truth only from a disinterested and objective approach to reality. When Mar Ivanios prefers 'realizing God' to 'serving God,' it is a reminder that we may have to keep in mind this danger of losing the personal involvement and interest in our search for God.

The basic thinking of the discipleship and following of Christ or the Christian spirituality according to Mar Ivanios is 'imitation of Christ.' The very notion itself means that it has something to do with the very person himself and not merely a partial involvement of the person. In order to come to the characteristic features of the idea of realization we have to first refer to the possible directions of understanding the notion



of ‘service of God.’ Often this distinction of God-realization and service of God is done with the biblical reference to the visit of Jesus to Bethany, to the house of Lazar, Martha and Mary. In the Gospel according to St. Luke (Lk.10.38-42), we see Jesus visiting Bethany and Martha complaining to Jesus about her sister Mary who was listening to Jesus without helping her in the household. Jesus tells her, “Martha, Martha, you are busy with so many things and Mary has taken the better option.” Here it is in no way Jesus encouraging escapism from the works but refers to a way of contemplation. Some scholars hold that Jesus is calling for a proper and balanced way of integrating both active and contemplative ways in the spiritual life. Jesus is in no way devaluing the works and hospitality of Martha.

In the Gospel of St. John (Jn. 11:17-27), we see after the death of Lazar, it was Martha who confesses her faith in the Son of God leading to the raising of Lazar from the dead. Therefore, when Mar Ivanios prefers realization of God to service of God, it is in no way to degrade the value of active mission and service which itself is a reflection of faith and Christian love. It is rather an invitation not to be limited to the material, exterior activities of the mission and a call to go beyond that to the contemplative dimension of Christian spirituality which only can lay a foundation for the mission. Mar Ivanios himself is a wonderful example of integrating both these dimensions. His life of prayer provided him with a vision which he actualized in his active mission. He envisaged for the Church in future also such a vision and mission, contemplation and action.

The first danger of getting limited to ‘the service of God’ is related to the possibility of reducing to objectivity. This objectivity in the service of God first of all can be thought of serving God with *what one does*. Here the person may be more attentive to the very act of what one does. Here the person may get more attentive to the external activity which one does rather than the spirit of it and the internal dimension of love and charity for others and an internal spiritual dimension behind the service of God. Then it can turn to a mere mechanical activity in which the involvement of the person is not at all taken care of. Mar Ivanios writes: “Good deeds and virtues can be done only by virtuous people.



Therefore, in our spiritual journey, we should concentrate on virtuous life rather than actions. This is possible only when the person pays attention to one's life guided by the Holy Spirit than one's own merit in doing some good deeds." In other words, it is a call to turn our attention to God himself than to ourselves and our actions.

As St. Paul says, "it is the Spirit who dwells in us who makes us capable of calling God as Abba" (Gal.4.6). This means the Holy Spirit enables us to do something good. Therefore, we need to trust Him rather than paying attention to our merit or our actions. Further, the objectivity refers to the very vision of the person. Serving God, when it is more centred on the dimension of 'serving,' refers to the danger of making God as an object of service in which the attitude of the person who does the service stands in danger of an objective relation to God. As we know, God, the Creator and in whose image and likeness the human person is created, demands a personal relation to the human person. Therefore, any attempt to limit this relation to objectivity or activity is then only partial and not ideal. That is why Mar Ivanios talks of 'imitation of Christ' as the ideal in which the person takes an attempt to relate with God from the point of view of a filial love like that of Jesus himself.

The second danger behind the relation to God limited to the concept of 'serving God' is the danger of divisibility and lack of full participation of the person. As we have already mentioned, anything less than the complete surrender and fully involved submission, love and worship are not worthy for God, the Supreme Being. In this direction, the personal prayers of Mar Ivanios as seen in *Girideepam* are a good example for his vision: "God, O Loving Father, teach us to love you with our whole heart, with our whole soul and with our whole strength."

Realization – Integration of Action and Contemplation

The whole thrust of the Ivanian spirituality based on the imitation of Christ can be seen as a wonderful combination of the two modes of life - action and contemplation. Actually, here we can trace the directions of all the mystical ways of spirituality on which all the monastic traditions are based. Mar Ivanios had great knowledge about the monastic traditions



of St. Basil and the spiritual way of St. Ignatius of Loyola. At the same time, his teaching and experiences in Serampore and the relation to Rabindranath Tagore and the visits to Sabarmati show the influence of the Indian monastic tradition and spirituality on him. As many authors have rightly pointed out, in Mar Ivanios we can see a person who wonderfully combines the western and eastern monastic traditions of spirituality articulated in terms of Indian spiritual tradition and culture. It refers to the need of seeing the human person from a holistic point of view. The very composition of the human person is in such a way that the apparently dualistic dimensions stand in need of synthesis. The very anthropological composition of the body and soul, and the resulting corporality and interiority imply the active and contemplative dimensions of human existence. Therefore, as some of the philosophers like Soren Kierkegaard rightly articulated that the human person from an ontological and existential point of view stands in need of actualization of a synthesis of different dimensions and therefore the spirituality is then nothing but the realization of this synthesis. That is why Mar Ivanios speaks of realization of God, which is nothing but the realization of the self in its comprehensive integrity. It is in this direction that he prays for the genuine vocations to this monastic life in following words: "Give us, o Lord, virtuous persons who with their life of prayer and virtues, manifest this world your love and sanctity."

Another great danger behind the relation to God from the point of view of 'service' is the alienation of the person. Many speak of the existential alienation of the person in modern society. Often, we tend to identify the person with the function one is doing in the society. The person tends to identify oneself with the role he is doing, for the family, for the society etc... It tends to lead to a crisis of identity. The identification of oneself with the service one rendering to God also stands in the risk of identifying one's own self with the functional self. It brings in a dichotomy in life and the self. It can lead to a self-centredness or self-righteousness rather than depending on the mercifulness of God. While emphasizing 'realizing God,' actually Mar Ivanios is emphasizing on the mercifulness of God than one's own worthfulness. In other words, it is in the mercy of God and in His love that one realizes one's own real self and identity. That is why, looking



back to his whole life and mission, Mar Ivanios writes: “God’s mercy is the basis of everything. He himself started everything, and He guided everything.”

Realization of the Real Self and God-realization: Truth-seeking is the Pre-requisite

The reductionism of the self to mere functionality results in the very defective self-consciousness and therefore a reductionism in the very religiosity of the person. That means we are called to go beyond our attributive self. Often, we tend to identify ourselves with our attributes. We identify us in terms of our jobs for example as an engineer, as electrician etc., or tend to think of our identity in terms of our possessions of wealth, health or other earthy goods. If we depend on such conditions, they are all temporary and passing things which come and go. As the Gospel says, they are all treasures on the earth where moth and rust can corrupt. Jesus asks us to have treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust corrupts and where thieves do not steal. (Mt. 6.21). It means we have to realize that our true and essential self is our spirit which aspires to reach God, to love God, to be loved by God. We are created in His own image and likeness.

We realize our own selves truly and fully only when we realize this true self as related to God. Therefore, the religious truth is something which addresses the whole person. It is not only something which has to do with ideas or morals. It is more something which should affect the whole person. This shows that the God-relation which does not affect the whole person is not ideal. It should go beyond objectivity, externality and any conditionality and should affect my whole person. That is why Mar Ivanios talks of the truth for which one renounces all his securities of life with the purpose of realizing the truth one recognizes in life. Reviewing on the event of reunion, he writes: “As I entered into the Catholic union, I could see the only open sky above me and only empty ground on my footstep beneath.” The whole life and mission of Mar Ivanios and the reunion movement show how much sacrifices he had to do for the truth which he followed and for which he committed himself. It is a participative truth-seeking and God-seeking for which one has to risk oneself. To



realize the truth and self as related to God then is a challenge for the person to renounce the egoistic self and to take steps for reaching the true self with prayer, virtuous life of commitment and sacrifice.

From this point of view, God-relation means a change in myself. The knowledge and realization of the truth have then after-effects in myself, the truth has an effect on the self. It is not something objective that has nothing to do with the knower, but the truth becomes subjectivity which means that the knower himself is affected by the knowledge and truth. That is why Jesus says: "Truth will make you free" (Jn.8.32). The objective approach to the truth is impassionate and disinterested with a resulting alienation of the knower whereas realizing God is based on the truth realized as something which affects my own being and self.

The religious truth is not something to be argued or approached only from an intellectual and analytical point of view. Mar Ivanios speaks of it in the following terms: "It is better to taste the sweetness and truthfulness of spirituality with the heart than to analyse intellectually the pros and cons and the truthfulness of the spiritual principles." The religious truth is something which addresses the very life and existence and the whole person himself. An approach based on the subjectivity of truth only can lead to the involvement of the person in the very act of knowing and assimilating the religious truth. Only the way based on the realization of the self in reference to the Transcendental Other has a scope of continuous self-renewal in the spiritual life. When it is based on 'serving God,' the way is that of a duality between the one who serves and the Other who is served. Speaking of God-realization, Mar Ivanios is actually articulating the Christian spirituality which is based on the supernatural revelation of the Divine in creation and history with its zenith in the incarnation and redemptive mission of the historical person of Jesus Christ from an eastern and Indian way of thought which is based on a non-dualistic vision of the reality. To speak in the Indian spiritual terms, the Ivanian spirituality is an integration of the *Jnana-Karma and Bhakti Margas*, integration of the ways of contemplation, action and devotion. It is a continuous renewal of the self in its all faculties and dimensions of existence. The very concept of 'imitation of Christ' shows this scope of the continuous self-renewal of the person.



God-Realization: The Integration of Truth and Life

The Christian spirituality is traditionally called as *kerygma* and *kenosis* – both proceeding from the very person and mission of Jesus Christ. Faith as the response to the revelation of God is something to be experienced and preached. The very paschal mystery (the mystery of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus) is something *to be preached* and at the same time *to be lived*. The lived faith is nothing but the way of Jesus himself (the way of *kenosis*), a way of self-denial and sacrifice which only can lead in turn to the resurrection and fullness of life. The service of God is more concentrated on the person who serves and therefore it may lead to self-presumptuousness or self-justification leading to a dichotomy. But the realization of God and self-realization acknowledge the weakness of the self and accept the grace of the divine. The *kerygma* with its implication of the preaching and proclamation of the paschal mystery means then that it is not an external act of preaching but more a witness of life that is decisive in the way of discipleship which is articulated by Mar Ivanios as the *imitation of Christ*. It is in this context that Mar Ivanios shared his dream of the evangelization of India with a unique and culturally adapted way for which he saw that the disunity among Christians themselves as the greatest obstacle. And his reunion was actually an attempt to foster and facilitate the evangelization of India. Mar Ivanios writes: “We can proclaim Christianity here in India adaptable to our land without risking the catholic and apostolic tradition of our faith.”

This kerygmatic mission of the Church also has another implication - that our mission and all services should be ultimately helping the people to seek the truth, to realize their real selves and realize God. In this context, it is remarkable how much Mar Ivanios was concerned about the education of the priests, religious and the laity. Often, we tend to adopt the worldly criteria of success and failure to judge even sometimes our missionary and evangelizing activities. The importance Mar Ivanios gives to silence and solitude in the way of discipleship and his dictum, “all success and victory to God,” implies nothing but to do everything for the glory of God and for the salvation of human beings. This is a call to evaluate the motives of our activities and services and to



have our real goal in realizing our real selves and helping others to realize their real selves; in other words, realizing God and helping others to realize God.

Our mission of evangelization has both the active and contemplative dimensions. It is through our services for the society in different ways that we make Christ and the Kingdom of God present and experiential for the world today. But at the same time, it is not only through our activities, but primarily and ultimately through our very being and witness, that we make the Kingdom present. It is in this context that the division and lack of unity in the Church, in the very body of Christ, stands as a counter-witness for the world. That is why the concern of reunion became the thrust of the search for truth and an essential prerequisite for evangelization for Mar Ivanios. He writes, “The biggest obstacle for the conversion of the whole world is the division within Christianity itself.” In the present context, where we see the conflicts between different Christian denominations, the commemoration of Mar Ivanios is a call for the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church to get renewed in her vision and mission of ecumenism and reunion.

Mar Ivanios is rightly called as *the Newman of India*. In St. Cardinal Newman the history witnessed a person, who, after his long journey of academic, intellectual and spiritual search, realized the truth at the threshold of Catholicism. The whole history of the reunion movement and the autobiography of Mar Ivanios prove that he was always in search of the truth. Mar Ivanios writes, “I was fortunate enough to have the goodwill and intensity to seek the truth throughout my life and to get enlightened by God’s grace to the true way of embracing the Catholic Church.” The use of the very term ‘realizing God’ refers to this prerequisite that the person needs to be a seeker in order to realize something. In other words, God-realization means actually self-realization, because the self is a creature of God and the crown of creation who is created in the image and likeness of God. The human person in his very nature is a truth-seeking and meaning-seeking being which implies more than his materiality or biology. He is a subject, a person and spirit who needs to realize his freedom, autonomy, relation and transcendence. That means the human self stands in need of realizing one’s own spiritual,



religious and transcendental aspirations of which the sum total can be articulated as *self-realization*. In this context, we are reminded of the words of St. Irenaeus: “A fully alive man is the manifestation of God’s glory.” A true seeker of truth finds his own real self in God himself. In other words, the seeker has to move in the process of deification or divinization as theologians explain it. It is nothing but to realize oneself as called to unity with God. As St. Peter, the Apostle in his Second Letter writes, we are called to share in God’s life itself (2 Pet. 1:4). In other words, as created in the image and likeness of God and redeemed by the precious blood of his only Son and our Lord Jesus Christ, we are called to take part in the eternal life, in God’s own life. That is our ultimate goal. We can see this in the famous words of St. Augustine who writes: “O God, we are restless till we find our real shelter in you.” The whole salvation history in the Bible is oriented to this message of continuous invitation to the human person to realize his own being as participatory being, to realize himself as a part of God, and to come to the salvation which means to take part in God’s life. It is very much clear in the prayer of Mar Ivanios in *Girideepam* which begins as “O God we are yours and we are set apart for you.”

Conclusion

When we remember the legend Mar Ivanios and his legacy, we are called to engage in a self-examination and a self-renewal in view of a re-vitalization of our evangelization not only through the service of God and his people but also as an authentic witness of Christ and his message through our own self-actualization which itself means God-realization.

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Chapter 17

Mar Ivanios and the Pursuit of Virtues

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Introduction and Preliminary Remarks

Mar Ivanios was a man of virtues and character. One of the character traits of Mar Ivanios is his ability to discern the thoughts, desires, and needs of his contemporaries and societies. Moreover, he owns many attributes to his name. To mention a few, Architect of the reunion Movement, Founder of Bethany Ashram and Bethany Convent, Newman of the East, Champion of the unity of the Church, Man of Truth, Great visionary, etc. All these quality traits suggest the very core of his life. More precisely, it speaks about his being rather than his doing.

The life of Mar Ivanios was a pilgrimage to seek truth, restore unity in the Church, attain perfection in his consecrated/religious life, and live a virtuous life. Since he is a possessor of many heroic virtues, he is called to be a virtuous man. On the other hand, one is not worried about his physical stature, qualifications, fame and reputation, appearance and external look, assets, and possessions. Surprisingly, none of the above attributes bestowed on him is grounded on these avowed temporalities. Although they are important, in the loneliness of life, one realizes that life is more than what we externally perceive and adore.



There is a saying in the academic world that teachers are generally remembered not for anything they have taught us academically but for the kind of persons they were to us. We remember our teachers, we must have forgotten all the mathematics, equations, and languages they have taught us, but still, we remember a few of our teachers who influenced us and made an imprint in our lives. We are least bothered about their external appearances but more serious about their internal qualities and dispositions. In the same way, Mar Ivanios is remembered for his qualities of life than the spelled-out activities of his life. His activities were grounded on internal qualities. As we know, he lived a saintly life, and the canonization process is underway. Then, the question is what the meaning of being a saintly man is? The synonym for saintly man is a virtuous man; being saintly is equal to being virtuous. Since he led a virtuous life, he is going to be venerated as a saint. Our interiority, dispositions, habits, intentions, virtues, and character are expressed in our external behavior. It is similar to the Biblical saying that the good tree bears good fruit and the bad tree bears bad fruit. That means our priority has to be focused on his personhood than on his activities which are signs that express his interiority.

His writings are testimony to his process of thoughts. Mar Ivanios, in his exhortations and autobiographical writings, emphasized the role of virtues and the importance of persons over actions. He was convinced that human beings may attain the ultimate end in virtues. To speak about virtue and virtuous is to touch upon almost everything we deem excellence in personal and public life. He categorically asserts that virtues flow from the virtuous. Virtuous life is to be preferred to virtues. Mar Ivanios treats morality in terms of the sort of persons we ought to be and the sorts of actions we ought to perform. The kind of person one is depends to a great extent on the sorts of decisions and actions one has taken, and conversely, the sorts of decisions and actions one has taken depend in part on the kind of person one is.

In developing his theology of communion, he insisted on Theo-centric, Christo-centric, Pneumato-centric, and ecclesio-centric approach wherein people respond to the proclamation of the gospel not only by uttering words and verses but also through virtuous deeds and works of fraternal charity. The accent given to the virtuous and exemplary life of the Christian enables her/him to be capable of enthusing and animating those whom they encounter.



Moreover, they can touch the lives of the people at all levels of society – the poor and the rich, the educated and the illiterate. In short, their virtuous lives always show a message of life for all.

When we try to understand Mar Ivanios, we realize that he was trying to become good, to attain virtues, and indeed to lead a meaningful life. The term virtue refers to a particular state of quality of human character. Virtue is available to all, not just a privileged elect or elite. Moreover, virtue is necessary for the perfection of any human life, and it is achievable with training and practice. For me, virtue is a habitual disposition, associated with the choice of actions and passions, laying in a mean, and being determined by reason, that is, as a wo/man of practical wisdom would determine. In other words, Habitual disposition, Choices of actions and passions, maintaining equilibrium; and Practical wisdom are the four components of virtues. In this paper, let us explore whether or not these four components of virtues make Mar Ivanios' life unique and distinct.

Mar Ivanios: Man with Habitual Dispositions and Character Traits

Dispositions are properties of things that give rise to a reasonably permanent pattern of behaviors. Many of our dispositions are fashioned and developed automatically as part of human nature, such as the natural tendency to grow, have feelings, have desire and emotion, think thoughts, and so on. At the same time, we can develop such habitual dispositions through training. Men become builders by building and musicians by playing music; so too we become just by doing acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts. In other words, states of character arise out of like activities. Therefore, everybody has the prospect of becoming good with practice. Continuity, permanency, and repetition are pre-conditions to declare an act to be virtuous. For example, stingy parents and their two children went for a picnic. One beggar came to them and asked for food. They were reluctant to give anything to the beggar. But the compassionate younger child gave his food parcel to the beggar and sent him off with a smile. Here we made two judgments: the parents are stingy and miserly, and the younger child is



compassionate. Even if the parents must have supported this beggar on that day, they might not be called generous since they used to demonstrate the characteristics of a miserly all through their lives. Similarly, if the younger child fails to support the beggar on this particular occasion s/he would not be called insensitive and indifferent because s/he has the habit of helping the poor and needy whenever and wherever is possible.

Similarly, there is a number of habitual dispositions owned by Mar Ivanios. From childhood to death, he was known to be a seeker of truth, and he stood for truth. He practiced truth in his everyday life. The moment he realized that Catholic Church is the real Church and the true Church, he started to live out the truth. He began to read and learn more, received advice from his parents and elders, deliberated with scholars, and continued to seek the truth. The more he got convinced, the better he started to work for the unity of the Church. He overcame all the hurdles one by one. He encountered setbacks, deceptions, desertions, and humiliations; his loyalty and integrity were questioned, he was even inflicted with demotion. Yet, he stood for truth and unity of the Church. This enduring character trait demonstrates the virtue of truthfulness. Similarly, he was courageous to make tough decisions in life. The departure from *Mundanmala*, relying entirely on God, was one of the most significant decisions of Mar Ivanios after the foundations of Bethany Ashram and Bethany Madham. He was brave enough to sacrifice property, positions, friends, and at the same time, he was courageous enough to embrace shame, embarrassment, risks, uncertainty for the sake of the unity of the Church. All through his life, we experience the virtue of Courage.

The life of Mar Ivanios teaches us that we can also acquire virtues in our day-to-day life. One can inculcate virtue through training and practice. If I am disobedient, cowardly, miserly, greedy, arrogant, and so on, I can consciously try and convert these vices into virtues. Our Church communities and catechism classes should be the centers of excellence in character formation. Priests and religious elders and parents have to lead an exemplary life that has to motivate children to follow. Above all, as Mar Ivanios repeatedly exhorts us, Jesus is the model and mentor. In that case, why cannot we take Jesus, the embodiment of virtues, as our hero and example?



Mar Ivanios: Man who made Wise Choices

The choices one makes determine whether her/his action is virtuous or vicious. The choice is a deliberative desire. When one chooses to do something, s/he does it after thinking it out sufficiently. No choice occurs all of a sudden; it is made through the process of deliberation. One takes into account all the available features and elements of possible action, and this enables one to compare or contrast these and so arrive at a final decision. The deliberation is technically concerned with what to do about something, not what to feel about it. Therefore, the disposition to choose at various places is a unique characteristic of a virtuous character. Mar Ivanios has made many important choices in life. He discerned his vocation and chose to be a seminarian; he became a priest and bishop. In all these cases, he was responding to the divine call positively by dialoguing with God and deliberating with his conscience. When he was entrusted the responsibility of being the official conversationalist for the Reunion movement, he took it very seriously, tried to understand the intricacies, and became convinced of the truth. Once he realized the real truth, he decided to embrace Catholic Church without looking into its consequences. The choice he made proved his character. One of his famous quotes echoes again: ‘virtue comes from the virtuous.’ Through this right choice, he fulfilled the universal vision of Jesus Christ “that all may be one.”

Another important choice that attracts our attention is the foundation of Bethany Ashram. The foundation of Bethany was a process, not an event. He had the conviction that the growth and prosperity of our Church depended on the formation of its clergy. Besides, if we establish a Missionary Society with educated people, they can broaden the legacy of St. Thomas the Apostle and spread the gospel values. The thought of Missionary Society preoccupied his mind day and night for many days, and he was seeking the will of God. But he could not take a decision. Later, relying on the grace of God, he decided not to establish a Missionary Society but to establish a Religious Congregation consisting of members who have voluntarily dedicated themselves to God. Here too, he made this significant choice and decision after adequate internal and external deliberation. Without a doubt, one can claim that his choices are indicative of his inner qualities.



When we choose our lives, we must transcend in deliberation, prayer, and discussion. All our choices are the outcome of our decisions. When we take a decision, it reveals our internal qualities. We need to educate ourselves in the art of “choosing the right and the good.” Our youth meetings and collaborations, our catechetical practices, and our coming together for liturgical services and prayers should enhance us to flourish in virtues to which Mar Ivanios showed the way.

Mar Ivanios: Man of Complementarity and Equilibrium

Virtue is in equilibrium and is produced and preserved by avoiding extremes and hitting the mean; it is self-sustaining. Virtue becomes self-sustaining, and one is made capable of becoming virtuous. There could be one or more virtuous options possible in any situation. But in the normal case, the good is limited; but the bad is unlimited. The complex question to be answered is how does one choose from varied options. A virtuous person maintains balancing acts where s/he avoids extremes and embraces the middle path. Let us take an example from the life of Mar Ivanios. Prayer and action are both equally significant for Mar Ivanios, which is envisaged through the charism of the Order of the Imitation of Christ. The charism of OIC is following Jesus Christ in his life of prayer and action, realized in the oriental monastic tradition and Indian *sannyasa* and aimed at the evangelization of India through the spiritual renewal of the Malankara Church. He is over-emphasizing neither the prayer nor the activities. He integrates and blends Marthian Spirituality as well as Marian mysticism. They co-exist and collaborate with each other. One is not better than the other at the same time, one does not have life without the other. The mutual complement adds beauty to Bethany today.

Therefore, it is imperative to avoid extremes in life. We need a good life that requires integral development. Let our basic Christian formation promote virtue inculcation and human flourishing. One has to realize that s/he is unique and distinct. We are not born to be passive and indifferent to the realities of life and satisfy with minimalism. On the other hand, we are people with possibilities, and we need to open horizons



to explore spiritually, intellectually, ethically, and emotionally and thus to establish a character of complementarity and equilibrium.

Mar Ivanios: Man of Practical Wisdom

Virtue, in the strict sense, cannot exist without practical wisdom. Practical wisdom is an understanding of what makes an act virtuous. It is a single virtue with several manifestations. Practical wisdom cannot be compared with technical skills, though it is neither identical with any particular technical skill nor does it require any particular skill. However, this does not prevent a person of practical wisdom from making use of technical skills in performing virtuous actions. Practical wisdom is a virtue by which one deliberates or reasons well in a practical way. Mar Ivanios is a man with practical wisdom. The earthly achievements at Serampore, the foundation of Bethany, leaving *Mundanmala* with empty hands and establishing hierarchy at Trivandrum, owning land in different places, *Bethany hills* at Nalanchira, and missionary activities in Kanjiramkulam, Marthandam and Nedumagadu areas are achieved through his practical wisdom and diplomatic approach and sincere commitment to the cause to which he was destined. Knowledge and information are not enough to achieve our goals. We must grow and flourish in wisdom and prudence. The virtue of prudence will enable us to engrave our identities wherever we are planted.

Conclusion

Let our pilgrimage with Mar Ivanios lead us to new prospects, new avenues, and a new horizon. Our society is in moral decline, and this trend can be called a kind of “moral poverty.” In this precarious situation, Church and her members cannot remain bystanders. Instead, we need to contribute to the wellbeing of our Church and society by forming the character of young people. In this respect, the MCCL, MCYM, MCA, and other associations cannot avoid their share of responsibility, or significant opportunities, to develop positive attitudes and ways of thinking in the moral and value dimensions of the society by strictly following the exemplary life of virtuous *Guru* Servant of God Mar Ivanios.

Chapter 18

Mar Ivanios and Marian Devotion

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The process of the canonization of the Servant of God Mar Ivanios has generated renewed interest in the spirituality of the great Church leader. While the biographers of Mar Ivanios have studied in detail many aspects of his personality and intellectual acumen, only limited attention seems to have been given to his reputation for holiness. This article draws attention to some aspects of his devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Beginnings

Like many devotees of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Pope Pius IX, Pope Leo XIII, St. Pope John Paul II, and St. Louis Montfort, it was from his mother that Mar Ivanios first learned to have devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. This devotion progressed rapidly over time. His mother's name was Anna, who firmly believed in the powerful intercession of Blessed Mary. As there were no male children in her family, Anna prayed for a male child, and God blessed her with a baby boy on the feast of the nativity of our Lady itself. Anna was a woman of great



Marian piety, and she always taught her son Geevarghese the importance of devotion to Mother Mary.

St. Bernard says, “Mary is the ladder to heaven, the door of heaven and the chariot of heaven, the Marian devotees climb heaven through her.” Mother Mary leads those who seek the true path in life towards Jesus. According to Mar Ivanios it is the Blessed Mother who led him to the Catholic Church. Mar Ivanios’ Marian piety began earnestly during his childhood. His mother was a devout holy woman, and the two of them would often visit the nearest Catholic Church. He later recalled that his mother had taught him from his early years that whoever seeks Mother Mary’s help will reach the coast of the true faith and embrace the Catholic Church. It made a deep impression on him.

Mar Ivanios also acknowledged Holy Mary’s exceptional help in his vocation to the priesthood. Young Geevarghese had a strong inclination towards priestly life, but his father wanted him to become a Military officer. Geevarghese spent hours in daily prayer, especially to Blessed Virgin Mary, and in return, his persistence was rewarded. As he grew his devotion to Virgin Mary increased in its intensity. During his priestly life, he often impressed upon the faithful through his teaching and preaching the powerful patronage of Mary. He wrote several pious songs in which he exalted the glories of a heavenly mother.

Almost all the important events of his life took place on the feast days of the Blessed Virgin Mary. He was born on the feast of the Nativity of Mother Mary. He received diaconate on the feast of the exaltation of the Blessed Virgin, his priestly ordination was on the feast of the Assumption, and he died on the eve of the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

Mariology of Mar Ivanios

The Servant of God, Mar Ivanios had a very deep knowledge of Mariology. Bishop Thomas Mar Anthonios, in his article, notes: “Mar Ivanios was indeed a Church Father who believed and propagated the Catholic teachings on Blessed Virgin Mary, even before his communion with the Catholic Church.” His deep devotion and veneration for the



Mother of God stand out clearly in all that he writes about her, even before the Reunion to the Catholic Church. Four important Marian titles dear to Mar Ivanios are:

a. Mother of God: One of the essential characteristics of the spirituality of Mar Ivanios was his profound devotion to the Holy Mother of God. The title ‘Mother of God’ was very dear to Mar Ivanios. He used to call our Blessed Virgin Mary, ‘Holy virgin Mother’ and mother who gave birth to God, considering Holy Virgin as his own mother. In his book, *Sabhavatsaram*, he extensively uses the title Mother of God. In the Holy Rule of Bethany Ashram, his advice to the congregation members is to have a childlike devotion to the Virgin Mother of God. The following extract from that book shows how much Mar Ivanios honoured the Mother of God: “Those who profess chastity should have great devotion to the Holy Eucharist, the source of their life and strength. They also should practice childlike devotion to the Most Holy Virgin Mother of God and daily entrust to her the purity of their souls and bodies.” All his pastoral letters ended with the invocation of the blessing of the Virgin Mother of God. In his thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of his M.A. Degree (*Were the Syrian Christians Nestorians?*), he says that the Syrian Christians of Kerala traditionally believe that there is only one unique Person Jesus Christ with two natures. The Blessed Virgin Mary is the mother of this single unique Person.

b. Holy Virgin Mary: It was evident from his writings that his Marian devotion was based on a solid doctrinal foundation. Blessed Mother, he wrote, “is the virgin among the Virgins, untouched by the sin. She was the most holy person than any other human being so that we can call her queen of saints. She is the holy virgin. She is the one who was chosen by God and fully dedicated to God, her body and soul, and led a pure life.” He also says, “God from the womb itself chose her, like Jeremiah and John the Baptist. God loved her so much... God already prepared her a virgin and saint. How great is her glory.” According to him, she became the Mother of God in her virginity. In his book named *Sanyasa Jivitha Sahayi* he puts forward the model of Blessed Mother to prepare for the retreat. He says, “we should prepare ourselves like the Holy Virgin Mary prepared herself to take part in the passion and death of the Son of



God.” In his book on confession, he prays to Mother, “O Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of my Saviour Jesus Christ! You are enthusiastic that I should be converted. Pray for me to the Lord.”

c. The Second Heaven: According to Mar Ivanios, Blessed Mother is the queen of all holy persons because the omnipotent God dwelt in the womb of this virgin as a child for nine months. He says, “Mary was the place selected by God out of all creatures to come and dwell, so he prepared it to be the most holy place. God dwells in heaven. Wherever God dwells, that place is indeed heaven. Oh, Mary, you are the second heaven, as God of all Creatures dwelt in you.” In his speech he delivered in Marian Congress at Canada, he said I accepted the invitation of the Archbishop of Ottawa to take part in the Marian Congress only because of my devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, who is also known as the ‘Second Heaven.’

d. The Second Eve: He says Holy Mary is the Second Eve. “Disobedience made the first Eve to become a slave of sin. But the second Eve saved humanity by her total obedience. Committing sin, first Eve offered misery and suffering over mankind. Keeping her virginity, the second Eve, became the Mother of God and thus provided salvation and redemption to all.” While commenting on Genesis 3:15 and Revelation 12:1-17, he says that the characters have similarities in both Genesis and Revelation: one woman, one man, and one serpent. While the serpent wins over the first woman, Eve of Eden, the Second Woman, the Blessed Virgin Mary defeats the serpent and brings you salvation.

Dogma of the Assumption of Our Lady

Before promulgating the dogma of Assumption of Our Lady into heaven body and soul, His Holiness Pope Pius XII wrote a letter *Deiparae Virginis Mariae* on May 1, 1946, to all the bishops of the Catholic Church asking: “Do you, venerable brethren, in your outstanding wisdom and prudence, judge that the bodily Assumption of the Blessed Virgin can be proposed and defined as a dogma of faith? Do you, with your clergy and people, desire it?” Mar Ivanios gave an affirmative response to both these questions and avowed that the bodily Assumption



of God's Mother into heaven could be defined as a dogma of faith. In his long letter, Mar Ivanios pointed out that the Malankara Catholic Church had been observing fifteen days' preparation before the Assumption, and this faith had been in practice for a very long time. Mar Ivanios wrote to Pope Pius XII: "My priests and I believe and teach that the Blessed Virgin Mary, after her physical death, was assumed into heaven, soul, and body." In this letter, he also gave a detailed history of the devotion to Blessed Virgin Mary in the Malankara Church, and he quoted many prayers from the liturgical texts of the Church. He concluded this letter with the following: "I, therefore, with my priests and people, most humbly beg Your Holiness to have the doctrine of the bodily assumption of the Mother of God into heaven declared as a dogma of the Church." He insisted that proclaiming the Assumption of Mother Mary as dogma will help the faithful grow in deep faith towards the Mother of God.

Marian Conferences

Mar Ivanios participated in the Marian Conference in the capital city of Canada from June 19-21, 1947. In his own words, it was a spiritual experience that cannot be described in words but an expression of profound love towards Lord Jesus and His Mother. Archbishop attended the central conference of the Legion of Mary in Dublin and established the Legion of Mary in the parishes of the archdiocese. An Irish Lady, Margaret Gibbons authored a book on Mar Ivanios. Chapter 21st of the book describes his devotion to Blessed Virgin Mary.

Promoter of Marian Devotion

It is the blessing of Mother Mary that won for him boundless graces. As a sign of his devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, he selected her as the special patroness of the religious community founded by him. Holy Mother of God is the heavenly patroness of both the Congregations of Bethany founded by Mar Ivanios. More than half of the churches established by Mar Ivanios are dedicated to Blessed Virgin. The Pattom Cathedral, churches at Palayam and Trivandrum, and many other parishes were also established in the name of the Blessed Virgin Mary.



In honor of Mother Mary, Mar Ivanios and his followers used to conduct special daily prayers for Mother Mary and observed abstinence every Wednesday. In all the parishes under the archdiocese, Marian Novena and Eight days of fasting were initiated. A statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary, as the mother of the re-union movement, was enshrined near the Archbishop's House in Pattom; and it is still kept in the premises of Catholicate centre.

One of the greatest expressions of the Marian devotion of Mar Ivanios is the Congregation of Daughters of Mary. He proclaimed: "the Congregation started in Marthandam as the Missionary Congregation in the archdiocese of Trivandrum and its name as 'the Congregation of Daughters of Mary.' The heavenly patroness of this Congregation will be Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Harvest." Archbishop himself had given the name Mother Mary to the Co-foundress.

In his discourses and homilies, Mar Ivanios used to exhort the faithful about the importance of the intercession of Blessed Virgin Mary. In the decisive moments, Mar Ivanios received the help of Mother Mary, from whom he always sought help. Mar Ivanios recommended Marian devotion to the people. He encouraged them to look unto Mother Mary, who prays for the sinners and leads them to conversion. Mar Ivanios used to propagate devotion to Mother Mary through the rosary, legion of Mary, and by encouraging fasts and feasts in her honour.

Marian Devotion of Mar Ivanios

The personality of Mar Ivanios was much identified with the personality of the Holy Virgin Mary. Mar Ivanios underwent great agony, faced crises and challenges from the very beginning of the Reunion movement. But he imbibed the attitude of Blessed Virgin Mary, who surrendered herself with total trust and obedience into the hands of the Lord and said, 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord – Be it done to me according to thy word.' After the crucifixion, Holy Mother gathered and strengthened the scattered disciples of Jesus and prayed together for the Holy Spirit, and thus on the day of Pentecost at Cenacle, the Holy Catholic Church was born. In the same way, the followers of Archbishop



Mar Ivanios were scattered at the beginning of the Reunion movement, but his immense faith in the powerful intercession of the Holy Mother gave him the necessary courage to persevere in his pursuit of truth and to strengthen his associates.

‘Marian Spirituality,’ which is the spirituality of the total, spousal ‘Yes’ to the Lord’s call, was indeed dear to Mar Ivanios. Through the challenging circumstances, Mar Ivanios grew more in faith, hope, and love, and he learned to obey like Mother Mary. At times he would weep in great pain, meditating the passion of Christ. He had unwavering hope. He continued to believe and pray. When it was difficult for him to understand God’s will, he chose to remain silent like Holy Mother of God, who stood at the foot of the cross and with deep sorrow saw his only Son and her Lord dying before her own eyes.

Mar Ivanios taught that Mary’s Motherly care and love is a source of strength for the Christians, especially at the hour of death. While he was sick and bedridden, his answer to Mother Basim, who asked him what they should pray for him, was ‘Holy Mary Virgin Mother of God, please do not stop praying for us to your son. So that he may always show his mercy on us’. Archbishop’s last prayer on his death bed was to Dolorous – the Mother of seven sorrows.

Let us thank the Lord Almighty for the Servant of God, Mar Ivanios, who taught us unceasingly about the importance of Marian devotion. Let us continue our journey towards heavenly Jerusalem, holding the hands of Mother Mary.

Chapter 19

The Importance of the Word of God in the Life of a Believer according to Mar Ivanios

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As a part of the series of Ivanian Yathra (Journey), “A Tribute to the Legend” organized by the Malankarites in U.A.E. to mark the 90th anniversary of the Reunion, I am delighted to reflect upon the topic “The Importance of the Word of God in the life of a believer according to Mar Ivanios.”

For many of those who are familiar with the life of the great Servant of God, Archbishop Mar Ivanios, we know one of the characteristics of Ivanian theology was that it was a “Theology Based on Scripture.” In fact, “all his theological reflections,” notes bishop Thomas Mar Anthonios, “are rooted in and based on the Holy Scripture. He profusely quotes from the Bible to substantiate his viewpoints, presentations, and arguments. This is characteristic of the oriental genius in Him.”



Zealous Teen

As we journey with Servant of God Archbishop Mar Ivanios, we recall the glorious Reunion. Let us reflect on the fact that the word of God played a central part in his spirituality. Archbishop Mar Ivanios was raised in the Jacobite tradition in a profoundly prayerful family and was able to absorb excellent spiritual training at home, making him an avid reader. He entered the seminary as a teenager, and one of the teachers began to probe and investigate his desire to live the life of a celibate priest. “Searching questions were asked to test his knowledge of the Bible and (George) answered them all satisfactorily.” Then the teacher commented, “You know the Bible well. How many times have you read it? Once or twice?” The young zealous teen Mar Ivanios responded, “I have read the Bible three times.”

Young Preacher

Very soon, the young Mar Ivanios, when he was a deacon, went on to Madras Christian College, and they formed a small association where he had the opportunity to “share his vast learning to those who attended the meetings.” The room was crowded with those who came to hear his “stirring speeches.” He was able to speak with ease on many topics, including the Bible. “He explained the *Bible* in great detail.” This young preacher had a great gift. After completing his Masters’ degree, he continued to be invited to give talks everywhere. “He had the extraordinary ability to fire the imagination of his audience. When he held out his *Bible* to the audience and declared that God had sent this message to his children to save them, the audience waited eagerly for his explanations.” After becoming Principal of M.D. Seminary, he did not rest. “Though he accepted the full charge of the school, he spent all his holidays preaching the *Word of God* in different places. The seeds for the Reunion were planted early in his soul when once he was serving as a professor in Serampore College, he responded to a deacon’s question, “which is the Church established by Jesus Christ? Is it the Jacobite Church or the Roman Catholic church? Finally, the professor set the students at ease by responding thus: “There are evidences in the *Holy Scriptures* as well as the history of the Church



that there is only one true Christian Church. I do not think that the Jacobite Church is the true Church” (A.M.I. p 117).

Monastic

As his prayer life continued to deepen, he began to dream about how to invigorate the spiritual life of his beloved community. Out of that desire, the longing for the life of a monastic grew in him, and he gathered young, like-minded men and women around him. As he was teaching the young women about the monastic life, it is chronicled that he shared with them some reflections during their retreat. “After a short session of prayer, he opened the *Bible* to teach them. Before beginning on the Bible, he asked them what their ideas were on the monastic life in India... after that preface, he began to read from the Bible, If anyone desires to come after me let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me...” For two days he carried on with this teaching. After that retreat, they were in a boat that had almost capsized; when the incident was over, he shared, “I remembered an incident from the *Bible*. I remembered Jesus and his disciples in a boat on the raging waters of the sea of Galilee. How the boat was sinking, but the Lord calmed the waters.” It was a part of the usual monastic discipline to meditate upon scriptures daily. Even mealtimes were punctuated by the living Word of God. “There is a reading from a devotional book at lunchtime and reading either from the Holy Scriptures of the Lives of the Saints during Supper.”

Bishop

After becoming a Bishop, he continued his great oratory skills. “He once committed himself to speak about the parable of the sower featured in the *Bible* for thirty days at a stretch. The sermon series commenced. Every day, he used to deliver a sermon for two hours in the evening.”

Reunion

After the Reunion, in one of his speeches in the U.S., in



Washington DC, he recounts how he came to reunite with the Catholic Church. He states, “We have to try hard to solve the problems of the Christian brethren who stand separated from the Catholic Church. We should help organizations that work as missionaries towards the purpose of the Reunion of churches... We should humbly implore our heavenly Father, the Mother of God, and St Peter and St Paul. Until the prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ that, ‘I ask not only on behalf of these but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they all may be one, as we are one’ is fulfilled, we should fervently pray for it.”

Speeches, Writings

From an early age, Archbishop Mar Ivanios was a great speaker who could intricately weave Biblical imagery with the liturgical prayers seamlessly with great prowess. His speeches are seeped in this deep Biblical spirituality. One must only glance at his preserved speeches to see how many and how apt the scriptural references he uses in his *speeches*. He was famous while in *Mundanmala* for giving long retreat speeches with in-depth *Scriptural* imagery, especially well attended during Holy Week. He published many books and articles about Scripture, including “*Bible stories, three volumes, Thiruvalla, A guide to the Malankara Sanyasa and Blossoms of Meditation.*” A brief perusal through the Blossoms of Meditation, we can see that Mar Ivanios did not just know Sacred Scripture from an academic standpoint, he knew the Scripture on a more intimate level. His familiarity with the word of God is seen in that every meditation is richly rooted in the Bible. Mar Ivanios did not just know Scripture in his mind; he knew it in his heart.

Learning Hebrew

Throughout his life, Mar Ivanios was known as a man with great powers of concentration. It is noted that during a storm, he was “Sitting in a chair, he was reading and learning from the *Hebrew* grammar text in front of him.” Despite this early interest, it was not until later that he could learn this language of Sacred Scripture. While Archbishop Mar



Ivanios was visiting New York, he began to show the first manifestations of the illness that would eventually take his life. Cardinal Spellman came to visit him and admonished him to take a rest. “The Archbishop was extremely tired, but he smiled as he replied, ‘Thank you.’ I cannot think of going to a hospital and doing nothing there. I should like your Grace to do me a favor. Please send me a book in Hebrew, and I shall spend my time in bed learning Hebrew. Learning Hebrew was one of *his great desires yet unfulfilled*. Mainly because he did not have the time for it... He spent five weeks there.”

Why was this such a great desire? Because he ached to read the Scripture as it was written. He strove to provide accurate and up-to-date translations of the Scripture and worked tirelessly to serve the spiritual needs of his flock.

Death

In his final message to all the churches, he states, “May all of us, you, me and all who have gone before us be able to hear the beautiful and consoling voice of God Almighty who will say. “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” and enjoy the deep and precious things of eternity “unseen by the human eye and unknown to man’s heart.”

To Summarize, Mar Ivanios maintained a close relationship with the Scripture his whole life, and it profoundly affected his spirituality and his ministry and helped to inspire many.

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Chapter 20

The Prayer of Dedication

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Lord, we are yours, set apart for you. We have dedicated ourselves to do your will. Loving Father, teach us to love you with our whole heart, and mind and with all our strength. Teach us to shun all selfishness and to give us totally to you. Teach us to love, as you deserve, to give and not to count the cost, to fight and not to heed the wounds, to toil and not to seek for any reward; for, doing your adorable will alone shall be our reward. May we live and glorify you Lord, with the life that you have graciously granted us in your bountiful love. Amen.

This Prayer of Dedication by the Servant of God, Mar Ivanios, owes its roots to the history of the Malankara Church. A better understanding of the Malankara Syrian Catholic Church is mandatory to comprehend the full meaning of the prayer, which is not complete without learning about Reunion.

The restlessness experienced in the Malankara Church for the last five centuries out of unfortunate misunderstandings followed by multiple divisions, power struggle, disputes over property, and hatred among the church leaders found a solution in the event of Reunion. The



movement to reunite with the Catholic Church became successful on September 20, 1930. This was undoubtedly a monumental achievement and a result of many years of relentless efforts. And this is etched in golden letters in the history of the Malankara Church. This was also the answer to the persistent search of solution to the quest of many bishops, clergy and the faithful of great nobility to end the restlessness of the Church. In his pastoral letter dated September 2020, Baselios Cardinal Cleemis Catholicos writes, “The sighs of financial disputes, grabbing of properties and the hatred in the mother Church led Mar Ivanios to uphold the stability of true faith, dedication and unity in the Church. His determination to give up positions and financial benefits for the sake of the acquisition of God was the historical lesson of this Reunion.” Mar Ivanios realized spiritual awakening as the only solution to the problems in the Church.

The prayer of dedication by Mar Ivanios is found in his autobiography, *Girideepam*, which he might have composed in the wake of the crisis and turbulence in his Church. His aim was to achieve the spiritual awakening through empowering the Church through evangelization and Gospel witness. In view of the freedom of evangelization, he found *Sannyasa* in Malankara Church, and later, he led the Malankara Church to reunite with the Catholic Church. Therefore, the essence of this prayer lies in the spirituality of Bethany *sannyasis* and *sannyasinis* and the Malankara Catholic Church.

A close analysis of this prayer brings out a crystal-clear proclamation of the Christian faith. Thus, this prayer could be perceived as a theological capsule of the Lord’s Prayer, and Ten Commandments. This prayer consists of nine verses - biblically based, theologically sound and beautifully ordered. It is an authentic prayer of a disciple, a Christian, who has confidence that he/she is called by God and is set apart for the work of God.

The prayer:

1. Lord, we are yours, set apart for you.
2. We have dedicated ourselves to do your will.
3. Loving Father, teach us to love you with our whole heart, and mind and with all our strength.



4. Teach us to shun all selfishness and to give us totally to you.
5. Teach us to love, as you deserve.
6. Teach us to fight and not to heed the wounds.
7. Teach us to give and not to count the cost.
8. Teach us to toil and not to seek for any reward; for, doing your adorable will alone shall be our reward.
9. May we live and glorify you Lord, with the life that you have graciously granted us in your bountiful love. Amen.

The first verse is the title of this prayer. The second verse is a prayer of dedication. The next five verses are of five steps of training in view of disciplining one in grace. The eighth verse is the result of this prayer. And the ninth verse is a statement of satisfaction.

The first verse has two parts, ownership and co-responsibility: ownership as the children of God and co-heirs to the eternal life and co-responsibility with God for the salvation of the world. Christ, the unique way of salvation, makes Himself present before us in the Church. The salvation offered by Jesus Christ is active on our planet earth through the Church. Through this verse, Mar Ivanios expresses that we belong to God as He offered us divine sonship through Christ. The title verse also proclaims one's faith as one enters into conversation with God. Jesus saved us from the bondage of sin, death, and Satan and gave us the freedom to call God Abba, Our Father. We have been adopted as God's children. This is true freedom – the freedom of the children of God. Paul writes in Romans 8:17, "We are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs of Christ." And what is the mission of the children of God? We are set apart by God in order for Him to use us as His instruments for communicating the fruits of salvation to the people.

The second verse reminds God's children that they are to seek the will of God forever. It is a statement of dedication, a meaningful submission to the will of God. This verse is associated with the ninth verse and together makes a meaningful platform of Lord's Prayer within this prayer. Jesus teaches that for a fruitful conversation with God, we have to give ourselves into the will of God, and we do it for the greater



love and glory of God. This kind of dedication is present in Mother Mary and Jesus. At the annunciation, Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). Right before his arrest at the Mount Olives, in his extreme agony, Jesus prayed, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me, yet, not my will but yours be done” (Luke 22:42). Giving oneself is an essential prerequisite for a good prayer.

The next five verses lead us through a spiritual journey, a pilgrimage of five steps of training based on the Ten Commandments. This prayer resembles the prayer of King David in Psalm 86:11, “Teach me your ways, O Lord that I may walk in your truth.” These are five appeals of training to build our life in the grace of God, as the Apostle John proclaimed that we might grow in “grace upon grace” (John 1:16).

The first training in verse three is based on the first part of the Ten Commandments: the love of God. We read in Deuteronomy 6:5-9: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” Mar Ivanios wanted to build the spirituality of the Malankara Catholic Church upon the Commandments God handed over to humanity through Moses and perfectly revealed in his only begotten Son Jesus Christ.

The next four steps of training are of the love of the neighbour, the second half of the Ten Commandments. The love of God is only complete through loving the neighbour. In other words, the love for others is the concrete physical expression of the love of God in the world.

The second training in the fourth verse is on selfishness that stands in our way towards God. We have to shun our natural tendency to do things for ourselves. St John, in his first letter, writes, “Beloved, let us love one another because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God” (1 Jn. 4:7).

The third training in the fifth verse is on serving God. To render



fruitful service in this world, we must make our plans comply with what God deserves. For Mar Ivanios, serving God makes sense only in the acquisition of God (cf. *Girideepam* 61). He writes, “Good deeds come out of only good people.” (*Girideepam* 59). That reminds us of the idiom, “no one gives what he does not have.”

The fourth training in the sixth verse is about evangelization. The proclamation of the Gospel is the fundamental mission of the Church. Mar Ivanios equates evangelization to warfare where soldiers fight to win. He prays, “Father, train us to fight for you without heeding the wounds.” He saw the ultimate goal of Reunion to the Catholic Church as the freedom for evangelization, freedom to preach the Gospel to the whole of India and to the ends of the world. In his autobiography, he writes of his intense desire that God may empower him and his disciples to assimilate the sufferings for the Gospel, if needed, even to leave one’s people and land (*Girideepam* 59-60).

The last training in the seventh verse is on emptying oneself at any cost, a complete surrender to the will of God. It is *Kenosis*: emptying of one’s own will and becoming entirely receptive to God’s divine will. It reminds us of the call of Abraham in Genesis 12:1. “The Lord said to Abraham, go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you,” a vocation to unknown. To discipline oneself is not an easy task; it costs a lot of pain. The letter to Hebrews teaches, “Discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Heb. 12:11). This process has two steps; transforming oneself to a ‘zero’ state where one can reinvent and refill his/her empty self with the providence of God. The spirituality Mar Ivanios followed in his life was withdrawing himself from everything worldly and moving through the God-led path.

The eighth verse encompasses the reward of this prayer. Through this training in the grace of God, we come to the fulfillment of this prayer. The reward is nothing other than our confidence in doing God’s will. Confidence in Christian life is like two-way traffic. On one side, we have the confidence that we are right and just because we are guided by the will of God. And on the other side, we have the confidence



that if we are wrong, we are willing to be corrected by the grace of God. Once St. Paul appealed to the Lord for a favour in 2 Cor. 12:9; however, the Lord consoled him, suggesting building confidence in the grace of God. The Lord said, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.”

Finally, the ninth verse reflects the concluding statement of the Lord’s Prayer, “Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, now and forever.” It is the Church’s confidence and satisfactory response to the Lord’s Prayer. Likewise, this prayer renders a reminder of human responsibility. Living an active, genuine life on earth is a primary responsibility of the human person. It is the first ordinance to humanity, we see in Genesis 1:28, to be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it. This co-responsibility we see in Jesus’ teaching of the Last Judgement in Mathew 25:31-46. And the prayer concludes with, “may we love and glorify you by living our life you have graciously granted us in your eternal love.”

This prayer encloses the spirituality of Mar Ivanios and that of the Malankara Syrian Catholic Church. Reciting this prayer with a right mind and heart, with total dedication to the will of God, with a willingness to be trained and corrected by the grace of God, can do wonders in our lives and in the world around us.



Mar Ivanios is a man for all times. He was an icon of such immeasurable stature that the Malankarites always take pride in having him as their guiding beacon. His ascetic life was filled with the prophetic voice from heaven; his heart was an overflowing fountain of divine vision. It was a heart which was also burning and melting spiritually. And from this heart sprouted and developed the Malankara Syrian Catholic Church.

