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Faithfull
Steward
of the
MALANKARA
CHURCH

JILU JACOB

**The Faithful
Steward of the
Malankara Church**

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Fr. Jose Mariadas OIC

Translated by Jilu Jacob



BP No. 145

Bethany Publications

Kottayam

2013

English

The Faithful Steward of the Malankara Church

By Fr. Jose Mariadas OIC

Translated by Jilu Jacob

First Published : 2013

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Published by : Bethany Publications
Kottayam - 686010

Printed at : Bethany Offset Printers
Kottayam - 686010
Ph : 0481- 2571355
Email: bethanyktm@gmail.com

Layout : Bethany Press, Kottayam

Cover Page design : Fingraph

Illustration : Benny James

Price : Rs. 60.00

Dedicated

To

The Young People of the Malankara Catholic Church

Residing in the Diaspora

Foreward

“*For where your treasure lies there also your heart will be*”
(Mt 6:21).

One of the first Malankara Christians to reenter to the Catholic communion with Servant of God Archbishop Mar Ivanios, Chacko Kileeleth, my great grandfather, was a man who found his treasure in heaven because he had entrusted his heart to God. As this book by Fr. Jose Mariadas reveals, these words of Saint Matthew’s Gospel ring true for the whole of Kileeleth Chacko’s life.

Many Catholics have a misconception that holiness is reserved for the clergy and those who enter religious life. But as the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* by the late Pope John Paul II reminds us, it is the vocation and mission of the lay faithful also to labor in the vineyard. To them too is entrusted Jesus’ call to “go out into the vineyard” (Mt 20:4). Decades before *Christifideles Laici*, Kileeleth Chacko grasped the importance of Jesus’ words and answered the call to labor in the vineyard. He remains an inspiration and model not only to me, his great granddaughter, but to all those who, by their baptism and entrance into the Church, are charged with the task of evangelization. In a world that has all but renounced faith in God, this short work on the life of the saintly Kileeleth Chacko offers a reminder that the vast vineyard that is the Kingdom of God is in dire need of laborers. Fr. Jose Mariadas has carefully and expertly captured the passion of a man who gave his life to laboring in Christ’s vineyard.

From Fr. Mariadas' biography, it is clear that Bethany Chackochan, as he was affectionately known, was not a man who worked half-heartedly for the Church. Recognizing that he was more than just a laborer, but also an extension of Christ in the world, Bethany Chackochan gave his life to the Lord and the Church wholeheartedly. He lived the words of Christ, "I am the vine, you are the branches..." (Jn 15:5). As evidenced by the many failings and sufferings he endured, he experienced the necessary pruning that comes from belonging to the Vine. Rather than despairing, my great grandfather saw these actions as God's hand in his life. Convinced that God was directing him toward his purpose in life, Bethany Chackochan unstintingly left everything behind to labor for the Kingdom.

Reading Fr. Mariadas' work offered me the chance to spend time with the memories of this man and to reflect on his life. As a young person striving to grow in my faith and to live and work for the Lord, I am encouraged by the untiring dedication and firm faith of my great grandfather. His life of humble obedience and submission to the will of God matches that of even the greatest saints. Truly, his determination to follow God's will over his own sets before us a model that we, as the faithful, can admire in our own journey to discover the fullness of life with Christ.

As you read these pages, I hope and pray that you too will be inspired by his witness so as to discover how the Lord is living and moving in your life. I pray that you too will heed the call of the Lord to "go out into the vineyard" and that your heart finds rest in God, for the treasures of the heavenly Kingdom are beyond compare.

Jilu Jacob
(Great Granddaughter of Kileeleth Chacko)

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1

WHY A BOOK ABOUT KILEELETH CHACKOCHAN?

A peek into history reveals that many lives are sacrificed in the development of institutions. Yet, those who reap the advantages of the back-breaking labor of these successful institutions rarely remember the diligent efforts of those who had gone before them. When, and if, they are remembered, it is in a formal ceremony that fails to capture the essence and soul of the people upon which the foundations were built. Perhaps a wreath is placed at their memorial, a commemorative seminar is organized, or a statue is unveiled. These methods, while acknowledging their efforts, remain distant from the life of these admirable pioneers. Many times, the loved ones of these faithful warriors are left struggling to make ends meet, a point that rarely comes up in such impersonal settings. When the leaders of such institutions prefer to display their commitment in formal ceremonies, a question arises. Is it not the responsibility of later generations to capture the service and self-sacrifice of the forefathers who toiled for these institutions? Is not their responsibility to ensure that their roles are not forgotten?

The Malankara Catholic Church has been late in doing justice to the remembrance of Sri. Kileeleth Chackochan, one of the five sons of the Reunion Movement. Now, as the Reunion Movement of the Syro Malankara Catholic Church completes 83 years we have the duty and honor of breathing new life into old memories for the inspiration and reflection of future generations.

The role of the first five members of the Reunion Movement and Malankara Catholic Church, suggests the divine hand of God carefully orchestrating its occurrence. The five men included an archbishop (Archbishop Mar Ivanios) an Episcopa (Bishop Mar Theophilos), a priest (Fr. John Kuzhimepurath O.I.C.), a deacon (Dn. Alexander - later Fr. Seraphion O.I.C.) and a layman (Sri. Chacko Kileeleth). The first five members of the reunion represented the five levels of the Church existent at the time, displaying the Church in its fullness.

The laity is a vital and integral part of the Church and their role and participation in the life of the Church is one that is given much significance and attention. The Malankara Church can proudly claim that even at the germinating stages of the re-union movement, the laity was well represented. In fact, God had carefully ordained Sri. Chacko Kileeleth for this purpose.

It is essential that the individuality and the simplicity of his life be made known to the newer generations of Malankara Catholics. Who was he? Why is his name specially mentioned as a layman? What were his contributions to the Malankara Catholic Church? Till now, there has not been proper mention or any writings about the life of this man, Sri. Chacko Kileeleth. In truth, who would find it interesting to write about a simple man who felt no

need to project his name or efforts to the high authorities and office-bearers of the Church?

Even before the Malankara Church was developed enough to promote lay organizations of the Church, Sri. Chacko had commanded the respect, cooperation and love from the laity by virtue of his dedication to the Church, leaving no thought in his mind for self-attainment or selfishness. Hence, when the foremost lay member of the Malankara Church withdraws silently behind the curtain at his time, remaining unknown to the younger generations of the Church, a verse from the Holy Bible comes to mind; “So should it be with you. When you have done all you have been commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants; we have done what we were obliged to do.’”¹ As far as Sri. Chacko Kileleth, who lived this ideal, was concerned, his life itself was a pilgrimage to the service of God. His growth from an ordinary lay member to Manager Chacko, and subsequently to Bethany Chackochan and one of the first five members of the Reunion Movement, personifies the image of a flame that burns brightly and dies with the candle. Such was his love for the Church; the way he had chosen for himself was one of self-mortification and spiritual development.

If Sri. Chacko Kileleth was so industrious and diligent, why did he die in poverty? Why was his purse empty although he had sufficient contacts and influence among the higher authorities of the Church? Why did his children feel the burden of poverty? Perhaps these answers can be discovered in realizing that his life and principles were totally different from what we see today. Surely, we can easily call to mind many who properly utilized their position and contacts among the socio-religious realms to acquire a comfortable lifestyle for themselves and their progeny. So why was not Sri. Chacko Kileleth one among those men, instead living the life of an ascetic? His unique nature and choice of poverty is

one that is noteworthy against the many possible opportunities for profit-making and self-gain. Instead of milking the cow that is the Church for his embellishment, he chose to feed it. Such was the desire of the man that was Sri. Chacko Kileeeth.

To experts in the fields of practical and effective politics and social service Sri. Chacko may appear inefficient and rather foolish- a man who was blind to the opportunities in front of him. On the contrary, he was a man with a set of personal principles who never yielded to the temptations of vested interests and never sought monetary benefits for the service he had rendered to the church. He willfully relinquished all such chances, marking him an endangered species among men who scoffed at such ideals.

As the unknown realms of his life are explored, the laity of the Malankara Church have a unique opportunity to come to know, love and cherish the life and values of this humble, but influential man

1 Luke 17:10



2

THE HISTORY OF THE KILEELETH FAMILY

The ancient port city, now called Kuravilangad, is well-known as the home of most of the ancient Christian families. The forefathers of Sri.Chacko Kileeleth belonged to the “Kali Illam’ and they embraced Christianity during the period of its introduction of in India. A few members of this family moved to Kayamkulam and became members of the Kadeesha Church. Over time, and as a result of vernacular changes, the family name “Kali Illath’ evolved to “Kileeleth”.

Sri. Chacko’s parents were Sri. Geervarghese Kileeleth and Andamma, the eldest daughter of Sri. Chacko Panicker. Sri. Chacko Panicker’s relationship as paternal uncle to Mar Ivanios would later play a small role in Sri. Chacko Kileeleth’s life. The three children of Geevarghese and Andamma were Geevarghese Cherian, Geevarghese Chacko and Mariamma Geevarghese. The middle child, namely, Sri. Geevarghese Chacko (K. G. Chacko), later known as Bethany Chackochan, is the source of inspiration for this book.

Sri. Chacko Kileeleth was born on October 29, 1888. As a child, Sri. Chacko never experienced the comforts of an affluent ancient family. Due to the death of his father, Sri. Geevarghese, at a very young age, Sri Chacko never spent much time in his paternal home. Shortly after his father's death, the family moved to his mother's paternal home, the Panicker Veedu in Mavelikara, where Sri. Mathai Panicker welcomed his grieving sister and her three children.

As was the custom of that time, Sri.Chacko got married at the young age of 10. God had chosen Annamma, of the Kuttiyil



family of Mullikulangara, a village near Mavelikara, to be his partner and “help-mate.” At the age of seven, she was joined in matrimony to Sri. Chacko, simultaneously promising to share the crosses that he would bear throughout his life.

At this time, Andamma, Sri. Chacko’s mother found it nearly impossible to secure a future for her son. She was overwhelmed by the dark, bleak future which awaited her son. She was left with very little money and no resources to obtain for her son a way to move forward in his life. Yet, she trusted in God, and throughout the years prayed intensely for the well-being of her son and his wife. Her prayers proved powerful, as the Almighty God, who had been with the Israelites, as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, was beside Sri. Chacko. God, through the pitiful state of his childhood years, was preparing Chackochan to undertake a great mission. “He takes away every branch in me that does not bear fruit, and everyone that does he prunes so that it bears more fruit.”¹ The entire life of Sri. Chackochan reveals the pain of purging followed by an abundant fruitfulness.

1 John 15:2



“I should be in the hands of Jesus as is clay in the hands of a potter”

Archbishop Mar Ivanios O.I.C

3

A RAY OF LIGHT IN TOTAL DARKNESS

Many times, when we feel that life is full of darkness, we turn to fervent and honest prayer, eagerly awaiting God's providential plan. Chackochan's mother went through a similar experience and was able to witness the providential hand of God slowly molding her son's life.

Deacon Sri. P.T. Geevarghese (later Archbishop Mar Ivanios) was at the time a student at the M.D. Seminary School in Kottayam. After successfully completing his studies, Pulikkottil Bishop Mar Dionysius decided that this intelligent young man should serve the Church in a greater way. The Mavelikara parish (to which Sri. Chackochan belonged) and Fr. Thariathu (Panicker Family) also approved this decision and sent a formal recommendation letter for this purpose. Thus, on January 9th, 1900, Sri P.T. Varghese was ordained Deacon by Pulikkottil Bishop Mar Dionysius. Later, under the direction of Bishop Pulikkottil, he joined the C.M.S. College, Kottayam to continue his studies for another 2 years.

During that time, he lived at the Kottayam Old Seminary where Bishop Pulikkottil assigned the Deacon the room adjacent to that of Rev. Vattasseril.

It was during these years that the clear intervention of God in Sri. Chachochan's life took place through the course of several events. Smt. Andamma, very concerned for the future of her son Sri. Chackochan, visited Deacon Geevarghese at Kottayam. She hoped that her cousin would be able to find a way out for her son. However, the Deacon could not simply act; he had fears of being accused of favoritism towards his relatives in using his contacts, influence or position. Yet, Chackochan's mother was persistent, visiting the Deacon regularly in earnest expectation of a favorable decision. Unfortunately, she would always leave upset and in tears. Bishop Pulikkottil, witnessing her visits and tearful departures, enquired about Smt. Andamma. After learning about her situation, the Bishop summoned Deacon Geevarghese and suggested that



some assistance could be provided. He told the Deacon, “After all, Chackochan belongs to your family. He should be engaged somehow. You will be rewarded by him somehow.” Later events in the lives of Chackochan and Deacon Geevarghese would reveal the foresight and prophetic nature of Bishop Pulikkottil’s words.

Bishop Pulikkottil was very pleased with Sri. Chackochan’s smartness and excellent character. He obtained a ½ acre of land and a small house in Kottayam for Chackochan, to which the elder brother of Chackochan’s father and his wife would later move and settle.

Some might suggest that the destitution of Chackochan during his teenage years seemed helpless and hopeless. But perhaps, it allowed more clearly for the divine plan of God to be revealed, as his presence in Kottayam proved to be instrumental in the later events of his life. Chackochan might have sung, like King David, “The LORD is my shepherd; there is nothing I lack. In green pastures he makes me lie down; to still waters he leads me; he restores my soul. He guides me along right paths for the sake of his name.” (Psalms 23:1-3)



4

FROM KILEELETH CHACKO TO MANAGER CHACKOCHAN

Why was Kileeleth Chackochan commonly referred to as ‘Manager Chackochan?’ The answer and story can be found in the position he held as the Manager at the M.D. Seminary High School, one of the best chapters in his life.

Deacon P. T. Geevarghese went to Madras to pursue his degree studies. After acquiring his degree, he was directed by Bishop Pulikkottil to continue onwards to obtain an M.A degree. It was only after completing this in 1907 that Deacon Geevarghese returned to Kottayam. Upon his return and well qualified with an M.A degree, both Bishop Pulikkottil and Fr. Vattasseril (soon after ordained by Mar Abdulla Patriarch of Antioch as Bishop Mar Dionysius) decided to appoint Deacon P. T. Geevarghese as the Principal of the M.D. Seminary High School.

At the time, the principal of the school was Sri. Edavazhikal E. M. Philipose M.A.B.L, an eminent lay man of the Jacobite

Church. He had been struggling to pay decent wages to the teachers, as the fees collected from the students and available government grants simply did not cover the costs. Before his resignation, he is noted saying “...I was wondering how I can transfer this burden to someone else,” (The Secret Box (Rehasya Peedakam) of the Malankara Church, E. M. Philipose, 97). The headmaster at the time, Sri. K. M. Mammen Mappillai was expecting to be appointed as principal with the resignation of Sri. E. M. Philipose. He was strongly opposed to the appointment of Deacon P. T. Geevarghese as the principal and is recorded to have said “Although I was compelled to be silent due to several reasons at the severe blow to my sense of esteem, the pain was searing my mind for long” (Malayala Manorama Weekly, Vol. I, no. 25, page 17).

It was into this hostile and troublesome scenario that Deacon P. T. Geevarghese stepped in as principal. Later that year, on August 15, 1908, Deacon P. T. Geevarghese was ordained as priest at the Parumala Seminary by the Catholicos Mar Osthathius Bava and Bishop Pulikkottil. As the first amongst the priests to obtain an M. A. degree, he became affectionately known as M. A. Achen.

M. A. Achen had visions of the M. D. Seminary High School being elevated to a College, but was discouraged by the financial constraints and hostile situations. He realized that he needed a loyal and trustworthy man to help him fulfill his dream. This person had to have the ability to raise and save the school’s money, as well as manage the property around the school. Achen hoped to maintain proper discipline in the school and boarding so it would be known as a model school.

In his search for a suitable person, Achen noticed an industrious, honest, and diligent 20 year old young man who loved the Church. It was none other than Sri. Kileleth Chackochan. Without a second thought, he appointed Chackochan as the manager of the M. D. Seminary High School. For the next ten years, until 1918, Chackochan commendably served as the School Manager, earning him the familiar alias “Manager Chackochan.” With the diligent Chackochan by his side, M. A. Achen strengthened and elevated the school as one of the best schools in Kerala.



“Difficulties and sacrifices will be there in a life being lived for Jesus”

Archbishop Mar Ivanios O.I.C

5

A FEW MEMORIES AS MANAGER

More than simply an employee of the school, Manager Chackochan was a bosom friend and helper in M.A. Achen's dreams for the school. This was evident in the way he approached his work- it was not merely a job that had specific times and limits, but one to which he gave his whole heart and being. Chackochan was essential in scheduling Achen's busy life in addition to the responsibilities of managing the school. (*“Archbishop Mar Ivanios,”* Fr. Thomas Inchakalodil, page 75). Still his duties did not end there- in one incident he even went to so far as to protect Achen, bringing danger to his own life! This small incident is described by Archbishop Mar Ivanios, in his autobiography *‘Girideepam.’*

“Another day, I was in sound sleep in the northern most room of the M.D. Seminary bungalow. There had been an earlier incidence of robbery, so we had started the practice of assigning someone to sleep in the room. On that evening, the person assigned

to sleep in the room was Deacon Cheppattu Philipose, a priest residing at “Bethania.” All those in the school compound were in a deep sleep. Even the sound of a leaf moving was not to be heard. Total, deep silence. Somehow, four or five thieves managed to dislodge the latch of the tightly closed window. All of them entered and saw me lying there in deep sleep. One of the thieves had a larger chopper in his hand, while another held a sack. I was in such deep sleep that I was not aware of this intrusion. My life was truly in their hands. They had the chance to sever my head in a single blow, and they knew what to do if the deacon woke up. The man with the chopper in his hand moved closer to my bed. He looked at others for a sign from them and raised the chopper in his head. My time for definite death was at hand. He would have beheaded me had his friends kept silent, but one of them suggested that he should do it only if I awoke. Two of them remained close, watching attentively in case I woke up. Meanwhile, the others collected the chests and books that were available. (These were all details that I heard from them later). Somehow, when the deacon woke up, he was aware of two people standing close to his cot, and others moving about collecting all available items in the room. He closed his eyes as soon as he opened them and felt that I must have been killed. It is no wonder that he fainted at the sudden sight, this late at night. He remained there as if dead and did not get up or cry aloud. Perhaps he wanted to cry out, but no sound escaped his mouth. Surely, if at any moment he had made a sound, both of us would have been killed. It was the abundant grace of God that saved us from certain death. Through his half-closed eyes, the deacon felt sure that the intruders had left and quickly woke me up. He stammered out the events that he witnessed. I tried to open the door to call up the boarding manager, but found that the

doors were locked from the other side. He managed to get through the window and found a man fleeing with a large box. He cried, “get him” and ran after him. As he ran a few yards, he found the others running away. One of them threw down a box containing Syriac books and ran faster, but the others had a suitcase full of books with them. They ran down the road along the north side of the M.D. Seminary and passed the Nagampadom bridge. The manager ran after them, crying “thief, thief.” He finally managed to grab hold of one of the thieves near the Arathooty bridge. The manager did not know what to do or how to handle this man and remained there, shaking all over. The thief realizing that the



manager could do nothing except tremble threw him down and ran away along the Kurishu Palli lane. No one knew where he went. We found that later that the thieves had entered the seminary building after locking all the doors from the outside. I myself could come out of the room only after the door of my room was opened by Fr. Joseph, who was residing in the seminary as a deacon.”

The M.D. Seminary High School continued to work despite many internal troubles for about four years. At that point, there was a small development. A conference of Christian Students in India was held in 1912 at Serampore, near Calcutta, under the leadership of Dr. John Arnot, an American. Bishop Vattasseril Mar Dionysius was invited for the conference and brought along with him a group of Christian students and M.A. Achen. Dr. Howells, the principal of Serampore College at the time, was attracted by M.A. Achen’s scholarship, knowledge and mastery of the English language and felt that such a scholar would be a great asset for the Serampore Theological College. He extended an invitation for M.A. Achen to become a professor there, which Achen then placed in the hands of the Bishop. Dr. Howells presented his requirement straight to the Bishop to which he replied that this was a commendable suggestion but one that faced many hindrances. He replied that he would need more time to think the matter over before a final reply. Even after they returned to Kerala, Dr. Howells continued to press the matter by writing letters to the Bishop. His persistence was rewarded, as in 1913, M.A. Achen, with the blessings of his teacher, Bishop Vattasseril Mar Dionysius, proceeded to Serampore to fill his post as a professor.

Although it appeared to be a great loss for the M.D Seminary High School, it became a great blessing in its own way.

The school, which was under great financial strain, found a new source of income; M.A. Achen, was able to collect a commendable amount of money that he then spent on the school (*Girideepam*, pp. 50 & 57). During this time, Manager Chackochan continued toiling for the school, having set aside his personal comforts. These unselfish efforts of Chackochan were able to somewhat fill the void of M.A. Achen's absence.

The toil of this married young man, who continuously left his family for an institution that belonged to a community, without a thought for proper remuneration was not left unnoticed by Bishop Vattesseril Mar Dionysius. Any other young man would have given a primary role towards his duties as a father and husband, and Bishop felt that perhaps this dedication for the community was simply too much. At one point, he invited Chackochan to his room. Their conversation on that occasion was later shared by Manager Chackochan to his sons. His second son, Sri K.C. Chacko remembers it thus:

Bishop: Chackochan, you have been looking after the school and its hostel for quite a few years. What have you earned for your family? What assets do you have?

Chackochan: Nothing so far, Bishop

The Bishop gazed at the unselfish young man with tears in his eyes and said, "Chackochan, even those who collected the dry leaves of the coconut palms at the school compound have turned rich. But yet you have not earned anything.....?".

The Bishop, with tears of happiness in his eyes, wholeheartedly blessed the young man and remarked, "Your home is like Bethany, and your asset is Jesus. Let it be like that. Lazarus

of Bethany had only Jesus as his friend. Let your friend also be Jesus”. The Bishop’s words were somewhat prophetic as the course of events over the next few years brought Chackochan the nickname of ‘Bethany Chackochan’.

Bishop Vattasseril Mar Dionysius, touched by this young man’s service, decided that he was worthy of a way of income to support his family. The Bishop summoned Chackochan at a later date and told him, “I have saved an amount for my foreign tour. I shall give you a part of it. You should start a business with it. You are married, unlike the priests here. Hence you should not live here with them. You have your family and you are meant to support them. It is your duty.” Thus, the Bishop gave a gift of fifteen sovereigns, in consideration of his unselfish service towards the community. In those days, each sovereign was worth 10 British rupees.

With the proceeds of this gift, Chackochan started a printing press with a treadle. He was able to print Church publications, Holy Quorbono books, prayer books, and church notices. While maintaining a business, he managed to live his life in service and with an excellent relationship towards the Church. Before further expanding his business, the Church called him back for service. Without hesitation, he left his printing business and rallied after the Church.



6

‘BETHANY CHACKOCHAN’

The lives of Archbishop Mar Ivanios and of Sri.Chackochan Kileeleth were closely intertwined. Just as any alterations in sound are reflected in its echo, each change in the life of the Bishop was reflected in the life of Chackochan.

While he was at Serampore, Mar Ivanios watched the predicament of his Church from the outside. In fact, he was able to better assess the situation as an onlooker. The Malankara Church was divided into two factions, namely, *Methran Kakshi* and *Bava Kakshi*. The on-going enmity between these two factions was crossing lines and becoming a counter witness to the people. The Church started losing its spiritual energy as the ecclesiastical leadership busied itself with litigations against each other. In general, the Church lost all its vitality and reduced itself to a mere institution with greed for power and money. None of the Church leaders had time for the edification of the Church. M. A. Achen was constantly burdened by these matters and fervently sought a

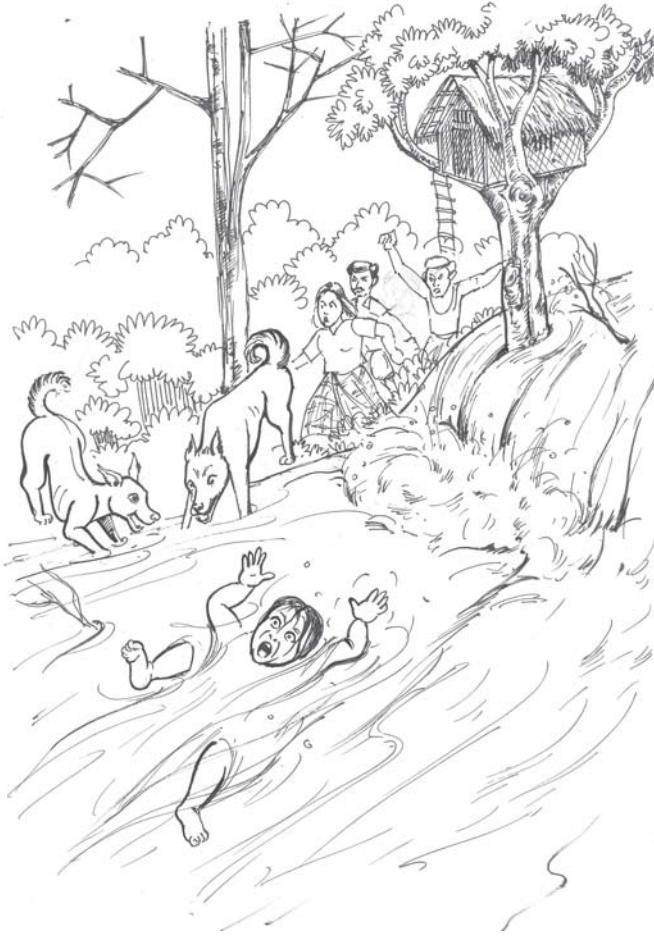
way out. Proposing that if the Church had more well-educated young men these petty matters would decrease, he took more than 50 men with him to the Serampore Theological College, providing them with an excellent education. He also considered starting a missionary society so as to impart life to the dying missionary efforts of the Church. The Bethany Missionary Society at Serampore was started as an experiment after much prayer and deliberation to enliven the missionary zeal of the Church.

Later, in 1919, with the blessings of Bishop Vattasseril and the cooperation of eminent members of the laity, he established an Ashram at Perunad near Ranni. He purchased 400 acres of forest land with the help of influential well-wishers and Sri. Mathai Panicker, his own brother. The responsibility to construct the Ashram was entrusted to Fr. Alexios, but it was clear that another person would have to work closely on this project. M.A. Achen was still at Serampore at the time, and Bishop Vattasseril and Fr. Alexios realized that none other than Sri. Kileeleth Chackochan would be suitable to take up this historical task. With his unselfish love for the Church and his diligent work, he would be the perfect man for the job.

No sooner than he was called, Chackochan departed for Perunad for the construction of the Ashram, leaving behind his press and its business. The job he was about to undertake was a difficult one. Perunad was a forest area, without proper roads and facilities for residence. Even emergency assistance was very difficult; the closest hospital and offices were far away and only reachable by foot. Yet, he was willing to work with Fr. Alexios to build up the Church.

The agreement was made to provide food and accommodation for the masons, carpenters and workers. Yet, in that land, no facilities were available for such purposes. Chackochan, concerned with these manners, called upon the assistance of his dedicated wife Annamma and his mother Andamma. Soon after, they joined Chackochan in the remote forest area named Mundan Mala, with two of the children (later Mr. K.C. Varghese Maruthoor and Rev. Sr. Semaha S.I.C). They selected a level area near the meeting place of the Kakkat and Pamba rivers and began living in a tree hut. While Chackochan sought after building materials for construction, the two women and children provided necessary food for the workers.

The location, at the confluence of the Kakkat and Pamba rivers, saw no scarcity of water. Instead, they faced a constant threat of flash floods. Unlike the gradual rise of water levels in a common flood, the usual rains in the forest area caused strong water flow, suddenly raising the water level and resulting in brutally strong currents. In one instance, both of the Chackochan's children were playing at the river bank when a flash flood came. They had come down from the tree-hut and were playing at the bank without anyone's knowledge. Their lives were saved by two dogs who had become the family pets. The dogs' loud barks alerted the workers who were able to save the children. It was the younger child, who was rather naughtier, who was in greater danger. A tragedy was avoided that day and the protecting hand of the Lord was with her, who had been called by God for His service. She later became the Mother General of the Bethany sisters as Sr. Semaha S.I.C.



By 1919, the Bethany Ashram buildings were completed. By that time, Bishop Mar Ivanios and his disciples returned from Serampore and the first members of Bethany Ashram were accommodated in the newly built buildings. Manager Chackochan and his family went back to their home, with the satisfaction that he had fulfilled the task entrusted to him. By virtue of this work and his further services and cooperation to the Bethany Ashram,

the name “Bethany Chackochan” fell firmly upon him. He was an established personality in the history of the Bethany Ashram.

Truly, Fr. Alexios had been given a huge investment in the unselfish efforts of Chackochan and his family. Few have considered the sacrificial part of this family, who toiled for the establishment of the “Bethany Ashram” that changed the history and very direction of the Malankara Church.



“...a man’s life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses”

(St. Luke 12: 15)

7

FAMILY LIFE

Bethany Chackochan followed and served Bishop Mar Ivanios as if he were a shadow, at times knowingly or unknowingly forgetting his family. After the construction for the Bethany Ashram was complete, God permitted him a chance to live with his family for some time. This period was a short interval in the life of Bethany Chackochan, who had offered his life in whole as a sacrifice for the benefit of the Church.

Using the land he had received as dowry, he had a house built in Thiruvalla, behind the present St. Mary's Residential School. He had considered selling the land to move away to another place, but his mother had not agreed. Perhaps his mother feared that his limitless love and service for the Church would jeopardize the family and what little they owned.

After 1919, he sold his property in Kottayam and using part of the proceeds, started a Rice Mill and an Oil Expeller unit at

Thiruvalla, near the Market landing. Yet, as God would have it, he was very engaged in Church matters and could not give adequate attention to his enterprises. He hired workers to run the mill and the provision store nearby. Still, Bethany Chackochan's stay in Thiruvalla was a retreat, back into his life as a family man. Yet in God's mysterious plan, his presence in Thiruvalla benefited the Church.

Bishop Mar Ivanios dreamed of reforming the Malankara Church through the edification of members of the Church. The Bishop felt the same pain for his church members as St. Paul did for his Jewish brothers who did not know Jesus. St Paul writes, "For I bear them record that they have zeal of God, but not according to the knowledge." (Romans 10:2). The founding of Mar Ivanios College and other educational institution was an answer to the need for greater "knowledge." His vision to impart this knowledge was also realized in Thiruvalla.

"Thirumoolapuram" near Thiruvalla was an undeveloped area at the time, a small village with few signs of civilization. The Kandathil family, an illustrious family, owned much of the property in this area. Today, the Balikamadom School stands on the land that they entrusted into the hands of Bishop Mar Ivanios. They were confident in the Bishop's ability and also realized that the development of the area would raise the value of all the land they owned. Previously, the Kandathil family had started a school for girls, but closed it down due to financial difficulties. Bishop Mar Ivanios eagerly took over that school and desired a residential school for girls.

He wanted to ensure a high standard of education and invited two European women, Ms. Holmes and Mrs. Brookesmith to manage the school. He became aware of these women through Mother Edith, whom the Bishop had invited for the training of the Bethany sisters. Of the two, Ms. Holmes had vast teaching experience at Oxford University and had filled the role of Headmistress for 30 years at the Queen Anne’s School, Caversham, England. With the help of Mother Edith, the two women provided invaluable service to the Bishop and Balikamadom School.

There are many others that claim the credit for the establishment and growth of the Balikamadom School, yet they are not supported by historical accuracy. The true unbiased facts are found in Chapter 4 of the book entitled “Mother Edith” written by Sr. Gertrude and published in 1964, in London, by M/sDarwen Finlayson Limited Publishing Company.

Once again, an initiative of Mar Ivanios would not have been complete without the efforts of Bethany Chackochan, who was called for the supervision of construction for the schools and hostels as well as the general management of the hostels. Chackochan, always seeing the responsibilities entrusted to him by the Bishop as a God-ordained missions, took them joyfully. Thus, he was able to establish close friendships with the European women working with the School, namely Mother Edith, Ms. Holmes and Felix Dorothy.

Around this time, Chackochan and Annamma had their third child, a baby girl. In the closeness of their friendship, Ms. Felix Dorothy expressed her desire that the girl be named ‘Dorothy’ at

her baptism. Generally, the child was to be named after her grandmother, in this case ‘Kunjanda,’ but Chackochan and his wife did not know how to refuse Ms. Dorothy’s suggestions. In the midst of the dilemma, he presented the matter to Bishop Mar Ivanios. The Bishop told him, “Chackochan, when the girl grows up, she may not like the old name ‘Kunjanda’; nor is the name ‘Dorothy’ familiar to our people. We may call her by the name ‘Mary’”. Hence she was baptized with the name “Dorothy Mary Kunjanda”. She officially had three names but was nicknamed Mariamma. Later, she grew up and married into the Srampikal family in Mithrakary.



If Chackochan had earned the name ‘Manager Chackochan’ in working for the M.D. Seminary High School and the name, ‘Bethany Chackochan’ while working for the Bethany Ashram, the name rewarded to his daughter was earned for his hard work at Balikamadom High School.

The Bethany sisters continued to work in the Balikamadom School until the Reunion in 1930. After the Reunion, the Bethany sisters decided to no longer teach at the school. It is sad that there are those who know the history and fame of the Balikamadom School, due to some unknown reason, willfully keep their silence.



“Lord, teach us to try to give, instead of to try to get”.

Archbishop Mar Ivanios O.I.C

8

MEMORIES OF THE BANKS OF MINERAL SANDS

From Alleppey to Chavara lies a long seashore famous for the mining of mineral sand. This area of land has been a long and lively discussion in political, social and industrial realms. Many throughout Kerala dream of the millions that are waiting to be gained in mining the mineral sand that attracts many foreign and indigenous industrial establishments to the area. So what possible connection could there be between Chackochan and mining of mineral sand?

With his inherent foresight and efficiency, Bethany Chackochan visualized a possibility for working with the mineral sands. After the establishment of the Balikamadam School, he had another period to look after his family and business interests. He hoped to establish a business that would exploit the abundant mineral wealth available in the seashores of Kerala. He planned to purchase 50 acres of land near Chavara in 1928, but knew his chances were slim. Many people had applied for the necessary

permit and had failed, yet Chackochan ventured ahead into this unknown territory.

During this time, the uncle of Sri Chithira Tirunal Maharaja was the heir of the Thiruvalla Paliakara Palace. Bethany Chackochan visited him and expressed his carefully devised plans for the business. Impressed by this man's efficiency and well defined plans, Sri Maharaja positively influenced Chackochan's process of obtaining the permit needed for mining of mineral sand. With the permit in hand, he registered his company with the name, "Christian Industrial Company Limited." He then sold company shares to raise the amount required to run the company. However, troubles were brewing and a consolidated opposition to the company was building up.

The opposition was steeped in the turbulent socio-communal situation of the time. The years 1924 to 1936 were filled with communal sensationalism and Communist thoughts which were disrupting the peaceful atmosphere of Kerala. The provocative speech of Sri. Jawaharlal Nehru at Payyannur at the 4th State Congress meeting caused a panic among the higher caste Hindus. Then in 1928, when Sri. Narayana Guru died, there was a strong fear among the Hindus that the Ezhava community would side with the Christians. These events characterized the sensationalism that created a very volatile situation in Kerala. In such a scenario, the very name, 'Christian Industrial Company Limited' roused murmurings among the opposition. He realized that his dreams of mining were blown away by the hot air currents of communist thought, and began returning the money that he collected from selling company shares. Yet, Chackochan never felt the loss of his dreams because his services were once again needed in the Church.

As the unification efforts of Bishop Mar Ivanios neared its goal, Chackochan returned to his work in the Church.

The failure in mineral sand mining was not an odd event in the life of Chackochan, who kept being called to different endeavors according to God's designs. He had a similar experience when he had closed down the printing press business in Kottayam.

These experiences confirmed his realization that his fate was invariably connected to the Church. He was convinced that God expected nothing less than his wholehearted service to the Church and its interests. His experience is reminiscent of Jonah, who proceeded to Tarsus in a ship against the will of God. Jonah was sent to Nineveh to preach the word of God. Instead, he went to Tarsus. On his way to Tarsus a great storm broke out in the middle of the sea. The ship was threatened to break up. The mariners threw cargo that was in the ship to the sea to lighten it but of no use. Then they cast lots, to know on whose account this calamity had come upon them. The lot fell on Jonah. When interrogated Jonah told them that he was fleeing from the presence of God and explained his whole story. Then they tossed him into the sea as he himself advised them and the sea became calm once again. A big fish swallowed him and after spending three days in the belly of this fish, on the third day it spewed Jonah on the shore of Nineveh where God wanted him to be. Chackochan had tried many times to lead his life in different ways, as his abilities and knowledge directed him. Yet at each turn, God brought him back to the Nineveh that is the Church. God had ordained him to be with the Church- it was his mission and call.

In another instance, when land was being bought for the Bethany Ashram at Mundan Mala near Ranni, Chackochan thought

it would be wise to buy land of his own nearby. An excerpt from Fr. Thomas Inchakalody sheds light on Chackochan's decision. "When Sri Mathai Panicker (brother of Bishop Mar Ivanios) and Sri. Chacko Kileeleth wrote to Serampore, the reply was like this: "None of you should have even a cent of land there or near about. All the land available there should be in the name of the Ashram. When someone goes ahead for the matter of God, He will look after all affairs." (Archbishop Mar Ivanios, pgs 146-147).

These are words the Chackochan lived by. Adhering to the advice of the wise Bishop, Chackochan, who had left his family in the hands of God, appeared very much foolish in the eyes of the world. However, Chackochan who wished to mine the mineral earth was led by God to mine good deeds in the shores of the unity of Churches.



“ He who has God as his asset and still seeks to gain something more, is covetous”.

Archbishop Mar Ivanios O.I.C

9

ON THE GOLDEN SHORES OF REUNION.

Over the years Bishop Mar Ivanios tried various ways to reform and edify the Malankara Church, yet none of his plans brought the peace and tranquility which he envisioned. His first plan, to send young men to famous universities in Serampore, Allahabad, Calcutta and Madras for higher education was fairly fruitful. Of the 50 candidates sent to Serampore, 13 were ordained priests and 6 were ordained Bishops. The Malankara Church is indebted to the Bishop for these young men who later became pillars of the Church. Bishop Mar Ivanios then led the efforts to start the Bethany order of monks. This brought a much needed spiritual enlightening to the Malankara Church, as if a lighted lamp was being placed on a mountain.

Yet despite these valiant efforts, the affinity for worldly gains and authority that plagued the Church was difficult to remove. This, along with the unexpected success of the infamous

“Vattippana Case” left the Malankara Orthodox Church rather intoxicated. At this point, it seemed unnecessary to pursue any solutions of permanent unification with the Universal Church. Bishop Vattesseril Mar Dionysius and the Catholicos Bava had entrusted Bishop Mar Ivanios to seek ways to be united with the Universal Church. However, in light of the success of the Vattippana case, all aims for reunion were left behind, rather conveniently.

Bishop Mar Ivanios, an ardent seeker of truth, was unwilling to withdraw from a truth that he was slowly recognizing. He decided to move forward in this path, even if it meant that he would stand alone. His prayer and deep studies resulted in the Reunion Movement, one of the greatest achievements the Church of the 20th century has witnessed. In order to join the Universal Church, Mar Ivanios and his followers left Mundan Mala and came to Vennikulam on August 20, 1930, empty-handed. It was another month before the formalities of the reunion process could be completed. During these days, the Bishop stayed at Thirumoolapuram while his followers stayed at Vennikulam.

The plan was to complete the formalities of reunion in the presence of Bishop Aloysius Maria Benzegar, the Bishop of the Quilon Diocese. On September 18th 1930, Fr. John Kuzhimeppurath O.I.C. and Deacon Alexander (later Fr. Seraphion O.I.C) reached Thirumoolapuram where Bishop Mar Ivanios was staying, for an unrelated purpose. Around that time, a car belonging to Sri. Oommen Melamparampil was sent to take Archbishop Mar Ivanios and Bishop Mar Theophilos to Quilon. Just as the car arrived, Sri. Chacko Kileeeth arrived in a car of his own.

Bishop Mar Ivanios took these occurrences to be a sign from God. A miniature representation of the official set-up of the Church was present, without any planning or manipulation on their parts. One representative from each of the different layers of the Church were present - an Archbishop, a Bishop, a priest, a deacon, and a lay member. Such an unforeseen representation turned out to be a blessing for the Malankara Church.



Archbishop Mar Ivanios immediately recognized the divine hand of God in the circumstance, as would befit such a holy man and said, “ Let the priest, deacon and manager get into the car; we shall go over to Quilon.” (ArchBishop Mar Ivanios, pg 445). At the Quilon Bishop’s house, they were engaged in prayer and devotions for two days. Then on September 20, 1930, the reunion process was formally completed.

Thus, Bethany Chackochan was hand-picked by God to be the first lay member of the Church. Thousands of laity followed after him to the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church, but the special privilege thus accorded to him was not left unnoticed. In turn, he continued to be faithful to God throughout his life, offering even more services to strengthen and facilitate growth of the Malankara Catholic Church.

Even today, many skeptics would like to see Chackochan's presence among the first five Church members as purely incidental. Perhaps, this rests in their lack of faith in the infinite programs and protections of God or in their ignorance about the theological foresight of Bishop Mar Ivanios.

The Second Vatican Council strongly mentions the “Spirituality of the laity as part of the Mission of the Church” (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* 4) and about the “Active part of the laity in the overall life of the Church” (*Gaudium et Spes* 43). From the very beginning of the Reunion Movement, the idea that the laity had a call “to perform their mission as a leavening agent in order to leaven the whole world in the spirit of Christ” (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* 2), was lived out. Here, we recognize that Bethany Chackochan was offered this blessed position to be a living witness of God's divine symbolism. Hence, his presence as a layman in the first physical step of the Reunion Movement should not be so easily dismissed as accidental and unworthy of remembrance. The deep meaning hidden in the incident, which is seemingly accidental, is as invaluable as the hidden secret of the kingdom of God. We are called to have the wisdom to recognize the spiritual history and legacy of the Malankara Church. The wisdom, discernment and foresight are a few of the qualities that make Archbishop Mar

Ivanios the greatest and holiest of personalities. His selection of a lay man to one of the first representatives of the Reunion Movement reveals his deep knowledge of Ecclesiology and the response of man who has accepted divine ordinance as the aim of his life. Truly, those who seek to suppress and hide the role of Chackochan as one of the first children of the Reunion Movement can only be viewed as foolish.



“Be proud in being Catholics. Let the purity of your life and good example be the light in the path of non-Catholics”

Archbishop Mar Ivanios O.I.C

10

STEWARD OF THE TRIVANDRUM ARCHDIOCESE

Following the suggestion of friend and well-wisher, Bishop Augustine Kandathil, the Archbishop shifted the headquarters of the archdiocese from Adoor to Trivandrum. Later events would prove that shifting to the city of Trivandrum, the capital of Kerala, would be a blessing to both the Church and the city.

Chackochan accompanied this move, and established himself near Trivandrum. The atmosphere of the Church after the Reunion strengthened Chackochan's spiritual vigor and he stepped forward as a full-time lay missionary for the Church, at times not even wasting precious moments for food and sleep.

As the archdiocese went through various growing pains, Chackochan firmly stood by with his honest and sincere effort. Always ready to help the Church, he was present to find locations for establishing churches, convents, Ashrams and other establishments of the Church. He also served as unofficial legal advisor in dealing with legal issues that arose in the Church. Late

Fr. Pachomios of Bethany Ashram was known to repeat this fact—that the land belonging to the Church and Ashram at Nalanchira was bought solely by Chackochan’s efforts. While many were searching for suitable land south of Trivandrum, only Chackochan had the foresight to consider other possibilities. He advised, “Father, many people will be visiting from the north of Trivandrum. When they come, we should provide facilities and places to rest to the north”. Archbishop found this argument valid and agreed to purchase the necessary land at Nalanchira for 1 *panam* (4 chakras) per cent. All the Church’s land in Nalanchira comes from this original deal.

After the establishment of the archdiocese, Chackochan wished to obtain land for the Church outside archdiocesan jurisdiction. When Chackochan insisted on purchasing land in places like Munnar, Bishop Mar Ivanios asked Chackochan: “Why should we purchase lands at such places like Munnar, Kanyakumari and Shamkumukhom?” Chackochan replied: “Bishop, when our priests desire to take rest from their busy schedules, they can go there!” Bishop lovingly patted him on his shoulder and remarked: “You are too talkative,” but soon after, he instructed Chackochan to purchase this land. Other bishops overhearing this conversation might have desired that they have such a faithful steward of the Church for their own. Perhaps this thought is what led Bishop Augustine Kandathil to half jokingly, half seriously ask the archbishop, “How much do you pay him?” Chackochan’s payment and reward, his deep love for the Church, was one given directly from God.

The Reunion Movement brought much enmity against Archbishop Mar Ivanios in the Malankara Church. There were

times when even the very life of the archbishop was in trouble. Chackochan, who loved the archbishop even more than his own life, was convinced that something had to be done. At one point, he became aware of a plot to take the archbishops life by using his personal driver. Immediately, he brought his nephew, Mr. Cherian Varghese, the son of his elder brother Geevarghese Cherian to be the Archbishop's driver and bodyguard. During that time, his nephew was profitably running a provision store at Ponkunnam. He dropped everything to serve, and continued as the driver of Mar Gregorios after the death of Archbishop Ivanios, until his own death in 1967. It is also interesting to know that one of the earlier priests of the Trivandrum Archdiocese was Fr. Zacharias Kileeleth, Sri Cherian's younger brother. He was ordained a priest on May 26, 1953 and died on September 11, 1985.



“Good deeds come out of only good people”.

Archbishop Mar Ivanios O.I.C

11

THE THIRUVALLA DIOCESE AND BETHANY CHACKOCHAN

Chackochan's efforts and service were not limited to the Trivandrum Archdiocese. His roots in Tiruvalla were never severed even throughout his time in Trivandrum. In the plot of land that he had received as dowry, he had built a house to settle down in. There was a time that he wished to sell this land, but his wife, Annamma's resistance, prevented him from doing so. Perhaps even this can be considered the blessing of the ThIruvalla diocese.

Bishop Mar Theophilos had a close and special affection for Bethany Chackochan, who he called 'Kunju Chackochan.' This close relationship led to many plots of land being purchased in Chackochan's name, as he was the attorney manager of the Church. Later Chackochan developed similar working relationships with both Bishop Mar Severios and Mar Athansios.

Thus, much of the Church's properties can be attributed to the work of Chackochan, such as the land where the present Pushpagiri Medical College is located. Fr. Pachomios, of the Bethany Ashram remembers Chackochan compelling Mar Severios to purchase as much land as possible within one mile of the Bishop's

House, so that all the Church's establishments would be centralized. Mar Severios expressed various doubts: who would look after these plots, would it be a dead investment, would the Church have the financial strength to purchase this much land, would the money be a better investment by remaining in the bank, and the like. Chackochan assuaged all of his doubts and obtained consent to purchase the necessary land. He purchased, developed and began cultivating the land. Chackochan's many drops of perspiration are rewarded today, as that land is home to the Medical College and Hospital, two proud establishments of the Tiruvalla diocese and Malankara Catholic Church

Chackochan's foresight, service mentality and efficiency in translating his ideas into reality were advantageous for the work of the Church. At points when these attributes turned worldly, God intervened, bringing Chackochan back to his dedication. One such incident occurred in Thiruvalla.

Bethany churches had been started by Archbishop Mar Ivanios as an independent institution. These Churches were neither under the jurisdiction of the Antiochean Patriarch nor under the jurisdiction of the Catholicos at Kottayam. They were under the direct jurisdiction of Mar Ivanios who was the Bishop of Bethany. One of these churches was located near the Tiruvalla *Pakuthi Kacherry*. Thinking that the re-union movement should have some material assets, having left Perunad empty-handed, Chackochan refused to hand over to the Orthodox Church this Bethany Church which had been established by Mar Ivanios. Yet, Mar Ivanios, upon hearing this, insisted that the Bethany Church be handed over, saying "Don't hold on to it, let them take it."



12

THIRUVALLA CATHEDRAL CHURCH AND BETHANY CHACKOCHAN

St. John's Cathedral in Thiruvalla stands proudly as a landmark and monument for the rapidly progressing city. The church beautifully represents an example of architectural symphony and the unique style of Kerala architectural tradition. Even more, the strong edifice symbolizes the solid presence of the Malankara Catholic Church in Thiruvlla. The history and first days of this church bear the stamp of Chackochan's service towards the Church.

The period following the reunion was a rather difficult period for the Malankara Church. It was nearly impossible to build a church. Building a church in those days required overcoming various oppositions, such as obtaining a permit from the Thiruvalla municipality. The Municipal chairman was Sri. K.M. Mamman Mapillai, the son of the elder brother of Sri. K. C. Mammen Mapillai who was the founder of the Malayalam Manorama. It was certain that he would never sign a building permit for the Church because

Malayala Manoroama and Kandathil family remained very loyal to the Orthodox Church and were very much against Mar Ivanios' re-union movement.

The sharp mind of Bethany Chackochan came alive in this situation. He had the original purchase document of the church prepared with only the survey numbers, so that the exact location of the plot could not be found easily. This document was under his name as the Attorney Manager, and not under the name of the Church. Later, he purchased surrounding plots. Nearby, Chackochan had a Copra drying yard at Kulakad, east of the present Santhinilayam Pastoral Center. There, he secretly collected timber and other items necessary for building a church.

One day, the head clerk of the municipality happened to buy a bag of rice from Chackochan's provision store. Chackochan decided not to collect the price of the rice and struck up a friendship with the clerk. Later, it was through this head clerk that Chackochan sent the draft of the building permit application to the Municipality.

After handing the letter to the head clerk, Bethany Chackochan waited anxiously till the Municipal Council meeting day. The council meeting ran late, with even the lunch break being postponed. Finally, at 5 p.m., at the end of a long day, the weary and impatient council members came out. The head clerk was there waiting for the Chairman with a file of papers. The Chairman Mapillai in a hurry to go home, grabbed the file which contained many urgent papers that needed his signature. Among these papers, the head-clerk had placed the building permit application. In his hurry, Municipal Chairman K. M. Mammen Mapillai signed this paper amongst the others without paying careful attention.

As soon as he had a signed building permit, Bethany Chackochan forged away with his efforts to build a church. He directed his rice mill workers to report for night duty. No one suspected anything, as they had worked many nights in the rice mill- it was common practice to boil the rice in the night and dry it in the daytime sun. Yet, this night, when the workers arrived for night duty, Chackochan did not ask them to prepare rice for boiling. Instead, he sent them to collect all the building materials that he had accumulated (wooden rafters, braided coconut palm leaves for the roof, and the like) and bring them to the proposed building site.

Those who saw these efforts throughout the night thought that a new Copra drying shed was being assembled and no suspicions were aroused. This temporary shed-like building would be the first church, and work was completed within that night, around 5 a.m. At 6 a.m., a bell sounded and Fr. Abraham Padinjaremannil O.I.C. of the Bethany Ashram offered the first Holy Mass in the small church shed.

By morning, word had traveled that the ‘Roman Catholics have put up a church.’ The municipal chairman woke up that morning in a rage upon hearing the news and rushed over to the church site. Meanwhile, various groups had assembled in a protest march, demanding that ‘those who put up the church and who permitted to build it should be paraded half-naked’. Upon reaching the site, the chairman recognized the thin man who stood unperturbed before the church shed - Bethany Chackochan!

He questioned Chackochan: “Who authorized you to build the church?”

Chackochan replied humbly, “I erected this church as per your permission. I have done nothing without your knowledge.” K. M. Mammen Mapillai remained silent in the face of Chackochan’s firm response and called for the file. He realized what had happened upon seeing the copy of the permit that he had mistakenly signed. His face turned red in rage and anger and regret flashed through his eyes. “Chackochan, did I commit a mistake? Will this not cause me to face the allegation that I signed the permit accepting a bribe from the Roman Catholics?” Bitterly, he left the site, concerned about what this would mean.

Although legally the issue was resolved, the Church’s opponents were in a rage. The situation immediately after the reunion of Mar Ivanios and his followers to the Catholic Church was one of severe hostility. The Orthodox Church used to spread the news that Mar Ivanios betrayed the mother church. But the real fact that the Catholicos himself entrusted Mar Ivanios to seek possibilities for reunion with Catholic church was conveniently forgotten and the facts were purposefully hidden. The enmity against the reunited faction was very severe, even to the extent that the Malankara Catholics could not even bury their deceased at some places. Thiruvalla was one of such strongholds of the Orthodox Church and the fact that Bethany Chackochan managed to build a Church and obtained legal permission for this Church was considered as a challenge to the Orthodox people. The Orthodox people in Thiruvalla city could not tolerate this. That night, they destroyed Chackochan’s rice mill. Chackochan felt helpless; his opponents had the financial and physical support of Sri. C. P. Chacko, Chalakuzhy, a prominent business man. That night, feeling that matters were going out of hand, he left Thiruvalla.

He remembered the saying, ‘Where physical strength fails, try the strength of wisdom.’ Since travel facilities were limited at night time, he walked up to Mavelikara. The next morning he proceeded to Quilon where he visited Aloysius Maria Benziger, the Bishop of Quilon and a close friend of the Reunion movement. He visited the bishop with a specific plan in mind to remedy the situation.

The elder brother of Mr. C. P. Chacko (generally known as Chalakuzhy Chackochan), was Mr. C. P. Mathen, the director of the Quilon National Bank. Bishop Benziger summoned Mr. C. P. Mathen to his home and insisted that his younger brother be advised from doing any further harm to Bethany Chackochan or the new church in Thiruvalla. This was a strategic move, as the funds of the Quilon diocese were deposited in the Quilon National Bank. If the total funds were withdrawn immediately, Mr. C. P. Mathen, an experienced banker, knew that it would be the end of the Quilon National Bank. Without further insistence, he warned his younger brother, Chalakuzhy Chackochan from proceeding in his angry actions. As Chalakuzhy Chackochan withdrew from the uprising, the opposition’s force rapidly dwindled. Gradually, peace returned to the Malankara Catholic Church in Thiruvalla, and the story of Bethany Chackochan and his one man army’s fight, became a colorful story in the history of the Thiruvalla Cathedral Church.

Those who know the history of the Cathedral are surprised to know that Bethany Chackochan’s services are only casually mentioned in the Souvenir that was published on the occasion of inauguration of the latest Cathedral building.



13

THE CHAPTER OF TROUBLES

One shouldn't think that Bethany Chackochan's life was only filled with achievements and victories. Many times, his mind was filled with private regrets for the sacrifices he had made in living a life totally dedicated to the service of the Church.

One such regret was that he did not have the time to impart the love and consideration that his wife Annamma deserved, as partner of his life. Like any father, Chackochan wanted his children to have a good position in life, but refused to misuse the access and influence he had with the Church leaders to better their position in life. The question arises, did Chackochan bear these thoughts in mind as a personal anguish as he continued to work for the Church, leaving his family and proper upkeep aside? Did those cares keep burning as a fire in his mind?

Even as his wife fell sick, Chackochan was away in Trivandrum solving puzzles for the Diocese, leaving no one to

take care of her. Annamma's spinster sister, who knowing of her illness, came to visit their home in Thiruvalla and decided to take her sister back to her home at Mullikulangara near Punnamood, Mavelikara so that she would have proper nursing care. It was here that Annamma died. Yet, even at that moment, Chackochan could not be there for his wife, and the news did not reach him immediately.

The Vicar of the Punnamood parish came to know that it was the wife of Chackochan had died and informed the Archbishop's house in Trivandrum. Archbishop Mar Ivanios immediately summoned Chackochan into his chamber upon hearing the sad news. He enquired, "Chackochan, how do you do? What about your wife?" Chackochan replied, "Nothing special, bishop, she is doing fine. " At that moment, Archbishop Mar Ivanios' eyes filled with tears as he looked at Bethany Chackochan, who had served the Church even to the abandonment of his own family.

Immediately, the Archbishop sent Chackochan to Punnamood in his car. It was only when Chackochan reached his wife's house that the reality of her death sank in- Annamma would never again be there waiting for him, who was always away from home. He stood next to his beloved wife's lifeless body suppressing many regrets and allowing tears, dense with love for the Church, to fall silently on her. Annamma was buried in the Punnamood cemetery on 18 Medom, 1952 (The date is recorded in accordance with the Malayalam Calendar).



Chackochan, severely weakened by the death of his beloved wife, continued to face various adversities. During this time, the repercussions of the Second World War were being felt even in India. Life was very difficult due to the shortage of food and other trouble. Rationing was imposed on all foods and rice mills, along with his own, were closed down. His financial strain worsened when his oil mill underwent fire damage. Yet, he continued to suffer these losses silently. At this point, he tried his hand at running a canteen at Mar Ivanios College, but he could not run the canteen

with an eye for profit as it was an establishment of his dear Church. At the same time, the College management opened another canteen of its own. Chackochan tried his best to get the managing rights to this canteen, but failed. His canteen ended up being a huge loss, and without further complaints, he closed it down and returned home.

By 1961, various illnesses were added to his list of woes. Chackochan suffered from diabetes and found himself with a leg wound that did not heal. He was hospitalized in Pushpagiri Hospital for about 6 months. Chackochan, resistant to accept other's generosity, later took refuge in the Thiruvalla Government Hospital. The doctor suggested amputation of the wounded leg but this thought was not allowed to go further because Bishop Mar Athanasius came to know of the predicament. He rushed to the hospital and had Chackochan transferred to Trivandrum Medical College. Due to his timely intervention, Chackochan was given proper treatment and amputation was unnecessary. Although the wound healed, two toes did have to be removed. After this incident, Chackochan spent the rest of his life at an old age home in Kuravankonam, Trivandrum.

The loneliness after his wife's death compounded with financial losses had taught him to bear any loss with indifference that would suit a monk. His life experiences taught him to receive everything in his life with spiritual maturity, tranquility and happiness. Without complaint or enmity to anyone, he entrusted his further life in the hands of God. No appreciation, reward or position was offered to this beloved child of the Malankara Catholic

Church. This lack of appreciation did not bother Bethany Chackochan. Instead, by the end of his life, he lived exactly like an ascetic, symbolized by the long white robe and black waistband that he was known to wear. To the present generation that is sickened with the presence of those who run after positions and rank, the very memory of a blessed life like Chackochan's is exhilarating and inspiring.



14

TO ETERNITY

At the completion of a life spent in service of the Church, Chackochan had not earned anything for his later years in life. Yet he had earned a deposit in a place where it would never rust or be stolen. He had succeeded in assuring himself a secure space in heaven.

He spent the last part of his life with his youngest son Mr. K.C. Easow (Easochan-Achankunju) who lived in Nalanchira with only limited facilities. Sri Chacko Kileeeth, known lovingly as Bethany Chackochan passed away to his eternal rest on 17 September 1970, basking in the memories of a past September when the Reunion had taken place. Bishop Mar Gregorios led the solemn funeral services and many believers accompanied Chackochan on his last journey to the Pattom St. Mary's Cathedral Church cemetery. At last, God had called Bethany Chackochan to his eternal blessing. Yes, perhaps he may even be engaged in the same efforts as he had been doing on earth, in heaven, for those of

us who are to follow him. The faithful steward of the Malankara Church might be working there, without rest, for us.

As his lifeless body, clad in white, laid in a tiny room in Nalanchira, the presence of this man remained palpable. The body contained a heart that had pulsed only for the Malankara Catholic Church. It was a heart that was big enough to contain the Malankara



Catholic Church as a whole. The pulse of this heart was one which is a perfect model for the laity of the Malankara Catholic Church. The nobility and purity of this heart and mind was what had rendered Kileeleth Chacko into the beloved Bethany Chackochan.

His firm faith in God and his perfect integrity had emboldened Chackochan for a life of service. He was a man of prayer. These words still characterize the memory of Chackochan that remain in the hearts and minds of his family, loved ones and acquaintances. While one of his grandchildren speaks about his devotion to St. Little Therese, another one remembers his firm belief that “Archangels Gabriel and Michael are my protectors.” Another grandchild recalls his beloved grandfather’s oft-repeated words, “the children of a just man will not be left to beg for his food. If needed, Gabriel, God’s messenger will bring the food.” Such are the pearls of wisdom that are cherished by his beloved grandchildren. Moreover, these few memories are windows into the prayer life and religiosity of Bethany Chackochan. Truly, his personality still remains as pure and brilliant as gold purified in the crucible because of the prayer life that was perfected in his firm faith.

Bethany Chackochan was a pilgrim walking the path of holiness. His journey of life had started at Kayamkulam. He traveled through Thiruvalla, via Mavelikarra and Kottayam and finally ended his journey in Trivandrum. His travels throughout his life symbolize his internal spiritual expedition. He had started as a seeker of luck, became a servant of the Church from being an ordinary church member, advanced to the position of a champion of the church and at last offered himself as a total sacrifice at the altar of service to the Church. His life, his journey, had reached its

end. The scent of holiness that rises from that altar is one that will be an inspiration to lay missionaries forever.

As far as Archbishop Mar Ivanios was concerned, Bethany Chackochan was like Laxman to Rama, Aaron to Moses, Elisha to Elijah, Simon of Cyrene to Jesus Christ as he bore the Cross, and like Veronica who had wiped the face of Jesus. For Archbishop Mar Ivanios, Bethany Chackochan was a walking stick to traverse the path of Reunion that was strewn with red hot cinders. Sri. Kileleth Chackochan aka Manager Chackochan aka Bethany Chackochan was the most trustworthy steward of the Malankara Church. But above all, he shines like a golden star in the sky that is the Church, lighting the way for many young and passionate laity, imbuing them with vigor and hope.



15

THE BALANCE SHEET OF AN ACCOMPLISHED LIFE

When we pass away from life, from this world to the next, knowingly or unknowingly, we influence the world, nature, and the lives of those around us. We come to know that the influence of the mortal man can be immortal. While a river flows on, knowingly or unknowingly, it wets its shores. As a flower blooms, willingly or unwillingly, it fills the wind with its scent. The wind blows, and purposefully or otherwise, it makes the trees dance. The same happens with human life; it is the law of nature. We are not at liberty to opt out of the law, but we do have the choice to decide whether the mark we leave will be positive or negative. Those who make the wise choice leave blessed memories in this world and are called ‘great.’

It is for this very reason that Sri. Kileeleth Chacko is considered a great personality in the history of the Church. A personality, strong, pure and unadulterated, without the backing of any awards or high-ranking positions to his name, left such an influence that it could only be described as blessed.

This influence continues to live on in the next generation. Our Church is staying alive even in the Gulf countries. Malankara Churches have been established there recently. Even before that, the members of our Church who lived in Gulf countries for work, kept alive our liturgical traditions and ethos. The Kuwait Malankara Rite Movement (KMRM) is one such effort. The first meeting that was the very beginning of this movement in Kuwait was held on February 27, 1994 at the house of Sri. K.V. Paul, the grandson of Sri. Kileeleth Chackochan. This meeting paved the way for all the activities of the Malankarites today in Kuwait. It may have been ordained by God. Another example is Sri. Tharakan K. Jacob, a live presence among the Malankara Church members in the United States. Recently, a Trust has been formed by the members of the Kileeleth family to keep alive the memories of their blessed forefather. One of the commendable works of this Trust is bringing together aged people who are living alone. This effort aims to add some happiness and comfort in their last days of life. This commendable and concerted effort, named Beautiful Bethany Evening, is under the control of the Bethany sisters and the spiritual guidance of Rev. Dr. John Padippura, in a village called Aruviyod, near Trivandrum. It is a beautiful way to remember Sri. Kileeleth Chackochan.

Yes, Chackochan does still live. He lives in the fond memories of those who love the Malankara Church. He lives through the land, wetted by the perspiration of Chackochan that became the soil for the great institutions of the Malankara Church. And he lives on through the good deeds and the service to the Church of his progeny. Great men do not die. They are immortal.



The First Five Members of Reunion Movement



Mar Ivanios OIC



Mar Thephilos OIC



Fr. John OIC



Dn. Alexander OIC
(Fr. Seraphion OIC)



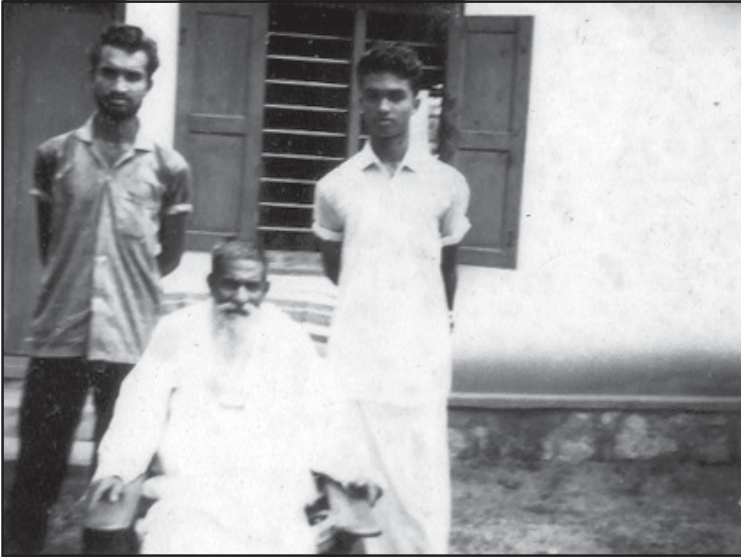
Mr. Kileeeth Chacko



The Funeral of Mrs. Annamma, wife of Bethany Chackochen
Rev. Sr. Semaha sitting in the first row.
Chackochen carrying a cross standing in the second row.



Bethany Chackochen in the Old-Age Home



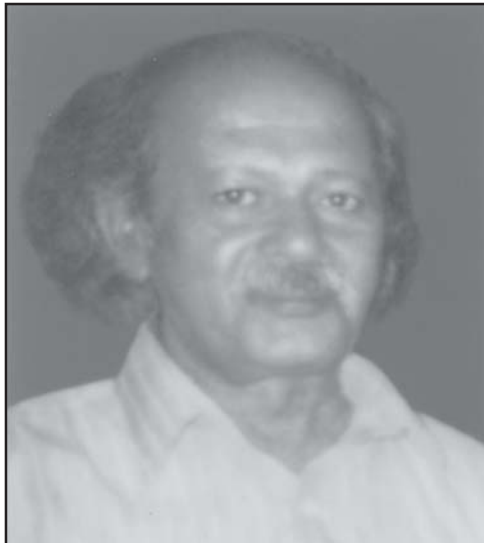
Bethany Chackochen with his Grand Children



Second daughter of Bethany Chackochen, Rev. Sr. Semaha SIC,
Former Mother General of Bethany Congregation



Eldest son of Bethany Chackochen,
Mr. K. C. Varghese and his wife Mrs. Mary Varghese



Youngest son of Bethany Chackochen, Mr. K. C. Easo.
Chackochen spent his last days with this son



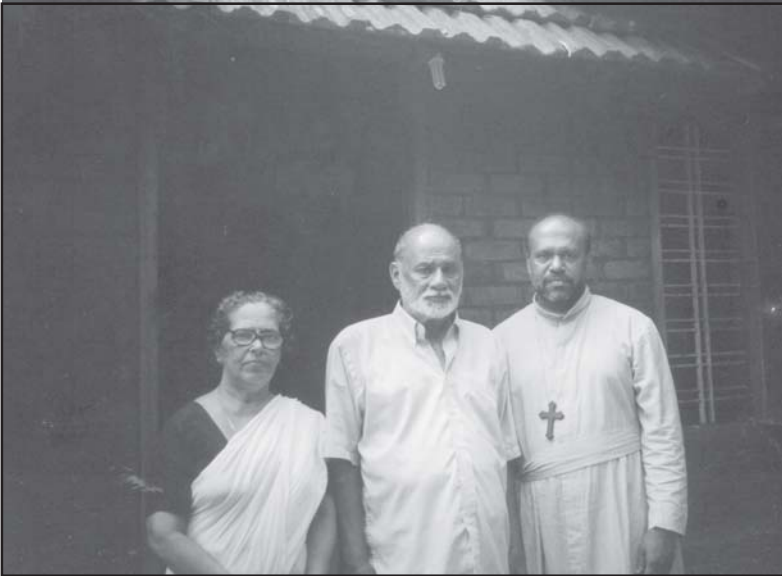
The intimate friend of Bethany Chackochen, Bro. Elias C. M. S. F.



In his Old Age



The author and Mr. K. C. Chacko
the fourth son of Bethany Chackochen



The author with Mr. K. C. Chacko and his wife



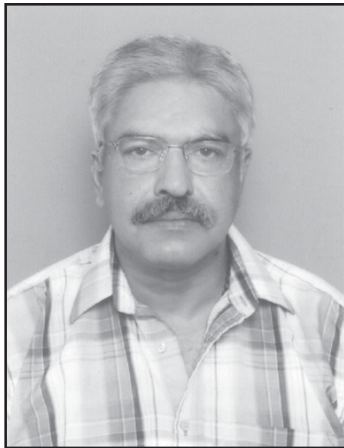
The Author with Mr. K. C. Chacko, his wife and his Grandson Mr. K. V. Paul



Mr. Cherian Varghese (Geevargheechan)
The nephew of Bethany Chackochen who served
Mar Ivanios as his driver and bodyguard



Rev. Fr. Zacharias Killeleth,
Younger brother of Mr. Cherian Varghese.
Ordination- May 26, 1953; Died -September 11, 1985



Mr. Jacob K. Tharakan
Grand Son of Bethany Chackochen, New Jersey-USA

Appendix - 1
The Kileeleth Family

K.C Varghese & Mary Varghese	Mother Semaha SIC Former Mother General, Bethany Religious Congregation	Mariamamma Chackochan & Chackochan Vallapurayil	K. C. Chacko & ThankammaChacko	K. C. Easo & Saramma Easo
AnnammaVarghese Chalakupuzhy Lane Trivandrum Raju Varghese Maruthoor, Trivandrum Adv.K.V.John (deceased) Kesavadasapuram Trivandrum Jacob K.Tharakan USA K. C. Geevarghese Nalanchira,Trivandrum K.V. Paul, Kuwait K.V. Mathew Maruthoor,Trivandrum Lizo Anil, USA		Chacko Kurian Aniyankunju Their seven girls	K. C. Chacko Thomas Chacko K. C. Zacharia ManjuChacko	Biju Jacob K. Easo Binu Stephen K.Easo

Appendix -2

**Memorable Days in the Life of
Archbishop Mar Ivanios**

Birth	21-09-1882
Baptism	04-10-1882
School Education	1887-1897
High School Education at M.D. Seminary High School	1897 – 1899
Deaconate at Puthencavu Church (by Bishop Pulikkottu Mar Dionysius)	09-01-1908
M.A. Degree	1907
Priestly Ordination at Parumala Seminary (by Bishop Vattasseril Mar Dionysius)	15-08-1908
Principal, M.D. Seminary High School	1908-1913
Professor, Serampore Theological College	1913-1919
Establishment of the Bethany Ashram	15-08-1919
Ordained Rampan at Thirumoolapuram Church (by Bishop Mar Gregorios)	28-01-1925
Ordained Episcopa at Niranom Church	01-05-1925
Establishment of the Bethany Sisters community	08-09-1925
Ordained Bishop	13-02-1929
Reunion with Catholic Church at Quilon	20-09-1930
Establishment of the Malankara Hierarchy	12-03-1933
Establishment of the Mar Ivanios College at Trivandrum	1949
Kantheela Service at Bethany Ashram at Nalanchira	02-09-1952
Demise	15-07-1953
Funeral	17-07-1953

Appendix -3

Important Dates in the Malankara Catholic Church

52	A.D.	St. Thomas arrived in Kerala.
03 July 72		St. Thomas died a Martyr.
03 January 1653		The vow at the Koonan Kurisu (Against Portuguese rule)
1926		Parumala Synod - Bishop Mar Ivanios deputed to discuss the Reunion process with the Roman Catholic Church.
20 September 1930		Reunion with Roman Catholic Church
11 June 1932		Establishment of the Malankara Hierarchy
12 March 1933		Inauguration of the Malankara Antiochian Syrian Hierarchy, Establishment of the Trivandrum Archdiocese, Assuming charge of the first Archbishop, Trivandrum.
06 November 1933		Establishment of the Thiruvalla Diocese.
29 November 1937		Reunion of Joseph Mar Severios with the Church.
29 January 1953		Ordination of Benedict Mar Gregorios OIC as Archbishop.
15 July 1953		Archbishop Mar Ivanios OIC Passed away.
18 January 1955		Bishop Mar Severios expired.
27 June 1956		Bishop Mar Theophilos OIC expired.
22 February 1965		Dedication of the Trivandrum Archdiocesan Cathedral.
28 August 1977		Reunion of Bishop Paulose Mar Philoxinos.
28 September 1977		Bishop Zacharias Mar Athanasios expired.

28 October	Establishment of the Sultan’s Battery Diocese.
28 December 1978	Ordination of Bishops Cyril Mar Baselios OIC and Isaac Mar Yoochanon.
27 December 1980	Ordination of Bishop Lawrance Mar Ephraem.
28 December 1980	Conclusion of the Golden Jubilee Celebration of the Reunion at Kottayam.
08 February 1986	Pope John Paul II visited the Trivandrum Cathedral Church.
28 April 1987	Bishop Isaac Mar Yoochanon expired.
06 August 1988	Ordination of Geevarghese Mar Timotheos, Thiruvalla Bishop.
25 May 1989	Dedication of the St.Mary’s Malankara Seminary.
10 October 1994	Bishop Benedict Mar Gregorios OIC expired.
14 December 1995	Assuming office of the Arch Bishop Cyril Mar Baselios OIC as Archbishop.
16 December 1996	Establishment of the Marthandom Diocese.
05 February 1997	Ordination of Bishop Geevarghese Mar Divannasios.
08 April 1997	Bishop Lawrance Mar Ephraem expired.
17 July 1997	Ordination of Bishop Thomas Mar Koorilos.
29 June 1998	Ordination of Bishops Yoochanon Mar Chrysostom and Joshua Mar Ignathios.
03 November 1998	Bishop Paulose Mar Philoxinos expired.
15 August 2001	Ordination of Bishop Isaac Mar Cleemis.
15 January 2003	Establishment of the Muvattupuzha Diocese.
10 February 2005	Malankara Catholic Church was elevated as Major Archiepiscopal Church. Its head shall be known as Catholicos.

- 19 February 2005 Ordination of Bishop Joseph Mar Thomas.
- 11 April 2005 The Faculty of Theology of St. Mary's Malankara Seminary got affiliated to the Pontificatal Urbanian University, Rome.
- 14 May 2005 Enthronment of Major Archbishop-Catholicos Moran Mor Cyclic Baselious OIC as the father and head of Syro Malankara Catholic Major Archiepiscopal Church.
- 16 - 18 August 2005 First Holy Synod of the Malankara Catholic Church at Catholiote Centre, Pattom, Trivandrum.
- 10 June 2006 Thiruvalla Diocese was elevated as Archdiocese and Isaac Mar Cleemis as the first Thiruvalla Archbishop.
- 1 January 2007 Establishing Mavelikara Diocese , Bishop Joshua Mar Ignathios as its First Bishop.
- 18 January 2007 First Major Archbishop Catholicos Moran Mor Cyclic Baselious OIC Passed away.
- 7-10 February 2007 Holy Episcopal Synod at Catholiote Centre Pattom. Bishop Issac Mar Cleemis was elected the second Major Archbishop Catholicos.
- 7 February 2007 Rev. Fr. Chacko Aerath OIC was elected the Apostolic Visitator of the Malankarites in Extra-territorial Region within India.
- 5 March 2007 Enthronment Moran Mor Baselios Cleemis Major Archbishop Catholicos.
- 10 March 2007 Rev. Fr. Chacko Aerath OIC ordained Bishop (Jacob Mar Barnabas OIC)
- 26 March 2007 Bishop Thomas Mar Koorilos was transferred from Muvattupuzha to Thiruvalla as its Archbishop.

- 14 July 2007 Archbishop Mar Ivanios OIC is declared Servant of God.
- 9 February 2008 Bishop Abraham Mar Julios ordained and installed the Second Bishop of Muvattupuzha Diocese.
- 25 January 2010 Establishing Pathanamthitta Diocese, Bishop Yuhanon Mar Chrysostom as its First Bishop.
- 13 March 2010 Ordination of Bishop Vincent Mar Paulose (Bishop of Marthandom) Thomas Mar Anthonios OIC (Curia Bishop) Philipose Mar Stephanos (Auxiliary Bishop-Thiruvalla), Samuel Mar Ireneos (Auxiliary Bishop-Trivandrum)
- 13 April 2010 Installation of Joseph Mar Thomas as the Bishop Sultan's Battery.
- 15 April 2010 Establishing the Eparchy of Puthoor and installation of Bishop Geevarghese Mar Divannasios as its first bishop.
- 14 July 2010 Establishing the Exarchate in the United State of America.
- 21 September 2010 Ordination of Thomas Mar Eusebius.
- 3 October 2010 Inauguration of the Exarchate in USA and installation of Bishop Thomas Mar Eusebius. as its First Bishop.
- 24 October 2012 Major Archbishop Catholicos Baselios Cleemis was elected as First Cardinal from the Malankara Catholic Church.
- 24 November 2012 The investiture ceremony of Major Archbishop Catholicos Baselios Cardinal Cleemis in Rome.





The
Faithfull
Steward
of the
MALANKARA
CHURCH
JILU JACOB

Reading Fr. Jose Mariadas' work offered me the chance to spend time with the memories of this man and to reflect on his life. As a young person striving to grow in my faith and to live and work for the Lord, I am encouraged by the untiring dedication and firm faith of my great grandfather. His life of humble obedience and submission to the will of God matches that of even the greatest saints. Truly, his determination to follow God's will over his own sets before us a model that we, as the faithful, can admire in our own journey to discover the fullness of life with Christ.

As you read these pages, I hope and pray that you too will be inspired by his witness so as to discover how the Lord is living and moving in your life. I pray that you too will heed the call of the Lord to "go out into the vineyard" and that your heart finds rest in God, for the treasures of the heavenly Kingdom are beyond compare.

Jilu Jacob



Bethany Publications, Kottayam