

ASIAN
HORIZONS
Vol. 12, No. 3, September 2018
Pages: 537-543

BOOK REVIEWS

Paul Pallath, *Vicariate Apostolic of Verapoly and the St Thomas in 1867: Kuriakose Elias Chavara Unworthy of Episcopate?*, Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2018. ISBN: 978 - 93 - 84964 -12 -2, Pages: 198.

Msgr. Paul Pallath, the author of this book, is at present a Relator of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, an Associate Professor at the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome, a Consultor at the Congregation for the Oriental Churches and a Commissioner at the Tribunal of the Roman Rota. To his credit there are 21 books and many scholarly articles. Although a trained canonist, through his rigorous research and scientific study of the history of the St Thomas Christians, the author has shed new lights into the history, liturgy and spiritual heritage of the St Thomas Christians of India. Many of his writings are the results of painstaking archival research which gives a unique stamp to his books.

In the present work under review, the author presents 13 archival documents in their original languages and in the English translation. These documents highlight the ecclesiastical situation of the St Thomas Christians (at present they are known as the SyroMalabarians), in the Vicariate of Verapoly (Varapuzha) in 1867, the historical context of the appointment of Kuriakose Elias Chavara as Vicar General, the reasons why he was not consecrated a bishop of the Catholic St Thomas Christians and why the Office of the Vicar General for the St Thomas Christians became extinct with his death. The book sheds light also on the liturgical, spiritual and devotional life of the St Thomas Christians in the Vicariate during that period.

The book has two parts with a general introduction and a general conclusion. The general introduction narrates the historical and ecclesiastical context of the St Thomas Christians and the start of the Rokos schism. To facilitate the easy reading of the book the author also explains the methodology he follows in the book. The first part presents the English translation of 13 documents, while the second part is dedicated to the original texts. For an easy and continuous reading of the text and to provide a logical coherence and sequence, the first part is

divided into three sections, without interrupting, however, the continuous numbering of documents, which are inserted in chronological order.

Each section has a historical introduction which is the immediate historical context and that facilitates the better comprehension and appraisal of the documents. Further, each document is preceded by a brief introduction which elucidates the content and indication of the source for the easy grasping of the exact citation. Original footnotes, added footnotes and explanations make the book more readable. The first part ends with a general conclusion. The letter of Kuriakose Elias Chavara to Pope Pius IX and his reply, letter regarding the conversion of Antony Thondanatt, letter of the Prefect of Propaganda Fide seeking the opinion of Vicar Apostolic Bernardino on the Episcopal consecration of Kuriakose Elias Chavara (documents 3-6) also form part of the first section. In the second part the documents are reproduced in the original language with an English heading.

In the general conclusion the author makes some pertinent observations regarding the change of attitude of the missionaries. In documents one and two the missionaries speak about Kuriakose Elias Chavara in the context of making him the Vicar General of the St Thomas Christians. The Vicar Apostolic was very generous in attributing all available qualities to Kuriakose Elias Chavara and appointed him the Vicar General of the St Thomas Christians to fight against the Rokos schism. He even proposed to the Holy See to consider the consecration of Kuriakose Elias Chavara as coadjutor bishop of Varapuzha. Propaganda Fide was seriously considering the Episcopal consecration of Kuraikose Elias Chavara.

In the backdrop of the return of Rokos and the conversion of Thondanatt Antony, the missionaries changed their mind and wrote against the Episcopal consecration of Kuriakose Elias Chavara and even against the constitution of a permanent Vicar General for the Catholic Thomas Christians. The missionaries could not find anything serious against the extraordinarily virtuous and saintly life of Kuriakose Elias Chavara. Therefore, they took recourse to superficial arguments such as insufficient knowledge of morals, inexperience in administration, advanced age, indisposition and extreme weakness of body. They also presumed the possibility of a schism and the impossibility to find a successor after the death of Kuriakose Elias Chavara (documents 7-9).

It is worth quoting the last part of the general conclusion: "If Kuriakose Elias Chavara had been consecrated bishop and the permanent office of a native vicar general with Episcopal character had been established as

desired by Propaganda Fide the schism of Chaldean Bishop John Mellus (1874-1882) and its consequences could have been avoided. History proves that the Western missionaries always strived their best, utilising the entire arsenal at their disposal, to jealously preserve the episcopacy and jurisdictional power for themselves and this was the main cause of troubles, division and schisms among the St Thomas Christians in India, whose forefathers had embraced Christianity even before the Christianization of Europe" (p. 120).

The documents, especially one to nine, speak of the historical context and the judgement of the missionaries about the St Thomas Christians. The documents ten to thirteen are very informative and give a detailed description of the life and other details of the St Thomas Christians. Document ten is the report of Vicar Apostolic Bernardino on the state of St Thomas Christians in the Vicariate of Verapoly in 1867 which is very informative.

The present work is the latest attempt of Msgr Paul Pallath to bring to light original documents related to the St Thomas Christians preserved in the Roman archives. The author is stationed in Rome and well-versed in ancient and modern languages and is committed to scientific research. The Indian Church is very much indebted to him for bringing out many scholarly books pertaining to the Indian Church. The present book is a must reading material for all who are interested in undertaking serious study on St Kuriakose Elias Chavara. Historical truths may not be always pleasing to all and in the present work Msgr. Paul Pallath has fulfilled the task of an accomplished historian.

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