

## BOOK REVIEW

Paul Pallath, *Vicariate Apostolic of Verapoly and the St Thomas in 1867: Kuriakose Elias Chavara Unworthy of Episcopate?* Dharmaram Publications, Dharmaram College, Bengaluru 560029, ISBN: 978-93-84964-12-2; Pages: 198; Price: Rs. 250; USD 15.

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 Consulter 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 researches which give 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 Syro-Malabarians) 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 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 shed 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 Roccas 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 a 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 and 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. The second part the documents are reproduced in the original language with an English title.

In the general conclusion, the author makes some pertinent observations regarding the change of attitude of the missionaries. In the documents 1 and 2, 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 as the Vicar General of the St Thomas Christians to fight against the Roccas 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 Kuriakose Elias Chavara.

In the backdrop of the return of Roccas 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 reason 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" (page 120).

The documents, especially 1 to 9, speak the historical context and the judgement of the missionaries about the St Thomas Christians. The documents 10 to 13 are very informative and give a detailed description about the life and other details of the St Thomas Christians. Document 10 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 a 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.

**Francis Thonippara CMI**

**NATIONAL SEMINAR ON EVANGELIZATION**  
**The Golden Jubilee of CMI Presence in MP**  
**“Sharing the Message of Jesus Christ: Missiological**  
**Trajectories for India Today”**

**Poornodaya, Bhopal 27-29 November 2018**

Every human person has a right to receive the good news of salvation. Jesus offers his love and compassion to all the creation. The turbulent and desperate lives of the people are in need of this message. It is the privileged mandate of all the Christians to share this message of peace and joy of Jesus Christ. The Golden Jubilee of CMI Presence in MP is definitely a golden opportunity to enhance the evangelizing mission in MP. The primacy of evangelizing mission has to sink into our minds, hearts, thoughts, plans and actions. The National Seminar on Evangelization aims to capture the above objectives.

It was in 1968 that the CMIs reached Sagar in MP for the first time to take up mission there. Now after fifty years of engagement in the mission, they look back and thank the Lord for all that has been accomplished there. This occasion makes us review our response to the missionary mandate of the Lord in the changed political and social situation of the country. The call resounds in our ears and hearts motivating us to invite with urgency the entire humanity to his message of compassion, reconciliation and mercy. In this context we evaluate the impact of the mission in the lives of the people around us in order to enhance our efforts at spreading the Good News.

The following themes were taken up in the discussion:

1. Foundations of Evangelization
2. Historical Perspectives of Evangelization in MP
3. Praxis of Evangelization
4. Evangelization through Apostolates

Millions of people in India are waiting the Good News. Committed and convinced persons are called upon to be the witnesses of the Good News of love and compassion of Jesus through their life, activities and proclamation. May this seminar enthuse us to be full timers as the messengers of Jesus.

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