



Bishop Mar Chandy Parambil -1687

- Bp. Gregory Karotemprel CMI -

Mar Chandy Parambil of Kuravilangad is the first native of Malabar to become bishop of the St. Thomas Christians. We do not have much information about his early life. Mar Chandy belonged to the Parambil family at Kuravilangad. One Kuriakose Parambil married into Kudukkassery family. The son born to the couple later became the bishop Chandy. He was born in Muttuchira. As a priest, he was the Vicar of Kuravilangad parish.

Mar Chandy died in 1687 and was buried at Kuravilangad. It is believed St. Thomas ordained bishops and priests for the communities he established in India. But we do not have any historical record regarding the immediate successor of St. Thomas who ruled us. From 4th century bishops from Persian Church came and ruled us.

The Background in which Bishop Chandy became first native Bishop of St. Thomas Christians.

As we know with the Synod of Diamper in 1599 the Latin missionaries took over the administration of our Church. By the so-called Coonan Cross Oath of 1653 vast majority of St. Thomas Christians rebelled against the jurisdiction of Archbishop Francis Gracia S.J. Twelve simple priests consecrated Archdeacon Thomas as their "Bishop" of course invalidly, in a ceremony at Alangad on May 22, 1653. He took effective charge of the Church. Only a small minority remained on the side of Archbishop Gracia. Then Holy See sent two Discalced Carmelites as Apostolic Commissaries. Fr.



Joseph Sebastian was the first to reach Malabar in 1657. He had some success in convincing the faithful that Mar Thomas was not really a bishop, since he had not been consecrated by another bishop. So many parishes showed willingness to abandon Mar Thomas, but they could in no way be persuaded to come under the jurisdiction of Dome Gracia. They did recognize the authority of Apostolic Commissary and requested Holy See to appoint a non-Jesuit as their bishop. F. Sebastian went back to Rome and returned in 1661 as the Administrator Apostolic of the Archdiocese of Angamaly-Cranganore of the St. Thomas Christians.

Bishop Sebastian worked vigorously and many parishes accepted his authority. By the end of 1662 about two thirds of St. Thomas Christians accepted Bishop Sebastian as their bishop. One third still continued to support Mar Thomas. Soon there was an urgent crisis. In 1667 the Dutch conquered the city of Cochin and ousted the Portuguese from the Malabar Coast. The new authority ordered all foreigners including Bishop Sebastian to leave the country. Sebastian's departure would leave Mar Thomas alone to administer the whole St. Thomas Christians. The Holy See authorized to elect and consecrate one or even two bishops from among the St. Thomas Christians. After consulting the representatives of major parishes he consecrated Fr. Chandy Parambil bishop on February 1, 1663 at St. Mary's Valiapalli, Kaduthuruthy.

Thus quite unexpectedly, a native St. Thomas Christian became the bishop of the Church. Mar Thomas was still powerful. Arrival of one Gregory, a Jacobite bishop from Syria enhanced the position of Mar Thomas. So Bishop Mar Chandy had to work hard to keep his flock united.

As Vicar of the large parish of Kuravilangad, Mar Chandy had a respected position in the community. Like Mar Thomas he was also a member of the powerful family of the Archdeacons. Mar Chandy was known for his piety, prudence, seriousness and compassion for the poor. He was very much respected in the community. He was a popular leader in the affairs of the Malabar Church. Further Bishop Sebastian had secured assurance from the Dutch authorities at Cochin that they would favour Mar Chandy against Mar Thomas.

Activities: Mar Chandy managed to withstand the manoeuvres and intrigues of Mar Thomas. He was able to keep the community that



came back after the schism united. He successfully prevented our community going back to Mar Thomas after the departure of Bishop Sebastian. And that was the historic role he played. The historian Stephen Neil says: "He was bulwark and a bastion. If there had not been a legitimate and regularly consecrated bishop on the scene to contend with Thomas there can be little doubt that Thomas would gradually have drawn the whole body of the Thomas Christians into his allegiance". (S. Neil. A History of Christianity in India, 1 (Cambridge 1984) p.329.

The Holy See confirmed the election of Mar Chandy as the titular bishop of Meguru and the Vicar Apostolic of Angamaly. Only in the first years of his ministry he used the title. Later he assumed the traditional title "Metropolita of All India". (J. Kollamparambil, The Archdeacon of All India (Rome 1972)

During the first decade of his episcopate, Mar Chandy was the only Catholic bishop in the whole of India. All the Sees in India were vacant. Seminarians from Goa, Mylapore, etc. were being sent to him for ordination. He used to send missionaries to Madurai as that region was part of the Archdiocese of Angamaly. Thus as a bishop, he was serving the whole of India.

Later Years:

In 1674 Mar Chandy requested Rome to elect Co-adjutor and proposed his nephew Mathew for this position. The Carmelites were asked by Rome to elect an Indian. But they elected Raphael Figueredo in 1677, who was not a Syrian Catholic but born as an Indian in the sense that he was a half caste Portuguese. The Carmelites had him consecrated in 1677 at Calicut by Bishop Thomas Castro. The choice of Figueredo Salgado as Co-adjutor was a great disappointment to Mar Chandy and all St. Thomas Christians. This appointment shook the confidence of Syrian Catholics had in Carmelites and quarrels started to arise.

Further Mar Chandy was then engaged in dialogue with Mar Thomas II to bring him and his followers into the Catholic Communion. The prospect of a Latin Bishop succeeding Mar Chandy dealt a death blow to those hopes of reunion. Further Mar Chandy had to face the threat of defection from the Catholic Community to the Schismatic group. To prevent that and to reassure



the people Mar Chandy appointed Fr. Mathew Pathil Archdeacon and entrusted him with the administration of the diocese. The king of Cochin recognized the new Archdeacon and he could govern the Community as the *Jathiku Kartavyan* i.e. ecclesially and civilly responsible head of the community. In effect Mar Chandy re-established the ancient System, in which the Archdeacon of All-India exercised the effective administrative control in the Community, while Metropolitan exercised the power of the Episcopal order.

Naturally, the Coadjutor and the Carmelites were very unhappy with the new arrangement. They instigated Mar Thomas II to oppose the Archdeacon Mathew Pathil. To counter this move, Mar Chandy promised to make Mar Thomas II his successor sooner or later with the approval of the Holy See. In fact, he did request the Holy See to appoint another successor, suggesting among others also Thomas de campo as worthy candidate. (APF SC (10C) Vol.2 690, letter dated January 9, 1679).

Many complaints were sent to Rome by the contending parties. So it took four years for the Holy See to confirm the election of Bishop Raphael as his Co-adjutor and let him exercise his Episcopal ministry. Then the Co-adjutor began to offend both Bishop Chandy and the Carmelites. He even dared to excommunicate Fr. George of St. John Curapoli, Mar Chandy's Vicar General for the Diocese of Cochin. This priest was a son of a cousin sister of Mar Chandy. Mar Chandy could tolerate it no longer. He ordered Bishop Raphael not to interfere any more in the diocese. The Carmelites also came to regret their folly in electing the undesirable character. Finally some years later but after the death of Mar Chandy the Holy See would depose Bishop Raphael.

Thus during the last years of his life Mar Chandy had been grieved by the continued condition of division in the Malabar Church and especially by the misconduct of his designated successor. But he could take consolation in the belief that he had provided well for the future governance of his flock through the revived office of the Archdeacon of All-India. And he was able to see the good effects of the new arrangement. Mar Chandy went to his eternal reward on January 2, 1687. He was buried in the St. Mary's Church at Kuravilangad.



Legacy Mar Chandy left

True, in spite of his strenuous efforts, he could not bring complete unity among the St. Thomas Christians. He could not bring back all the Thomas Christians back to Catholic Communion. But he tried his level best. This sad division continued and still continue to this day even after centuries. For the last 300 years or more no one has been able to change the situation in any appreciable extent except for the reunion of a fraction of Puthenkootucar in the reunion movement started by Mar Ivanios and continued by the Syro-Malankara Church.

Secondly Mar Chandy, the first indigenous bishop of Thomas Christians in the modern age could not change the Latinized liturgy. He lacked the expertise and the qualified clergy necessary to effect any liturgical reform. Even for his Episcopal ministry he had to use the Latin Pontifical in Syriac translation made by the Jesuit professors of Ambazhakad Seminary.

In the administrative field he did achieve a great success. He was able to revive the office of the Archdeacon of All-India and he used the traditional title of the Metropolitan of All India. But both were discontinued when European bishops again took over the administration of our Church.

A century later another St. Thomas Christian Mar Joseph Cariati was appointed Metropolitan. Unfortunately he could not take over the See as he died in Goa on his way back to India. It took another century the Holy See recognized the St. Thomas Christians as a Sui juris Church effecting a ritual separation in 1886. And it took another century, Church became Major Archiepiscopal Church with Synodal powers in 1992. Still we have yet to realize what Mar Chandy Parambil left us three hundred years ago, namely a Metropolitan of All India. The title speaks loudly of the vision of Mar Chandy had about our Church, a Church spread in the whole of India with a unifying head – Metropolitan of All India in communion with the Holy See of Rome. Let us gratefully remember the great dynamic leader of our Church who re-established our traditional system of administration.

Palliveettil Mar Chandy Methran, alias Alexander Parambil, Alexander de Campo is the first known person appointed in India as



a bishop from among the native St. Thomas Christians. From fourth century, Bishops from Chaldean Church came and ruled the Thomas Christians. But the office of Archdeacon, a native was the real Administrator of the Thomas Christians. He had authority over all the priests and he managed the temporal affairs of the Church. The bishop was only a spiritual head. Mar Abraham (1568-1597) had a plan to appoint George of Christ, his Archdeacon Metropolitan of Thomas Christians. The consecration of Archdeacon did not happen due to the death of Mar Abraham. Hope the present Synod of Bishops of Syro-Malabar Church will reestablish our traditional administrative systems.