

From the annals of history ...

Archdiocese of Verapoly and the Religious

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Introduction

The Malabar Vicariate was established in 1659, was continued as Verapoly Vicariate and it was elevated as the Archdiocese of Verapoly in 1866. Archdiocese of Verapoly is the first in Archdiocese Kerala Church and is the Mother of all dioceses including Latin and Syro-Malabar rites. This is the lovely lap from where the first religious congregations in Kerala began to spring up in Kerala. It is praiseworthy to remember that Verapoly Archdiocese is the cradle of indigenous religious life in Kerala. There are 29 religious houses of 17 religious congregations for men, having 150 members and in 98 convents of 40 religious congregations there are about 1000 sisters in the Archdiocese of Verapoly. They are doing a

highly estimable service in the Archdiocese by participating and conducting various ministries.

1. Reasons for the Lack of Indigenous Religious in Kerala until 19th Century

Indigenous religious congregations flourished in Kerala in 19th century with the support of the Carmelite Vicars apostolic, especially with Archbishop Bernardine Baccinelli OCD. Archbishop Zaleski, the third Apostolic Delegate to India, expressed his appreciation for the Mission of the Carmelites and said, "How much the illustrious Carmelite Order has accomplished in Kerala and in India...". St. Elias Kuriakose Chavara in his life time appreciated and affirmed the spiritual

enrichment which he and the Syrian community experienced from the Carmelite mission. He did not hesitate to record the true evaluation of his own community and their attachment to Oriental Patriarchs and the lack of cooperation towards the missionaries, who came with true intention of propagating the Word of God in Malabar. He acknowledged that the evaluation of this situation helps one to understand that it was because of this schismatic attachment that the practice of virtues and a religious way of life did not occur in Malabar until 19th Century. He noted in his manuscripts that Malabar remained sterile until the 19th Century, but many other countries and islands which received Faith in a later period have produced many saints. He makes a confession, "The virtuous missionaries came over here to propagate the faith and they abandoned their families and countries with the zeal of spreading the Kingdom of God, but the Christians in Malabar did not obey them with faith and love, but obeyed them only out of mere obligation. The Christians in Malabar did not realize that the will of God was expressed through those pious missionaries and never obeyed them with hearts full of love. So, the missionaries performed their mission with painful hearts and the Christians who received their mission were unworthy and so the mission became ineffective".

2. Archbishop Bernardine Baccinelli OCD and Indigenous Religious

God implanted the branches of Carmel in the ground of Kerala well prepared by the missionaries by removing obstacles, schisms and problems and purified it in the light of the Gospel and enriched it with faith formation, catechism, retreats, Eucharistic adoration and pious devotions. In the histories of the indigenous religious congregations the paternal love and care of the *Mahamissionary*, Archbishop Bernardine Baccinelli OCD was imprinted in golden letters. In the second half of the 19th century, Archbishop Bernardine Baccinelli provided every means for the growth of the first religious communities in Kerala for men and women. Bernardine Baccinelli OCD came to Kerala in 1833 and later he was

nominated as the first Pro-Vicar Apostolic of the newly erected Vicariate of Quilon. In 1853, in the absence of Archbishop Ludovico Martini, the coadjutor Bernardine Baccinelli ruled the Vicariate of Verapoly and in 1859 he was appointed as the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly. During the 15 years of his service, he changed the face of Verapoly, by constructing churches, schools, seminaries, monasteries and TOCD convents. The Canonical establishment of the Syrian Tertiary Congregation (CMI), establishment of their four monasteries and attached seminaries, the establishment of first monastery of the TOCD priests of the Latin Rite (OCD Manjummel Province) and the establishment of the first convent for TOCD women (CTC & CMC) were the most important contributions of Archbishop Bernardine Baccinelli.

2.1 The TOCD for the Priests of the Syrian Rite

Fr. Thomas Porukkara was the first to conceive the idea of starting a religious house in Malabar for priests. In 1828, he was appointed as the secretary to Bishop Stabilini. During this period he had the opportunity to discuss it with Fr. Thomas Palackal, a consultant of Bishop Stabilini. Fr. Pascal Baylon de Gesu of the Latin Rite was the Chancellor of the Vicariate and served as confessor to the Vicar Apostolic. The manuscripts of Fr. Chavara testify that Fr. Pascal was one of the three priests who first approached Bishop Stabilini. On November 1, 1829, they approached the Vicar Apostolic, Bishop Stabilini, with the request to establish a house of prayer for priests. The Vicar Apostolic encouraged them and he himself gave the first donation of Rs. 200. He published a circular letter dated on November 1, 1829 to collect alms for the construction of the Monastery. With the paternal blessing and encouragement of the Vicar Apostolic, the two pioneers with others, decided to start a religious house in the village called Mannanam. Chavara Kuriakose, one of their disciples was a seminarian and was not ordained at that time. He joined with the project of his masters after his ordination. Fr. Jacob Kaniyanthra was joined with the two beginners earlier to Chavara Kuriakose and he

was one among those who joined with the pioneers. On May 11, 1831, the foundation stone for the chapel was laid by Fr. Thomas Porukkara.

The canonical foundation of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate was only in 1855 with the intervention of Archbishop Bernardine Baccinelli. In 1840 they began to live as a community without any specific rules and regulations. St. Chavara's role in the building up of the new community became more prominent after the deaths of two pioneers, Fr. Thomas Palackal and Fr. Thomas Porukkara in 1841 and 1846 respectively. According to Mathias Mundadan, the name of St. Chavara was mentioned with primary importance and relegating the two founding fathers to the secondary position, was done by the biographers at the time of the process of the Cause of Beatification of St. Chavara.

Archbishop Bernardine erected canonically the TOCD Congregation for the priests of the Syrian Rite on December 8, 1855 and Fr. Chavara, professed his vows before Fr. Marceline Berardi OCD, the Delegate of the Vicar Apostolic. Fr. Chavara was then appointed as the first Prior of the community, and the other members made their religious profession before Fr. Chavara. The congregation was given the title 'Servants of Mary Immaculate'. In 1860, the congregation was officially recognized as the "Third Order of Discalced Carmelites (TOCD) by the General Chapter of the Discalced Carmelites, held in Rome. In 1958, the name of the congregation was again changed to Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI).

The TOCD Syrian Congregation for men (CMI) for a long period of time experienced the paternal love and care of the Archbishops of Verapoly and flourished under them. Bernardine Baccinelli was their Major Superior (Provincial) in India from 1855 to 1868 and Archbishop Leonardo Mellano from 1868 to 1887. Archbishop Bernard CMI was the Prior General of CMI from 1892 to 1902. From the time of Bishop Maurilius Stabilini OCD all vicars apostolic of Verapoly generously

contributed to the monasteries, seminaries, and printing press at Mannanam.

2.2 The TOCD for the Priests of the Latin Rite (OCD Manjummel Province)

The indigenous religious congregation for the Syrian Rite flourished rapidly. In the beginning, members of Latin Rite were admitted to this congregation, but they had endured some bitter experiences. In 1844, a group of students at the Major Seminary at Verapoly submitted a petition to the then Rector of the Seminary to start a religious congregation for the indigenous Latin priests of Malabar. The protagonists of this movement were Francis Xavier Kuruppassery, Thalaketti Thomas D'Couth, Syriac D'silva, George Rosario Vayalithara and George Alvarez Alunkal. In 1853, Archbishop Bernardine came to Verapoly and as a result of the constant requests, Archbishop Bernardine decided to erect a monastery for them. Thus, the Latin priests started religious life on July 23, 1857, in a building attached to St. Philomena's Church, Koonammau. The candidates of the Latin Rite had no previous experience in the life style, and they found the rules and regulations very difficult, and some even fell ill. In the absence of more recruits, Archbishop Bernardine invited the Syrians, and the monastery was temporarily handed over to the Syrian Carmelites from Mannanam in 1857.

Archbishop Bernardine decided again to start another Monastery for the members of Latin Rite and he laid the foundation dedicated to 'Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception' at Manjummel. The new religious congregation was officially inaugurated by the Archbishop Leonard Mellano OCD on April 26, 1874. It was named 'The Third Order of Discalced Carmelites of the Latin Rite'. The first ordained priest of this Order was Rev. Fr. Louis Vyppissery, the brother of Mother Eliswa, the foundress of the TOCD Congregation for women. In 1957 April 22, this amalgamated with the First Order Carmelites and in 1964 December 8th, it became a semi province and in 1967 June 8th a province in the Discalced Carmelite Order. The Pius Xth Province of Manjummel is an

important province in the Carmelite Order. The founder of the first Catholic bimonthly publication and Bible translator Fr. Louis Vypissery, The zealous Rocky Palackal who did remarkable mission among the lower cast in Middle of Travncore, Bro. Nicholas Verovan who founded the famous St. Joseph Hospital in Manjummel, Michael Puthanparambil who conducted the *Cherupushpam* Press, Bro. Leopold, a local historian and writer of many books and many others were the prominent figures of this Province. The Carmelite Fathers render enriching and enlightening service through Theological and Philosophical institutes, spirituality centres, retreat centres and parish ministry and other activities. St. Pius Xth Manjummel province has 9 monasteries in the Archdiocese.

2.3 The Congregation of Teresian Carmelites (CTC)

The first Religious Congregation for women was the Third Order of Discalced Carmelite Congregation (TOCD) founded in 1866 February 13th at Koonammavu by Servant of God Mother Eliswa in a small convent built on her own property. Archbishop Bernardine Baccinelli OCD signed the Decree of Foundation, *Documentum Errectionis* in 1866 February 12th. Mother Eliswa's daughter Anna and sister Thresia were the co-foundresses of the Congregation. An Italian missionary, Fr. Leopold Beccaro of St. Joseph was appointed by Archbishop Bernardine as their spiritual director, confessor and his Delegate for the convent. Mother Eliswa later admitted the members of Syro-Malabar Rite also and it developed as a congregation for both Latin and Syro-Malabar Rites.

Servant of God Mother Eliswa was originally from Ochanthuruth Cruz Milagris parish, she was the eldest sister of Fr. Louis Vypissery TOCD, who was the first member of the Discalced Carmelites of Latin Rite at Manjummel. She was married to Vatharu Vakayil of Koonammavu parish and became a widow at the age of 20. Her daughter Anna and sister Thresia joined in her life style oriented to

prayer and shared her charism and thus gave birth to the first religious Congregation for women in Kerala. Archbishop Bernardine entrusted the girls education as their apostolate which was the urgent need of the time. She started school, boarding house and orphanage for girls first time in the Kerala Church and contributed to the empowerment of women. After 24 years of foundation the congregation was divided according to the Rites and two separate religious congregations, Congregation of Teresian Carmelites (CTC) and Congregation of the Mother of Carmel (CMC) were formed out of TOCD. On 17th September, 1890, Mother Eliswa and Latin sisters left everything and shifted their residence temporary to a small house in the CSST convent compound at Ernakulam. On 10th November 1890, they were solemnly brought to Varapuzha to the new convent built by Archbishop Leonardo Mellano OCD. Mother Eliswa was a shining model of detachment and fraternal charity and God rewarded her hundred fold. Today CTC Congregation has 187 convents and 1400 sisters in the 7 provinces. CTC sisters render their services in various missions and institutions in the Archdiocese, also in the important centres like Archbishop's house, Carmelgiri Seminary and Ashirbhavan. The CTC has 27 convents and many Institutions like colleges and schools in the Archdiocese of Verapoly.

2.4 Carmelite Sisters of St. Teresa (CSST)

Carmelite Sisters of St. Teresa is another Carmelite Congregation founded in Kerala in the 19th century, by Servant of God Mother Teresa of St. Rose of Lima. Miss. Grace de Lima was an Anglo Indian, who came to Alapuzha as a teacher. At the time of Archbishop Leonardo Mellano, under spiritual guidance of Italian Missionary Candidus OCD the CSST congregation was founded. From the beginning she tried to give English education to the Anglo Indian students in Ernakualm and now, St. Teresa's School and College are very remarkable centres of girls' education. They render their services in orphanages, old age homes and other missions. In the Archdiocese of Verapoly, there are 11 convents and many

institutions. The CSST Congregation has 828 sisters in five provinces.

2.5. Oblates of St. Joseph (OSJ)

The TOCD Latin priests at Manjummel received an invitation from OCD Superior General to amalgamate to First Order. But four of their Fathers Fr. Felix Punnakkattussery, Fr. Philip Komaranchath, Fr. Hilarion Nedumparambil and Fr. Berchumens Konnullu had no interest in this plan and so they approached Archbishop Joseph Attipetty. He made necessary changes to the Rules which he received from Pope Paul VI. The copy of the same was given to these four fathers for their study and evaluation. They received the Rules and thus in 1962 a local congregation was formed with the name Oblates of St. Joseph and this was amalgamated in 1987 May 13 with the Oblates of St. Joseph founded in Italy. In Verapoly Archdiocese they have two houses, one in Aluva and the other in Perumpilly.

2.6 South Kerala Province of OCD

When the Discalced Carmelite family in India was rearranged by V. Rev. Fr. General, Philip Sainz de Baranda, in 1981 into different circumscriptions, 10 Latin members from Malabar Province were assigned to St. Joseph's Monastery, Varapuzha to form an independent community under the General Definitory. It was then christened Varapuzha Unit. In the year 1992, a territorial adjustment was made by Fr. Camilo Maccise, Superior General between the province of Manjummel and the Varapuzha Provincial Delegation. Accordingly St. Peter's Monastery Bethsaida and St. Aloysius Monastery, Kottiyam were transferred to the Delegation and the monastery of Varapuzha was given to Manjummel Province. The Delegation was assigned to the southern regions of Kerala for its expansion and vocation promotion. At this decisive juncture of its growth, by the decree of the Definitory of 21st December, 1992, Varapuzha Provincial Delegation was raised to the status of General Delegation under the new name South Kerala Province. During the Provincial Chapter of March 1996, the General

Definitory raised Commissariate into a full-fledged Province on 29th of May 2001 which was officially declared on 15th of October 2001 at Kottiyam. Now the South Kerala Province has altogether 22 Houses (Kerala 10, Mission 8, Italy 2, Germany 2) and 87 Priests and many students in formation. The members of the South Kerala Province participate the pastoral care of the faithful through parish ministry, retreats, classes and other activities proper to the Order.

3. Other Religious Congregations for Women in Verapoly

After indigenous religious congregations founded in 19th century, other religious women came to Verapoly in the first half of the 20th century. Sisters of Charity, Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, Order of Poor Clare Colettines, Daughters of the Heart of Mary, Order of the Most Holy Saviour and St. Bridget are the congregations started convents in Verapoly before 1965.

3.1 Sisters of Charity

The foundress of Sisters of Charity, Bartholomew Capitanio was born in Italy on January 13, 1807. Vincenzo Jerosa was her best support during the foundation and led it after her death. This congregation was started in Lovera Italy and its first house in India was in Calcutta on March 17, 1860. In 1922, with the invitation of the king of Cochin, Archbishop Angel Mary invited them and they did service in Ernakulam General Hospital for forty years. In 1964 Archbishop Attipetti entrusted them the administration of the Lourdes Hospital. In 1975 the administration of the Hospital was taken back by the Archbishop. The Charity sisters render their service in five houses in the Archdiocese of Verapoly.

3.2 Franciscan Sisters of Mary

The foundress of Franciscan Sisters of Mary was Mother Mary of the Passion, France. She came here as a religious in another Congregation and after reaching in India she founded the congregation in Ootty. Their

Generalate is in Rome. Archbishop Angel Mary invited them to Archdiocese of Verapoly. In the Archdiocese of Verapoly they have three convents: in Kaloor, Palarivattom and Manjummel. They render remarkable service to the women through vocational training centres, schools and parish ministries. In 1930, the first house was blessed at Kaloor.

3.3 Order of Poor Clare Colettines

Poor Clare Colettines follow the same Rule of St. Clare approved by Pope Innocent IV in 1253. Collet was born in France in 1381. Her parents died in her childhood and she joined in the Franciscan Congregation and became a religious and she lived in a hermitage in asceticism. She was inspired to live in real poverty and original values of the Congregation and to renew the same with the permission of Pope Benedict XIII. In 1932 they founded a convent in Burma but during the Second World War, Burma was attacked by Japan and the Sisters had to flee from there. The Capuchin fathers in Aluva gave them a house and on December 2, 1942, the first house of Poor Clare was established in Aluva.

3.4 Daughters of the Heart of Mary

Daughters of the Heart of Mary was founded in Paris and in 1961, Vimalayam convent was started in Ernakulam Kacheripady and in 1976 Marialayam in Panangad. They do service in the field of education and vocational training. They help the poor girls by giving them training and teach Home Science to girls and enable them to find out possible jobs.

3.5 Order of the Most Holy Saviour and St. Bridget

With the interest of Archbishop Joseph Attipetty, a convent of the Order of the Most Holy Saviour and St. Bridget was established in Kalamassery. This is the third Bridgetine convent in India. In 1962 June Apostolic Internuncio Most Rev. Dr. James Robert Knox laid foundation stone for the convent in the presence of Archbishop Attipetty. The inauguration was in 1963. Bridgetine Sisters render their service in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament Christian

education to the children, and preparation of the children for receiving Sacraments.

3.6 Women religious after 1970

In the second half of the 20th century, after 1970, many religious congregations of women which have origin in India and from European countries like Italy, France, Spain, Switzerland and Austria started convents in the Archdiocese of Verapoly. Many religious congregations of Italian origin opened their houses in Verapoly Archdiocese. They are:

1. Institute of the Christ the Redeemer founded in Madrid Spain.
2. Augustinian Sisters of Servants of Jesus and Mary Generalate in Rome, houses in Pottakkuzhi, Aluva and Thevara
3. Augustinian Sisters of Most Holy Annunciation. Generalate in Arezzo Italy, house in Koratty.
4. Compassionate Servants of Mary Generalate in Rome, house in Kalamassery.
5. Congregation of the Apostolic Carmel (AC). Generalate in Bangalore, house is in Valappu, Ochanthuruth.
6. Congregation of the sisters of St. Charles Borromeo. Generalate in Thane, house in Thuthiyoor.
7. Congregation of the Carmelite Religious (CCR), Generalate in Thiruvananthapuram, house in Karthedam.
8. Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph Chambery Generalate in Rome, house in Unichira.
9. Daughters of the Crowns Virgin Generalate in Rome, house in Elamakkara.
10. Daughters of Divine Zeal Generalate in Rome, houses in Chalikkavattam and Edavanakkad.
11. Deena Sevana Sabha (DSS). Generalate in Kanoor Pattuvam, houses in Kalamassery, Pizhala and Pachalam.
12. Dominican Sisters of Our Lady of Rosary Generalate in Firenze Italy, houses in Vaduthala and Kothad.
13. Daughters of Nazareth Generalate in Pisa Italy house in Athani, Ankamaly.
14. Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Generalate in Kollam,

- Pattathanam, house in Edathala.
15. Handmaids of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Generalate in Rome, houses in Kakkanad, and Manattuparambu.
 16. Institute of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mount Carmel (O. Cam) Generalate in Rome, houses in Kalamassery, Chittoor, and Pachalam.
 17. Marian Congregation of the Houses of Charity. Generalate in Emilia Italy, houses in Mamangalam and Varapuzha.
 18. Missionary Sisters of Incarnation (SMI) Generalate in Rome, houses in Vallarpadam, Thaikkoodam and Pallilamkara.
 19. Missionary Sisters of the Mary (SSMI) Generalate in Nalgonda Andhra Pradesh, house in Manjummel
 20. Passionate Sisters of St. Paul of the Cross, (CP) Generalate in Rome, houses in Cheranelloor and Nettoor.
 21. Poor Clare of Perpetual Adoration started in America and house in Chempumukku
 22. Reparatrix Sisters of the Sacred Heart, Generalate in Rome, house in Thevarkadu
 23. Sisters Handmaids of Charity of St. Vincent De Paul (SMDC), Generalate in Novara Italy, houses in Palarivattom and Perumpilly.
 24. Sisters of the Holy Cross Generalate in Switzerland, house in Kacheripady.
 25. Sisters of Holy Nativity Generalate in Turin Italy, house in Ponnarimangalam.
 26. Sisters of Our Lady of Sorrows Servants of Mary of Pisa Generalate in Pisa Italy, house in Cheranelloor
 27. Missionary Sisters of Most Sacred Heart of Jesus Generalate in Viterbo, Italy, house in Ponel
 28. Sisters of the Sacred Heart (SSH) Generalate in Bihar, house in Vennala.
 29. Sisters of Mercy of St. Maria Magdalena, Generalate in France, house in Kuttikattuara
 30. Society of Our Lady of the Way (Secular Institute) Generalate in Austria, house in Ernakulam.
 31. Visitation Congregation (SVD), Generalate in Alapuzha, houses in Aluva and Muppathadam
 32. Sisters of Immaculate Conception, Generalate in Madrid Spain, house in Thelathuruth,

33. Missionary Sisters of St. Antony Mary Claret, Generalate in Brazil, house in Koonammavu.

4. Other Men Religious in Verapoly Archdiocese

4.1 Jesuits

As part of the Portuguese Mission, many religious Congregation came to Malabar and Jesuits started by St. Ignatius of Loyola was and important one among these Religious Orders for men. Missionary activities of St. Francis Xavier and Jesuits are written in the Indian History in golden letters. The House of Jesuits in Kerala was started in *Iso-Bhavan* in St. Albert's School compound. Fr. D. Gordon SJ, the Provincial of Madhura was invited by Archbishop Attipetty In 1956, *Iso-Bhavan* was started and Fr. Antony Manchil SJ was the superior. In 1960, Fr. Joseph Edamaram bought Lumen Institute and *Iso-Bhavan* was returned to Archdiocese. The second Jesuit house is at Thaikattukara, Aluva. In 1975, Archbishop Joseph Kelanthara blessed this house. Later ICTA in Kalamassery and *Jyothis* at Kaloore were opened.

4.2 Order of St. Augustine

From the Portuguese Mission, Augustinians were in Kerala. Four Augustinian bishops were there in the Diocese of Kochi. The famous Archbishop Alexis Menezes who conducted the Synod of Diampher was an Augustinian. After Portuguese period, the presence of Augustinians in Kerala was in 20th century. In 1968, Augustinians reached again in Kerala. The first member from Kerala was Fr. Francis Kothakath. In 1982, the first house was established in Edakochi and the only house of Augustinians in Verapoly Archdiocese is the St. Augustine Study House in Mariapuram, Aluva. They participate in the parish ministry and other spiritual ministries.

4.3 Salesians of Don Bosco

A branch of Salesians was reached Kerala in 1956 through the Don Bosco Institute at Vaduthala. Archbishop Joseph Attipetty blessed



the Don Bosco Oratory. This institute render remarkable service in the Youth formation.

4.4 OFM Capuchins

The first Capuchin monastery of the Franciscans was established in a building at Varavukatt in 1959 and it is shifted to Ponnuranni Monastery. Servant of God Theophine's tomb is in this monastery. Their Provincial house is Kalamassery in the Archdiocese of Verapoly.

4.5 Congregation of the Mission

In 1625 St. Vincent De Paul founded the Congregation of the Mission in France to propagate the Good News of Christ to the Poor. In 1922 the Spanish Missionaries of this Congregation reached India in Cuttack diocese and began their missionary activities. In 1961 a study house with the name St. Vincent Mission House was opened at Aluva. They give their service in different fields like formation of the candidates for priesthood, preaching, retreat and pastoral activities, St. Vincent De Paul Sodalities and classes of Catechism.

5. Other Men Religious in the Archdiocese

1. Redemptorists (CSSR) house in Maloth, Koonammavu.
2. Institute of Christ the Redeemer Idente Missionaries (M. ID). House in Kalamassery
3. Missionary Fathers of Incarnation- (PMI). House in Manjali
4. Priests of the Sacred Heart (SCJ). They have two houses in Aluva.
5. Josephites of Murildo (CSJ). House in Chemparaki
6. Institute of *Voluntas Dei* (IVD). House in Sreemoola nagaram

Besides these religious communities of Men there are Brothers of St. Teresa of Avila and Brothers of St. Patrick at Manjapra. All these religious communities are giving splendid service in the pastoral ministry of the Archdiocese. There are a good number of religious congregations of both men and women in the Archdiocese of Verapoly and there service adds splendour to the pastoral ministries.

