

**Palackal Thoma Malpan** [പാലയ്ക്കൽ തോമ്മാ മൽപാൻ] (b. *circa* 1780 at Pallippuram [പള്ളിപ്പുറം], near Shertallay [ചേർത്തല], in Alleppey [ആലപ്പുഴ], Kingdom of Travancore [തിരുവിതാംകൂർ രാജ്യം]; d. there, 16th January 1841) was an illustrious secular priest [ഇടവകപ്പട്ടക്കാരൻ] from the Catholic Church of St. Thomas [Syro-Malabar Church] then under the Vicariate-Apostolic of Verapoly [വരാപ്പുഴ] and later under the Archdiocese of Ernakulam [എറണാകുളം]; the senior among the three founders of the first Religious Order of the St. Thomas Christians, the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate; and the founder and Rector of the first Seminary run by the St. Thomas Christians, first at Pallippuram and later at Mannanam [മാന്നാനം] near Kottayam [കോട്ടയം]. (The title *Malpan*, from the Syriac word *malpānā*, denotes his status as a preceptor of priests.)

After his ordination *circa* 1805 consequent to studies under Thachil Abraham Malpan [തച്ചിൽ അബ്രാഹാം മൽപാൻ] (the younger brother of Thachil Thariath Matthoo Tharakan [തച്ചിൽ തര്യത്ത് മാത്തു തരകൻ]), he was appointed the Secretary for the St. Thomas Christians and Counsellor to the Bishop Mgr. Raymond Roviglia of St. Joseph, O. C. D., Vicar-Apostolic during 1803–1815; he continued to be a counsellor to the Vicars-Apostolic for the rest of his life, even after he resigned the position of Secretary in 1815.

As secretary and counsellor, he was instrumental to several reforms in the Catholic Church of Kerala: the practice of St. Thomas Christian priests and seminarians wearing cassocks [ജോവ] was introduced (previously, they had dressed in a way resembling the Jacobite clerics); the custom of episcopal visits [വിസിത്ത] to parishes was begun; the confessional [കന്യാസാരങ്ങളുടേ] was made obligatory in all churches; walled cemeteries [സെമിത്തേരി] were built for all churches (earlier, the dead had been buried in the open compound); and confraternities [കൊമ്പിരിയാ, ദർശനസമൂഹം] were started in the St. Thomas Christian churches borrowing the custom from the Latin churches in Kerala; the *confreres* [ദർശനക്കാർ] assisted the orderly conduct of solemn feasts [കൊമ്പിരിയാപ്പെരുനാൾ, ദർശനപ്പെരുനാൾ], funerals, and other ceremonies.

After leaving the position of secretary, he returned to Pallippuram in 1818. Since there were several acolytes desirous of studying for priesthood under him, the *Malpan* was compelled to start a seminary at Pallippuram, with Mangalath Chandy [മംഗലത്തു് ചാണ്ടി] of Pallippuram, later secretary and counsellor at Verapoly, as the first student. Among the first to join his seminary was Chavara Kuriakose [ചാവറ കരിയാക്കോസ്] (1805–1871) of Kainakary [കൈനകരി], then aged 13; the *Malpan* brought him up as if he were a son and considered him the spiritual heir. Seeking to bring order to the seminary, he wrote a *regula* [ക്രമച്ചട്ടം] for the seminarians, following it himself more stringently than all else. Even otherwise, he had kept an austere routine and diet from his early years.

Considering teaching and scholarship as his vocation, the *Malpan* devoted his life to that aim. He took particular care that his seminary had an exemplary collection of books, especially modern books in Tamil and the few in Malayalam, printed chiefly by members of the Society of Jesus. He had a special interest in languages. Learning Tamil on his own, he translated the spiritual books in Tamil into Malayalam; as a consequence he began to be called in jest the ‘Tamil Malpan’ [ചാണ്ടി മൽപാൻ]. He asked his students to scribe all the books they considered valuable, including liturgical books in Syriac. These may have inspired his disciple Fr. Chavara to start a Malayalam printing press at Mannanam, only the third of its kind in Kerala, in 1844. The *Malpan* also took every care to have his abler students learn other languages such as Latin, sometimes from European priests.

Since his early years the *Malpan* seems to have cherished the notion of a Religious Order; his experiences in running the seminary might have strengthened the resolve. In this endeavour he found an eager and able collaborator in Porukara Thoma Kathanar [പോരൂക്കര തോമ്മാ കത്തനാർ] (1799–1846) of Kolloorkad [കല്ലൂർക്കാട്], Champakulam [ചമ്പക്കുളം] (to which the *Malpan*’s maternal family, Puthenpurackal [പുത്തൻപുരയ്ക്കൽ], also belonged), who had known and admired the *Malpan* since his days as a seminarian. As for Fr. Chavara, as he says in his *Chronicles* [നാളാഗമങ്ങൾ], he had always been of one mind with his *Malpan* in all matters. With the blessing of the Bishop Mgr. Aurelio Stabellini, O. Carm., Vicar-Apostolic during 1828–1831, the Monastery [കൊവേന്ത] was founded at Mannanam on 11th May 1831.

Two years later, the *Malpan* started a seminary at Mannanam to teach priests both secular and religious; a new movement in the spiritual formation of St. Thomas Christian clergy, this became the cradle for several priests and bishops such as Mar Louis Pazheparambil [പഴേപറമ്പിൽ മാർ ളൂയിസ്] and Mar Augustine Kandathil [കണ്ടത്തിൽ മാർ ആഗസ്റ്റിനോസ്] from the St. Thomas Christians.

He passed away in 1841 and was buried at the main altar in the Forane Church of St. Mary, Pallippuram (connected by tradition with the apostolate of St. Thomas in South India); judging from the account of Fr. Chavara, the funeral was worthy of a bishop.