The Great Archbishop

Mar Augustine Kandathil, D. D.

The Outline of a Vocation

George Thalian, D. D.

'Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel,
but upon a candlestick, that it may shine to all that are in the house.'

Matt. 5:16.

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Contents

Preface to the First Edition[1]

This is not a biography, much less a history, of the illustrious and esteemed late Archbishop of Ernakulam Mar Augustine Kandathil. But this is only a faint echo of the feelings of affection and admiration that well up in my heart for the incandescent personality of the Archbishop who has inspired my life, enkindled my spirits, and who still fills my mind with memories never to fade. In the fond hope that these pages will constitute a humble acknowledgement of the deep debt of gratitude I owe him, I publish this on the fifth anniversary of his departure from this world.

George Thalian.

Tiruchirappalli,
10th January 1961.

Preface to the Second Edition

I published this book first on the 10th of January 1961, when I was a student in the Seminary, Trichy. Years passed, times changed, the numbers of the Bishops and the Archbishops including the Cardinals increased in the Catholic Church of India, and in Kerala in particular. Still the Archbishop Mar Augustine Kandathil stands out as the Great Archbishop, especially in Kerala, even now in my mind when there is a Major Archbishop in the Syro-Malabar Church in Kerala. He was a man of strong decision and action, with strong mind and heart looking ahead of the times. Moreover he was a leader in the Catholic Church, concerned more about the people of God and priests in the Church, with discipline, more than anything else.

With the memories of all these of the past, I think that the Major Archbishop at present must be the Great one with all these qualities of mind and heart of action for the unity in the Syro-Malabar Church, especially in the liturgy, and the discipline among the priests and the religious more than anything else. The high title with authority and power is not enough. It has to be exercised for the good of the whole Church at large in the way acceptable to all as far as possible.

This is the reason why I publish this very short life history of that great man, the Archbishop, Mar Augustine Kandathil, as an outstanding model to

[1] The first edition was published under the title 'The First Indian Archbishop, His Grace Most Rev. Mar Augustine Kandathil, D. D.'

the people and priests, and even to the Bishops and Archbishops of Kerala Catholic Church at present.

Let me thank all those who have helped me to publish this booklet and read this with a spirit of sharing.

George Thalian, D. D.

Assisi Mount, Neerpara,
30–6–1993.

Foreword

This booklet is the outline of the biography of the illustrious ecclesiastical dignitary, Mar Augustine Kandathil, the first Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church. It is a reprint of what the author had published in 1961 as a humble token of his appreciation, love, and gratitude, to his Archbishop.

At this juncture of the history of the Syro-Malabar Church, it is relevant to recall the memory of this great Archbishop. One wishes he were alive today. He would have provided the much needed strong and enlightened leadership during these troubled times. While he was alive he fearlessly and tirelessly fought for defending the rights and privileges of the Church he loved, of which he was the undisputed leader. It was he who laid the foundations for the progress the Syro-Malabar Church has made in recent times, against great odds. As early as in 1955, Archbishop Kandathil had the vision and courage to declare that we should have a liturgy that is progressive and dynamic and suited to the culture of our great nation and changing times. He would surely have been the obvious choice to be the first Major Archbishop or Patriarch of the Syro-Malabar Church. His death leaves a void that may take long to fill adequately.

Let us hope that his unique qualities of leadership will inspire future generations to emulate him to restore unity and prosperity in the Syro-Malabar Church.

Fr. Thomas Mulavarickal, B. A., L. Ph., L. D.

Green Gardens, Shertallay,
13–12–1992.

1 Archbishop Mar Augustine Kandathil

On the 10th of January 1956, there occurred a sad and unexpected event that plunged the people of Kerala into deep sorrow. It was the demise of the Archbishop *Most Rev. Mar Augustine Kandathil*, the head of the Syrian Hierarchy in India. That long life of more than half a century for the Church of Christ in Kerala came to an end that day. It was a loss not only for the Catholic Church in Kerala, but also for the whole Christian Church in India. He served the Church for 55 years as a priest, 44 years as a bishop, and 32 years as an Archbishop. His achievements are written already in letters of gold in the annals of the history of the Syrian Church in India. They bear testimony to the fruitful service he has rendered to the Church and to his country. Let us cast a glance at his long and glorious life of service to the Church and to the society at large in India.

2 His Early Life

He was born at Chempu, near Vaikom, on the 25th of August 1874, and was brought up in the spirit of a Christian family that taught him to love God more and more as he grew older. He completed his priestly studies in the Papal Seminary, Kandy, and was ordained priest on the 21st of December 1901 at Kandy by *Rt. Rev. Mgr. Clemente Pagnani, O. S. B.*, the then Bishop of Kandy. Afterwards, he returned to his Vicariate of Ernakulam and was made the first Rector of the Petit Seminary there. He carried out his duty to the great satisfaction of his Bishop up to 1911. In between he had been vicar in two places, Vadayar and Kulasekharamangalam, and within a short time, by his ardent zeal and holiness, he proved himself an excellent parish priest after the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

He was consecrated Bishop on the 3rd of December 1911 at Kandy by *Most Rev. Mgr. Wladislaw Michal Zaleski*, the then Delegate-Apostolic to India, and was appointed Co-adjutor[2] to the then Vicar-Apostolic, *Rt. Rev. Mar Louis Pareparambil*, of the Vicariate of Ernakulam. At the death of the Bishop Mar Louis on the 9th of December 1919, he became the Vicar-Apostolic of the Vicariate. When the Syro-Malabar Hierarchy was established and the Vicariate was raised to the status of an Archdiocese on the

[2] On the 29th of August 1911.

21st of December 1923, he was made the Archbishop. And it was his privilege to be the first Indian Archbishop in power and administration.

In the Jubilee Year 1925 he visited the Holy Father *Pope Pius XI* and the eternal city for the first and only time. In 1926 he celebrated his sacerdotal silver jubilee. Then in the year 1936 he celebrated the silver jubilee as a Bishop. On that jubilee day the title of the Official Assistant at the Pontifical Throne was conferred on him. He was the first to receive this honour in India. Again he had the privilege to celebrate the golden jubilee of his ordination, and it was celebrated in a splendid way. The crowning function of it was the Eucharistic procession conducted with all grandeur and solemnity at Ernakulam.

3 His Auxiliary

In his old age he longed for an auxiliary to help him and his longing was fulfilled by the Holy See in the year 1953. He found it difficult to do all the multifarious duties of administration single-handedly since he had become very weak and old. The good news of the appointment of his auxiliary was announced by the Dean of the Cardinals, *Most Rev. Mgr. Eugene Tisserant* himself, when he arrived at Ernakulam on 11th November 1953 with the holy relics of St. Thomas. *Rt. Rev. Mar Joseph Parecattil* was chosen as his auxiliary who later became his successor.

4 Extension of the Hierarchy

29th April 1955 was a red letter day in the history of the Syrian Church in Kerala, because it was on that day that the decree of the extension of the Syrian Hierarchy was published and granted by the Holy See mainly due to the ceaseless efforts of Mar Augustine Kandathil. He refers to it in his pastoral letter thus: 'Personally speaking I tried my level best for it with the help of my suffragan bishops. I am glad to see that our efforts proved fruitful and I thank God Almighty for it in a special manner. I believe that it will help the Church in India both spiritually and materially to grow and flourish more and more in her achievements.'

5 His Mortified Life of Virtues

He was known for his solid piety. Love for the poor and purity of life were the two virtues shining in him most. His personal capacity was the moving force for all the achievements. His motto '*In te speravi*'[3] was the guiding principle of his life. Every action of his was a reflection of his well chosen motto for life. He was convinced that all his endeavours had to be stamped with the divine help to bring forth fruits. He firmly believed that all his strength was from God, and lived the life of a faithful soldier of Christ accordingly. The hand of God was manifest in all his undertakings throughout his life. He was a man of prayer. He found consolation and hope in prayer. Every day he drew strength for his hard work from the power-house of grace through prayer and penance. The external activities of his pastoral life were the signs of his union with the Good Shepherd Jesus Christ.

6 Shepherd of Souls

He served the Syrian Church in Kerala at large and the Archdiocese of Ernakulam in particular for 44 long years with the generous heart of Jesus the Good Shepherd. His service will be remembered by the future generations of Kerala with feelings of gratitude and reverence. The Archdiocese of Ernakulam is indebted to him much.

He was a man of principle, and he regulated his works of administration accordingly. He established order everywhere, whether in the accounts of the parish or of any pious institution. He had a well thought-out plan for everything. For the ruling of the diocese, he adapted a proper and accurate form of administration according to the needs of the times. Laws were laid down regarding the administration of the parish property and things connected with it. He was attentive to every detail of administration. In the beginning, he had to face a lot of difficulties in bringing order in all these matters. But with a strong and resolute mind he overcame all these difficulties. To safeguard the rights of the Church in Kerala he worked hard and achieved success. He had the happiness of seeing the fruits of his labour before his death. To a great extent the Syrian Hierarchy owes to Mar Augustine Kandathil, its head, for its success then and after.

[3] I trust in Thee.

For the good of his children entrusted to him, and others too, he was ready to do everything he could. He could overcome any obstacle on the way to his end in view, by his undying motive force which was the love of God. It was as it were in his nature to go ahead amidst troubles either from within or without in order to do good to the people. Though he was strict and exacting in his dealings, he was broad-minded and far-sighted. First and foremost he was strict to himself, and that was the sign of the sincerity of his purpose.

7 Lover of the Poor

THE poor and the down-trodden had a special place in the corner of his magnanimous heart which was aglow with the love of God. He left no stone unturned for doing good to them. They could see in him Christ going about doing good. All the hospitals in the Archdiocese, meant for the different kinds of people suffering from all sorts of diseases including leprosy, bear witness to his love of God and love of the poor. Orphanages for the young and old were dear to his heart and they had their origin from him. He was not satisfied with merely founding these institutions for the poor but also saw to it that they really proved helpful to the poor. To look after the sick and poor of different walks of life, he founded different religious congregations both for men and women. Well-trained sisters were mainly given the charge of the sick and old, and especially the lepers. As often as he could, he visited the hospitals and the other institutions and examined their working, giving necessary corrections and directions so that they might serve their purpose well. Thus he is rightly called the lover of the poor and the needy.

8 The Protector of Catholic Schools

TO have a lively faith in God it is necessary that children be given Christian education. He understood this fundamental principle very well and lived for it. He fought for it boldly and unceasingly against the opposing forces. He vindicated the right of the Church to give them proper education. When others were wavering about it, he proved a sure guide and powerful leader to bring them to the proper channels and make them also fight with him for the cause. To show how much he worked for Christian education, it will be helpful to know the number of colleges, schools, and other institutions meant for the cause, he had in his Archdiocese. The Nirmala College at Muvattupuzha will be a standing monument to his thirst for having a new Catholic college in his Archdiocese for the better formation of the modern youth. When he died, there were 2 colleges, 31 high schools, 42 middle schools, 138 primary schools, 2 teachers' training schools, 5 industrial schools, and 25 boarding houses, in his Archdiocese for the purpose of imparting Catholic education.

Again, with a view to safeguard the faith of the people, he spread Catholic literature on all topics, especially on matters of importance as the time demanded. The most widely circulated and appreciated Catholic weekly 'Sathyadeepam' bears witness to his love of Catholic literature. He started it and maintained it as the apple of his eye. There was a daily, 'The Malabar Mail', the souvenir of his episcopal silver jubilee. This is an outstanding success of his strenuous efforts in this matter.

9 Reunion of the Separated

To bring the separated brethren back to the true fold of Christ, he helped the Archbishop *Most Rev. Geevarghese Mar Ivanios Panicker, O. I. C.* and his followers. He could see only with great sorrow the separated churches of disorder and confusion leading the sheep astray. He did, therefore, everything possible for their long expected reunion with the true Church of Christ. He prayed for it with the heart of a good shepherd. His last pastoral letter treated of the reunion of his separated brethren. He says: 'My earnest prayer and desire is that the separated brethren may come to the true fold soon. I am longing for it and I invite them all with a fatherly heart.'

10 The Spiritual Renovation of the Faithful

For the spiritual nourishment and growth of the people entrusted to him, he introduced many useful and timely ways and means by which they could grow in sanctity. The spreading of the devotion to the Sacred Heart was the first and best among the many.

He exhorted the faithful that they should dedicate their homes to the Sacred Heart and make Him the Ruler of their homes. Each and every action of theirs must be governed by that Ruler. He made compulsory that there should be an annual retreat in every parish. All the parishioners were expected to take part in it deriving spiritual strength for the whole year. Devotion to the Sacred Passion of Our Lord was spread in many parishes; it produced wonderful effects on the people and they began to understand more the dignity of suffering in their lives. Feasts were celebrated with more spirit of prayer and interior reform of the participants. Sacraments were administered in more regulated and unified forms according to the importance and sanctity of each one. Children were taught catechism in the Catholic schools and parishes and encouraged with prizes for distinction in it. The grown-ups were also given lessons of catechism according to their ability of understanding the sublime truths about Christ and His Church on earth. All his attempts both for the spiritual and temporal welfare of the Archdiocese of Ernakulam met with grand and unqualified success and it is noticeable in priests, parishes, religious, faithful, and in institutions of various kinds. The secret of his success lies in his well-chosen motto of life: 'In te speravi'. It did not remain a dead letter. It was the lodestar of his life till he breathed his last.

11 The End of his Life

Let us hear about his happy and peaceful death, in the very words of his successor *Rt. Rev. Mar Joseph Parecattil*: 'He had the privilege to die a peaceful and happy death because his life was such. He lived in faith and prayer. He received all the last sacraments in perfect serenity and in his senses. Together with the Extreme unction, he himself asked for *Viaticum*. Before receiving the Holy Communion, he said the '*confiteor*' distinctly. While he was given Extreme unction after the anointing of every member, he answered clearly 'Amen'. Then he breathed his last with the last words: 'Sacred Heart of Jesus, I trust in Thee'. Thus he sealed his life of faith and confidence; with these words he commended his soul to the Father. As he lived, so he died, fulfilling the will of God on earth. His long life of dedication to the Church and to his country gloriously came to an end here on earth.'

'Blessed is the rich man that is found without spot: and that hath not gone after gold, nor hoped in money and treasures. Who is this, & we will praise him, for he hath done marvelous things in his life. Who is proved therein, & perfect, shall have eternal Glory. He that could transgress, and hath not transgressed: and do evils, and hath not done: therefore are his good things stablished in our Lord, & all the church of saints shall declare his alms.' *(Eccles. 31:8-11.)* What beautiful words! He was a man to whom the Lord gave five talents, and he gained another five. What is his reward? Entrance into the joy of the Lord. *(Matt. 25:21.)*

I believe that Mar Augustine Kandathil of happy memory is now in heaven interceding for the Church in India, especially in Kerala, and for his country at large. By Divine Providence, the example of his life is a lesson delivered to the present age, of self-sacrifice and over-flowing generosity towards God and man.

12 His Epitaph

In
Loving and Respectful Memory
of

His Grace the Most Reverend
MAR AUGUSTINE KANDATHIL, D. D.

Archbishop of Ernakulam

Assistant at the Pontifical throne
and
Roman Count

FIRST METROPOLITAN
of
THE SYRO-MALABAR HIERARCHY

Watchful Guardian
of
THE RIGHTS OF ST. THOMAS CHRISTIANS

Resolute Defender of Their Ancient Rite
and
ZEALOUS PROMOTER OF THE REUNION MOVEMENT

Founder of
Numerous Institutions of Charity

Ardent devotee of
THE MOST SACRED HEART OF JESUS

His was a life of Heroic toil
Dedicated to
THE SERVICE OF CHURCH AND COUNTRY.

Born	25–8–1874
Ordained Priest	21–12–1901
Consecrated Bishop	3–12–1911
Installed Archbishop	16–11–1924
Called to eternal rest	10–1–1956