



**Servant of God Fr. Canisius Thekkekara CMI**  
*"God's Will... That Alone... That in Full."*



THE LIVING  
SAINT

Fr. Canisius

JOSE CHUNKAN

C. V. Francis (Translator)

2015

Dharmaram Publications  
Bengaluru 560029, India

***The Living Saint: Fr. Canisius***

By

Jose Chunkan

C. V. Francis (Translator)

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ISBN: 978 93 84964 33-7

Published by

Dharmaram Publications, Bengaluru, India

Printed at

Matha Printers, Bengaluru

Price: Rs. 100.00 / US\$ 5.00

**Dharmaram Publications**

Dharmaram College, Bengaluru 560029, India

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Email: [dpinformation@yahoo.com](mailto:dpinformation@yahoo.com); [dpoffice3@gmail.com](mailto:dpoffice3@gmail.com)

Web: [www.dharmarampublications.com](http://www.dharmarampublications.com)

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## FOREWORD



### **To Have New Wings**

When the life of Jesus is being re-introduced through New Evangelisation, is it not a great thing to introduce the life of such esteemed persons who intensely followed Jesus in their personal lives? New generation is going after new 'Heroes'. They are fascinated by the persons who strived to be famous in the fields of cinema, sports, business, etc. They do not appreciate, however, the 'Brave Fisherman' who steered the life's shipping boat in the violent storm and succeeded in reaching the safe shore. At this juncture, it is important to present the biographies of great luminaries with unblemished record before the new generation, who spread the life of grace around the common people and converted the life's sufferings as virtuous sweet experiences. The biographies make them aware that this way of life makes a life great. The saintly priest, Fr. Canisius is a divine Light

House. Fr. Jose Chunkan is a competent author on the life of Fr. Canisius, which is evident through his works and here the author is presenting a brief sketch about the saint's life. I whole-heartedly appreciate the endeavour of Fr. Jose Chunkan. Let there be new wings to the ideas about the kingdom of God to those who read this enjoyable and inspiring book.

Mar Sebastian Adayanthrath  
Auxiliary Bishop  
Archdiocese of Ernakulam-Angamaly



## GREETINGS



Holiness is a process and outcome of discerning the Will of God and living it with one's total commitment. For the holy people, the prime concern is seeking God and encountering him and making him known in and through their lives. Of course, God does take the initiative and the believer responds to the call heroically, living the life of faith, hope and love. This has been the legacy of all saints and holy persons.

In general, it is said that nobody should be called a saint or sinner before death, but in fact for all the people who met the Servant of God Fr. Canisius, he was a living saint. Many people testify even today that when Fr. Canisius spoke about Jesus and His Gospel, their hearts burned with zeal. Truly the life's waves which came out from Fr. Canisius were filled with holistic aroma. In the journey of holiness

the motto of that great soul was "God's Will... That alone... That in full!" It is God's providential intervention that made possible the initiation of canonisation process within a short span of time after his death.

Fr. Jose Chunkan, an ardent disciple of Servant of God Fr. Canisius, has taken so much effort to learn and write on the life of Fr. Canisius, and deserves special appreciation for his creative role and contributions. He has written many books in Malayalam; it is indeed praiseworthy that under his leadership an English version has come out to communicate with a larger audience. I sincerely congratulate and thank Fr. Jose Chunkan for the new book titled *Living Saint: Fr. Canisius* and for the hard work at different levels to propagate the visions of Fr. Canisius and to expedite the canonisation process of the saintly Fr. Canisius.

Having lived one year with Fr. Canisius at Sakshatkara, the Centre for Spiritual Realisation (CSR), Pariyaram, I remember with gratitude the time of blessings of his presence. Sakshatkara is a renewal centre of the CMI Congregation, situated at Pariyaram on the banks of river Chalakudy. During 1988-'89, I worked there as a scholastic. One day a bank officer came there with his colleague, his only aim was to meet face-to-face the living saint named Fr. Canisius. He carefully observed the way in which Fr. Canisius walked from his room to the meeting place, and after meeting him they returned home with great self satisfaction. During those days, Sakshatkara was a halting place for the tourists who came to Athirapilly, Vazhachal and their aim was also to meet Fr. Canisius. The nuns who

came here with their school students used to tell them pointing to Fr. Canisius, "The Living Saint."

Fr. Jose Chuncan in his book *Jeevikkunna Visudhan: Fr. Canisius* tried faithfully to portray the life of Fr. Canisius. I had the opportunity to live in the next room close to Fr. Canisius to pray and to eat with him. Those were the days in which I experienced the glory of consecrated life. Fervent prayer, deep knowledge, graceful and spiritual dialogue, considerate approach, and making the listeners great ones through his caring dialogues are some of the ways which made Fr. Canisius a saint.

Fr. Canisius hails from a remote but spiritually rich village named Anandapuram. That little boy Ouseph grew up well in spiritual life, wisdom and reached great heights. He has become the Light of the World and a role model for the fellow beings. Fr. Canisius loved holiness than knowledge: more than being the First Biblical Doctor from India he was a devoted servant of the Word of God, who gave flesh to the Word of God.

"My mother and my brethren are those who hear the word of God and do it" (Luke 8:21). Mary became the mother of God by giving this response: "Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). Fr. Canisius, a great devotee of Mother of Carmel, built up his spiritual life on this strong foundation. Fr. Canisius was in a stream of spiritual enrichment while he was active as a reputed Professor, erudite preacher, loving Rector of seminarians, and a Major Superior in the Congregation.

Like St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara, the Champion of Blessed Sacrament, Fr. Canisius followed the legacy and the charisma of the founder and spent hours in front of the tabernacle in Sannidhi, the small chapel at CSR. His reflective meditations on the Word of God inspired many and a large number of people longed to attend retreats and talks given by him. More than his word and works, his pious life was a true witness to the Gospel. He stood for Gospel values with an uncompromising commitment and motivated the young religious and his community members to fall in line with Jesus of the Gospel.

Being a religious after the model of St. Chavara, he lived a life of prayer, penance and austerity. He did pray without being noticed by others and did penance for the renewal of the community. He had the simplicity to say, "Prayer is my rest." He was indeed a true saint to the people, in his words, deeds, walk and movements and in his whole life.

Prof. C. V. Francis has done the translation of this work beautifully well. His earnest efforts will inspire many to love, know, and learn more about the Servant of God Fr. Canisius.

I congratulate the original author and the translator and wish that this book be spread everywhere and the readers be blessed with spiritual awakening.

Let us earnestly pray for the canonisation of Fr. Canisius so that he will be a Light to the Nations!

Fr. Paul Achandy CMI  
Prior General

## CONGRATULATION AND CONTEMPLATION



*The Living Saint: Fr. Canisius* is a biographical work on the Servant of God Fr. Canisius, written by Rev. Fr. Jose Chunkan CMI, and translated by Prof. C. V. Francis. This book presents the lovely and pious growth of a little boy by name Ouseph from the remote village of Anandapuram to a veteran spiritual leader with deep God-experience and to the status of a Servant of God in the Catholic Church. The golden words, "Golden Virtues", and heavenly intercessions which are described in this book offer a good harvest for the spiritual minds.

The very motto of Fr. Canisius, "God's Will... That alone... That in full!" is very simple. His lifestyle was such that he would proceed only after getting an assurance that it is the Will of God, especially in confused situations. May I point out some of his basic qualities for study and contemplation:

- (a) Fr. Canisius, a man of humility, by his conscious efforts and constant prayerful life has grown up to a man of God. He has spent almost 16 years at CSR Pariyaram, the renewal centre of the CMI congregation. Many a people visited him for his inspirational advices and spiritual guidance. Together with them he prayed, to them he asked to pray for him and with them he shared his divine experiences. There he was with the Eucharistic Lord, not only physically but also wholeheartedly. St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara, the founder of his congregation, was his role model. He was abiding in the love of Christ and lived in the Word of God.
- (b) In spite of being the first Indian to secure a Doctorate in Sacred Scripture (DSS) from the prestigious Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome, and a reputed Professor in renowned seminaries, he took Bible classes even to the altar boys at Ernakulam, novices, and sisters throughout Kerala and to the people of God at large all over India.
- (c) Servant of God, Fr. Canisius held high positions in CMI congregation and he was undoubtedly an able administrator; but never in his life he took advantage of his positions.
- (d) He was with utmost compassion for the poor. He loved God as his own father and served his fellow human beings as his own brothers and sisters. He has initiated many charitable and social works for the benefit of the marginalised.
- (e) He was a man who welcomed suffering expecting its salvific value. He never complained about his pain and sufferings for which I am a personal witness, because I

was blessed to serve him at Amala Hospital, Thrissur, during his last days. The way he approached suffering was a model for all of us.

At this juncture, I congratulate and thank Fr. Jose Chunkan for all the services he has rendered throughout these years on account of the cause of Fr. Canisius, including publication of books. He has succeeded in depicting Fr. Canisius in his previous books and especially in *The Living Saint: Fr. Canisius*. I also thank Prof. C. V. Francis for translating this book into English, which will be beneficial for many. May all those who go through this book be inspired by the saintly life of Fr. Canisius and be blessed by his heavenly intercession!

Fr. Walter Thelappilly CMI  
Provincial, Devamatha Province,  
Thrissur





## AUTHOR



Fr. Jose Chunkan CMI, son of Chunkan Ouseph and Thresia, was born in 1952 at Meloor. He joined the CMI Congregation and made the profession of first vows in 1972, final vows in 1978, and in 1980 was ordained a priest.

He had his philosophical and theological studies from Dharmaram College, Bangalore. He got his B.A. Malayalam Degree from S.B. College, Changanassery, affiliated to Kerala University, with first rank. In 1983, he took his M.A. in Malayalam with first class from Kozhikode University Centre.

He served Christ College, Irinjalakuda, as Professor, Head of the Department, and the Principal. He gave leadership for the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of the college.

An able administrator, an efficient organiser, famous preacher, lyricist of devotional hymns, and an author of

many books, he is still very active at various levels. The first Associate Editor of *Deepika* Thrissur edition, Chief architect during initial years of Christ Vidhyanikethan School, Administrator of Catholic Centre, Director of Sneha Bhavan, and Prior of Christ Monastery, Irinjalakuda, were some of the posts which were adorned by Fr. Jose Chunkan and has done an exemplary service at all these places.

He has authored the following books:

1. *Sanaysa Samudhgradhanam*
2. *Canisiusachanum Carmaleetha Sabhayum*
3. *Gruhasakhi* [Revised Edition]
4. *Jeevikkunna Visudhan: Fr. Canisius*
5. *Daivadasan Canisiusachante Nermozhikal*

## INTRODUCTION

I wrote a brief biography of the Servant of God Fr. Canisius, titled *Jeevikkunna Visudhan: Fr. Canisius*, and it released by the Major Archbishop Cardinal George Alencherry in a public meeting convened immediately after the solemn requiem mass at Mannanam church in 2012. Many priests, members of my own Congregation, and Rev. Sisters who were familiar with my earlier work, *Canisiusachanum Carmeelatha Sabhayam*, asked me to write a small biography that could be easily and quickly read. The same request was made by many Christian and non-Christian people of Anandapuram. I took up their sincere and well-motivated request, which resulted in the publication of the work, *Jeevikkunna Visudhan: Fr. Canisius*.

Appreciation of this Malayalam book came from many corners and it compelled me to have an English version. My search for a good translator came out in success when I could contact Prof. C. V. Francis, Chakkachamparambil, my former colleague at Christ College, Irinjalakuda. Though hesitant initially, he took up this translation work with a sense of dedication and devotion.

I am very happy and indebted to two of my colleagues for their co-operation for the publication of my two biographies on the Sainly Religious Fr. Canisius. Prof. Sebastian Joseph, HoD of Malayalam, has contributed with greetings to my book, *Canisiusachanum Carmeelatha Sabhayam* and Prof. C. V. Francis, HoD of English, has translated this book *The Living Saint: Fr. Canisius*. I remember with great gratitude Rev. Sr. Santhi CMC, retired

Principal of Carmel College, Mala who helped me in the biographical writings and Mr. P. Joms Jose MA, BEd from Chiyaram, whose proficiency in the English language added charm and style to this English version, *The Living Saint: Fr. Canisius*.

Mar Sebastian Adayanthrath, the Auxiliary Bishop of my home Archdiocese Ernakulam-Angamaly, deserves my special gratitude for his forewords for both the Malayalam and English versions. The Prior General of the CMI congregation very Rev. Fr. Paul Achandy is to be specially mentioned for his words of blessings and appreciation. I acknowledge with gratitude the services of Prof. Dr. Francis Thonippara CMI, Professor of Church History at Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram and the Chairperson of the Historical Commission of the process of Canonisation of Servant of God Fr. Canisius for graciously taking up the responsibility of publishing this work as the Director of Dharmaram Publications.

Rev. Fr. Jose Nandhikkara CMI, Professor of Philosophy at Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore, is an ardent devotee of Fr. Canisius and a promoter of Canisian thoughts and holiness. It was due to his efforts the doctoral thesis of Fr. Canisius, namely *Cardinal Seripando: An Exegete and Biblical Theologian*, was published posthumously. He took the initiative for "Fr. Canisius CMI Endowment Lectures" at Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram as well as the initial steps towards the canonisation process of Servant of God: Fr. Canisius. He has helped me with the publication of this work in formatting and proof-reading. I sincerely thank the

artist Mr. David Thekkiniath, Smrti, for the apt and beautiful cover design.

Fr. Canisius is yet to be studied in detail and that will be an intellectual tribute that we could pay him and I hope this translation work of Prof. C.V. Francis will be a path finder for us. I congratulate and thank the translator as well as Mr. P. Joms Jose MA, BEd.

My ears are blessed to hear the words of acknowledgment and appreciation from many including my Major Superiors for my sincere and constructive attempts both in words and works at Anandapuram and Ampazhakkad as a widow's penny for the noble cause of Fr. Canisius. It is not for this human solace tiny or great, that I work; it is for the Glory of God and honour of my former Provincial and Section master Fr. Canisius. The time and energy that I have spent in this regard is for the benefit of the faithful at large, for the propagation of the spiritual ideals, and to help the needy for the heavenly intercession of the Servant of God. I am sure, as many of you expect, that Servant of God Fr. Canisius will be declared a Saint by the Holy See within a few years. Praying for the same and beseeching his heavenly intercession to all of us.

Fr. Jose Chunkan  
Galilee, Chiyaram, Thrissur  
Mobile: 9446625255

## TRANSLATOR



Prof. C.V. Francis was born in 1953 at Irinjalakuda as the son of Chittilappilly Chakkachamparambil Varghese and Mariam. Mrs. Moly Francis, his wife, is a school teacher and they are blessed with a daughter and a son named Neetha and Emil respectively. He started his public life and service as a lecturer in the Department of English at Christ College, Irinjalakuda. He was sincere and efficient until his retirement in 2009 as an Associate Professor and Head of the Department of English. He was a member of the Board of Post-Graduate Studies in English, University of Calicut.

## PREFACE

One day Rev. Fr. Jose Chunkan CMI, former Principal of Christ College, Irinjalakuda, and a close associate of mine approached me with his book *Jeevikkunna Visudhan: Fr. Canisius*. He wanted me to translate the content to English. I was hesitant to take up the work firstly because as a layperson I lacked the spiritual insight to explore and understand the intricacies of the life of a holy man. Secondly, the author had already proved his mastery of the language in portraying Rev. Fr. Canisius as a living saint and that any attempt from my part might mar the uniqueness of the multi-faced personality.

The first reading of the book, *Jeevikkunna Visudhan*, impressed me because it gives a vivid picture of a saintly priest. The second reading was a kind of revelation, which opened my eyes to go through the short life history of an ideal priest through the eyes of an ordinary layman like me. I started translating the biography of Fr. Canisius. I found in him the official intercessor before God for the sins and the needs of humankind, not only by offering sacrifice but also by his constant prayers, official and personal. I found in him a man of God especially when I went through the fourth phase of his biography of as narrated by Rev. Fr. Chunkan.

In the process of translation I witnessed a fire burning in the heart of this extraordinary priest who took care of souls. It was a fire of divine love and zeal for God's glory and for the salvation of souls. The third phase of the source text reveals Fr. Canisius as a man of leadership who sets a good example to fellow priests as well as laypeople. I saw in him

a man of sacrifice for the sake of values. It is a matter of great concern for people like me to watch in many of our institutions led by priests and nuns where they fail sometimes to practise what they preach. Fr. Canisius was an exception to this. He proved to be a symbol of sacrifice and embodiment of goodness and piety. In the denouement, I would like to mention the team spirit witnessed in the life of Fr. Canisius, which makes God's work easy and fruitful.

I would like to conclude by saying a wholehearted thanks to the author of the text Rev. Fr. Jose Chunkan CMI and Mr. P. Joms Jose MA, BEd, for their creative contributions to make this endeavour a beautiful and attractive one. I also extend my sincere thanks to Dharmaram Publications for bringing out this work in time.

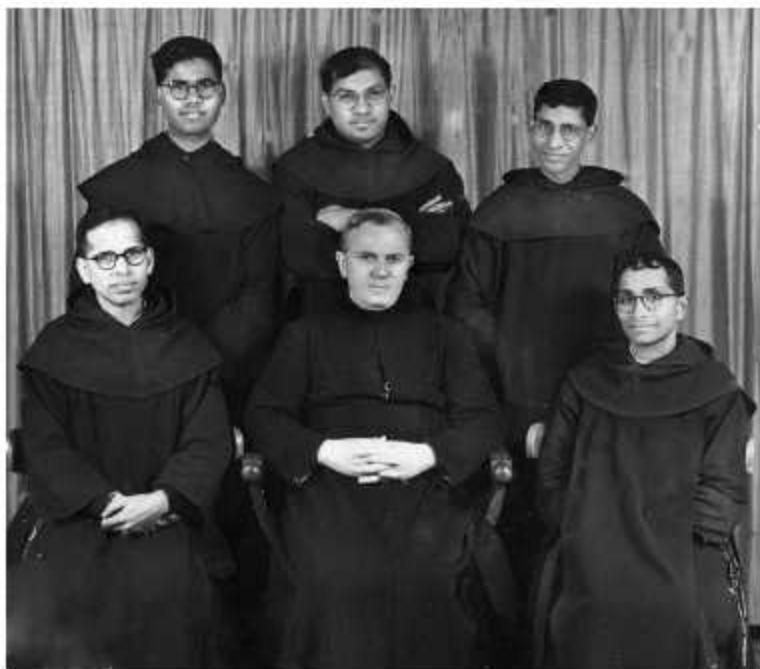
Let us pray that the canonisation process of the Servant of God Fr. Canisius be completed at the earliest and may his intercession bring miracles in the lives of all.

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Chakkachamparambil House,  
Irinjalakuda, Thrissur, 680121  
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# PHASE ONE

## Though Small in Physical Stature



Fr. Canisius (right extreme of the front row) in Rome  
together with Confreres and Fr. Prefect

As one gets closer to God through meditation, the soul gets illuminated. As a result, those unseen dust and dirt scattered around become visible gradually in its disgusting form. This is heart breaking for a soul, which has a claim of purity and holiness. St. Theresa of Avila in the beginning of her meditative life was perplexed by such experiences and thought of ending the strong personal relationship with God. When we think of her experience we can even guess how great is the temptation to divert us from realizing the reality of our impurity.

**Fr. Canisius**

"Fr. Canisius, please intervene in my critical condition... We had accomplished many a task by mutual help and co-operation. Please be with me at this critical juncture..."

"I prayed broken-heartedly. There were blocks in two of my veins. With many difficulties the doctor managed to fix a stent in one of them."

"The second one was more dangerous than the first. I heard the doctor telling himself that the first one was alright. The second is in a difficult position. This really gave me a shock."

"It was at this time that I sought the help of Rev. Fr. Canisius to intervene. It was really a miracle that Dr. Schulze was able to successfully implant the second stent also, though it was thought to be a difficult task. I strongly believe that it was through the intercession of Fr. Canisius that this difficult and critical operation was accomplished within a short span of forty five minutes."

It was on 3 March 2012, on a Saturday, that Mar Joseph Pastor Neelankavil, overwhelmed with emotion, spoke while delivering a commemorative talk on the occasion of the death anniversary of Fr. Canisius at Ampazhakkad monastery Chapel. He reiterated these words of witness in his autobiography titled *Oh God! You exalted me*.

This event occurred on 10 July 1999 when Mar Joseph Pastor Neelankavil was at a retreat House of a convent at Ulm in Germany; at night a severe chest pain developed, and he was attended by Dr. Strobel, Dr. Haerer, and Dr. Schulze the next day. They were able to remove the blocks and implant stents.

The above incident shows the deep trust that Mar Joseph Pastor Neelankavil experienced in the strength of the intercession of Fr. Canisius Thekkekkara CMI who died on 29 January 1998, and was buried at St. Theresa's Monastery Chapel at Ampazhakkad.

### **At First Sight**

There are plenty of people who have had known Fr. Canisius, a spiritual person, from close quarters. They include bishops, priests, seminarians, religious, laypeople, and top executives in government and private sector undertakings. The list includes Blessed Mother Theresa of Kolkatta, Kunjikutty Thamburatty of Kodungallur Kovilakam, and many more. They used to refer to him among themselves with at most sincerity and respect as a **'Living Saint'**. After spending some time with him in prayer, listening to his words of advice, and receiving his blessings, all of them experienced a holistic satisfaction and used to say "How glad that we were with a holy man all this time!"

Slightly high broad forehead. Well combed hair kept in order from left to right; but the marks of the comb cannot be noticed through the hair which is hardly of one and a half inches of length. Attractive eye brows and small shining eyes. Nose proportionate to the face, not too long or high. Black framed spectacles can always be found on the nose, and very ordinary pair of ears. The greying short trimmed beard covered the beauty of his cheeks. The lips were not so large but widened and average in rosiness. Short but not so lean neck. Either

because of the eruditeness of the head or due to the weakness of the neck he always walked with stooping head slightly tilted towards the left. Moderate fair in complexion with a height of five and a quarter feet and an average body weight. May be due to the tightly fastening of the leather belt over his cassock that it never seemed that he had a tummy.

While walking through the veranda, it appears as if a sage as well as a simple man was moving forward. He was one who wore the Carmelite habit in all its traditional form. The style of walking was such that the sound of the footwear was not heard outside and walked ahead neither too fast nor too slow.

The movement forward was very peculiar. He swung the right hand and held his left hand close to the chest as if something precious was kept safely. The eyes were directed not too far or near and gave a feeling that he was particular that the angle of vision was kept within six feet and moved forward peacefully. Sometimes he used to look at people and premises over the black framed spectacle with raised eyebrows. When he comes closer we can understand that what he has kept close to his chest with left hand is a file or a book. Deeply immersed in thought, he walked gracefully without turning left or right keeping to the left of the corridor.

The physical features and gestures of Fr. Canisius in a pictorial description are given by the author in the biography titled *Canisiusachanum Carmaleetha Sabhayum* (Fr. Canisius and the Congregation of the Carmelites). The golden star in the high blue sky appears to the human eye as

a dot; but in reality – Is it not several times larger than the earth itself? Likewise Fr. Canisius though small in stature was undoubtedly a man of high profile, great character and a living saint.



Declaration of Servant of God at Ampazhakad

## **PHASE TWO**

### **Beginning from Anandapuram**



*Canisium: The House Where Fr. Canisius Was Born*

The internal human slavery is not a bondage that can be quickly removed as the intervention of God Almighty quickly heals the bodily blindness, dumbness or limpness. Conscious mental effort is to be taken up to come out of internal slavery. On the one side the power of God that wakes one up from slumber, on the other hand the conscious cooperation of the mind; and the mind comes out of the slavery in accordance with this conscious cooperation and finally gets liberated to enjoy complete freedom.

**Fr. Canisius**



Fr. Canisius was born on 12 May 1914. His birth was a boon to Anandapuram, a serene and beautiful village in Thrissur district. His father Thekkekara Pothaparambil Lonappan was an accepted simple and a righteous person in the village and was known for his humility in dealing with people. Owing acres of agricultural land, he toiled hard and earned a name as a successful farmer. Mariam, Fr. Canisius' mother belonged to Thekkumana Kannath family of Pazhukara, Chalakudy. Velleiyath Sankunni Nair who was their neighbour and a good friend of Fr. Canisius when he was young, has a strong testimony about this model mother. He says, "She was unique in the locality known for her generosity and philanthropic activities."



Lonappan and Mariyam: Parents of Fr. Canisius

Fr. Canisius lost his mother and father in 1954 and 1964 respectively. Fr. Canisius had the following remarks about his parents:

My parents, I consider, are the greatest gifts given to me by my Lord. "God's Will... That Alone... and That in Full!" was the law of their life... It was from my father who used to surrender completely by kneeling in front of the Holy Eucharist with eyes wide open I learned to immerse in personal prayer when I was a young boy. My mother gave me training in 'Jesus Prayer'.



Fr. Canisius Was Born in This Room

Fr. Canisius was the youngest of the seven children born to this model couple. The siblings included the two brothers Lonappan and Kochuvarkey, two sisters Kochumariyam and Rosa, the other two elder brothers had died during their infancy. The younger sister Rosa joined the Franciscan Clarist Congregation and led a life dedicated to our Lord assuming the new name as Sr. Sarseela.

Ouseph was the baptismal name of Fr. Canisius when he was baptised on 6 June 1914 at St. John Nepumsian's parish church at Parappukkara. Canisius was the name given to him by the CMI Superiors when he was inducted into the Congregation.



Lonappan



Kochuvarkey

Elder Brothers of Fr. Canisius

### **1. At Anandapuram School**

Ouseph (Fr. Canisius) was old enough to join school for his elementary education. The only school at Anandapuram was a primary school built by Sankara Variyar of Vadakke Variyam and Narayani Varasiyar. Later in 1913 they handed the school over to the government. It was in 1919 that Ouseph started his formal elementary education.

Sri Pattathil Gopalan Master was Ouseph's class teacher during his first year in school. Narayani Varasiyar taught him the basic lessons in music. During these early stages of education Ouseph was identified as an earnest student with exemplary character and received a number of prizes and gifts as recognition.

Sankunni Nair who observed Ouseph keenly noted the following: "Ouseph was extraordinarily intelligent and was calm and quiet in his dealings. He had an attractive and beautiful handwriting but was not always with alacrity or agile."

The year Ouseph completed his primary education a new upper primary school was started at Parappukkara. It was a matter of great solace to Ouseph and his family who were at their wits' end regarding Ouseph's next stage of education.

He joined the bridge class known then as Nalara Class during the first year at upper primary school as a preparation to enter the fifth standard but unfortunately the school had to be closed down during the first year of its inception due to insufficient number of students; with this young Ouseph's formal education also came to standstill.

At this juncture, his former teacher Gopalan Master insisted that Ouseph be sent somewhere to pursue his education; his parents went on a search and at last got Ouseph admitted to St. Aloysius School, Elthuruth, in 1927, where he completed his upper primary education as a boarder.



Kochumariyam (Sister)



Sr. Sarseela FCC (Sister)

## **2. Aspirant for Religious Priesthood**

It was not by accident but by design that Ouseph who was excellent in academics and exemplary in character decided to join the religious Congregation. Some senior diocesan priests like Rev. Fr. Pullokaran Ouseph and Rev. Fr. Elamkunnapuzha James visited Ouseph's home frequently and suggested that he could join a minor seminary to get trained to become a diocesan priest, but Ouseph had a different plan. Once he revealed his mind to his parents: "I want to be a priest, but not a diocesan. I would like to join

the Congregation of Mary Immaculate and become a religious priest."

Sr. Sarseela, Ouseph's sister, testifies that she heard this conversation and it was because Mother Mary herself appeared before him and told him to do so. "This was the reason that Ouseph was quite particular about becoming a Carmelite priest," said Sr. Sarseela FCC to the author, in one of our personal conversations. Finally, Ouseph pursued his high school education by staying at the Aspirant's House in Pavaratty. Later Ouseph and his aspirant batch mates went to the monastery at Alwaye for language studies; after that he went to Ampazhakkad for his novitiate training and his vestition was on 23 November 1934.

As part of the fulfilment of his dreams he became a member of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate pledging the first vows on 24 November 1935.

Brother Canisius was sent to Koonammavu to continue his training as a monk, which was part of the custom those days. It was after this that he pursued his studies in compulsory subjects such as philosophy and theology as of priestly formation. There was a practice of selecting and sending brothers with academic excellence and spiritual maturity to the seminary at Mangalore. Accordingly, Bro. Canisius was sent to St. Joseph's Seminary at Mangalore. He took his perpetual vow at Mangalore Seminary on 23 January 1938.

On 21 December 1942, Bro. Canisius was ordained a priest at Mangalore Seminary after successfully completing his studies and training and joined to serve in Our Lord's vineyard. The following day he celebrated his first Holy

Mass at the chapel in the seminary and later with due preparation and festivities at the home parish in Parappukkara. The solemn beginning of the service in the church on earth in 1942 came to a glorious finale in 1998 and I would venture to add that he continues his noble service from his seat in Heaven.

### **3. The First Biblical Doctor**

Fr. Canisius acquired Doctor of Divinity (DD) in 1944 from Candy in Cylone. He was awarded Doctorate in Sacred Scriptures (DSS) in 1952 from Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome. During his studies in Rome, he stayed Collegio Damasceno, Rome. Fr. Canisius deserves the honour of being the first biblical doctor from India and the second from Asia.

"The religious are the ones who are graced with the virtue of celibacy to safeguard in this world, by without getting married, the eternal inseparable union with God which is its symbol. Through denouncing worldly union through marriage they enter into eternal union with God. And thus they turn to be equal heirs with God and share eternal fruition. As a result of this equal right all that is of the Lord turn out to be ours and also all that was once ours will be of Jesus..."

"Just as when husband and wife become one in body and spirit in conjugal relationship and the children born out of this union hold the imprints of both of them, so are with those who become one with Jesus. That means all those who are born out of Christ are privileged to have the combined imprint of Jesus' personality and ours who have already became one with Jesus. And this fruition is unlimited unlike the limited fruits of marriage."

**Fr. Canisius**



## PHASE THREE

### The Ministry of Administration



Rev. Fr. Canisius (Prior General) and His Team

"The sum total of the deep core of the modern man is: the sheer uncertainty deep within the heart, dissatisfaction and the worry resulted through inadequacy of satisfaction offered by modern world in practical life. The only way to emancipation is through spiritual renewal..."

"The divine ideals might seem to be unreachable for human beings, yet they can be aspired. The greatness and dignity of human beings are evaluated in accordance with their efforts to achieve those ideals. So, all those who are good at heart struggle for divine ideals."

**Fr. Canisius**

Fr. Canisius exhibited an unusual calibre in utilizing his authority for rendering service to humanity for thirty six years since he became the Professor at the Sacred Heart Seminary, Chethipuzha near Changanassery in 1945. During this period he served the Church and Congregation in various capacities. He was the Rector at Dharmaram College, Bangalore (1960-66), the Prior General of the CMI Congregation (1966-72), the Provincial, Devamatha Province, Thrissur (1972-75), Superior at Dharmaram College, Bangalore (1975-78), and the Vicar General of the CMI Congregation (1978-81). He discharged his duties in an exemplary manner until he took voluntary retirement with due permission from the Prior General in 1981, giving emphasis to spiritual values rather than the worldly parameters with utmost sincerity even after facing many difficulties and making innumerable sacrifices. This is definitely a unique achievement and deserves special appreciation. Even when he was recognized and grew as an internationally acclaimed Guru, he lived as an embodiment of humility, a reservoir of knowledge and a ray of sanctity.

### **1. Seminary Rector**

It was in 1957 that Dharmaram College, the CMI Major Seminary was established at Bengaluru. Rev. Fr. Chrisostom was the first Rector. The CMI Seminary, till then was at Chethipuzha in Changanassery. When he took over the charge as a Rector, out of the six main blocks of the building meant for living quarters, only one was completed; a big hall along with prayer house and a refectory, classrooms and an auditorium were also constructed.

Fr. Canisius was appointed Rector in 1960 when he was 45 years old. The all-time record of being the Rector of Dharmaram at such a young age still remains an unbeaten one. It was during his tenure of office as Rector that the remaining five blocks used for residence and the spacious three storied library building was completed. The Chapel for around three hundred members of Dharmaram was on the second floor of the library building.

Fr. Canisius knew each of the members of Dharmaram community from close quarters; he also made it a point to learn the names of each one of the new batches within a week of their arrival in the seminary. He took it as his prime responsibility to encourage those whom he thought to be specially called to the vocation and discourage those whom he thought is not really called to serve the Lord. He loved each of the members with fatherly affection, but at the same time did not mince matters to correct without any fear or favour their personal mistakes and faults when they were behaving themselves against the established norms and code of conduct of the Congregation.

Some of the decisions have caused mental agony to a few, but the decisions that he took were impartial and were reached at after prayerful meditation seeking the will of God. He ventured to implement those decisions with humility and sincerity. Fr. Canisius never had to think twice before he apologized in front of people to whom his decisions had caused pain even if they were unintentional.

It was from the Holy Eucharist that he sought strength and confidence to face such critical situations. Along with initiating the construction of a strong basement for

Dharmaram, he made it a point to mould spiritually strong brothers to be ordained as priests, which we say is not a matter of flattery but a fact. During his Rectorship, 197 seminarians received the Orders of holy priesthood.

During the Eucharistic Congress held at Mumbai in December 1964, Fr. Canisius had the unique privilege to witness the ordination of 90 of his own disciples from the CMI Congregation along with other deacons of the Syro Malabar Church by His Holiness Pope Paul VI. It was a special honour for Fr. Canisius to offer such a large number of priests during this Holy Celebration to the Holy Catholic Church and that too such a large number from Dharmaram where he was the Rector.

### **1.1. Spiritual Father**

Fr. Canisius contributed greatly at Chethipuzha and Dharmaram towards the character formation and spiritual direction of the seminarians. He was a role model to the seminarians, one who strictly adhered to the rules and regulations in his personal life. He tried to inculcate in the Seminarians both at Chethipuzha and Dharmaram nothing but his own pious life style. He practised what he preached. Sincere prayer, vigilance in the life style of a monk, endeavouring greatly to cultivate the virtues in himself which he wished to perceive it in others, genuine humility, and everlasting enthusiasm were some of the inborn qualities in his personal life. He possessed a special grace of discernment to recognize the genuine call to serve our Lord.

### **1.2. Bible Professor**

After his ordination, the authorities assigned him the task of being a professor to teach Holy Bible in seminaries. Apart from seminaries, he also taught Bible in the training centres for sisters and at 'Sakshatkara'; even after he fell sick he continued the mission as a teacher at the novitiate in Ampazhakkad. Wherever he served he was successful in conquering the heartfelt appreciation of his students as model teacher. He himself made it clear that teaching is his passion and he loves teaching as he loves his own life. His favourite subject was the Holy Bible and especially the Letters of St. Paul. His students developed a sense of appreciation for his classes since he possessed deep knowledge and the ability to explain the most difficult concepts in a very simple manner. He had the gift to make the classes most active and interesting to the students.

He wanted his students to be familiar with the places and incidents that are explained in the Holy Bible and for this he made an embossed map of the Holy Land in the Dharmaram Campus. It was made in cement with scientific precision and artistic perfection. The creative talents of Rev. Fr. Joseph Pathrapangal, who was a creative Bible genius, in the later years added details to this cement model of the Holy Land. This 'Cement Holy Land' model became a venue to teach certain parts of the Holy Bible to the Seminarians.

### **1.3. Crib Artist**

Fr. Canisius was a talented artist. He won the heart of the Dharmaram community and the people around by

designing and executing a modern Crib at Dharmaram. He gave concrete ideas about the characters, the places and contexts referred to in the Bible; at the same time Rev. Fr. Januarius Palathuruthil who later became the first Bishop of Chanda gave leadership in art direction and the dramatic presentation of the new generation crib at Dharmaram. This unique crib at Dharmaram turned out to be a novel audio-visual experience to the Bangalore Malayalee Community. The message of the commemoration of the birth of Jesus Christ was conveyed in an attractive fashion using all the available technological devices. Such vibrant and audio-visual cribs at Dharmaram arranged in a big hall every year captured the media's attention and turned out to be a biblical and spiritual pilgrimage for the visitors.

#### **1.4. Magical Personality**

The entry of CMI Congregation into Bangalore was viewed with scepticism from different corners. There were unwelcome attitude shown from different quarters. Even from the Archbishop's House in Bangalore there were tinges of unacceptability.

Rev. Dr. Thomas Pothakkamuri, hailing from Andhra Pradesh, was the then Archbishop of Bangalore. Soon after Fr. Canisius took charge as the Rector of Dharmaram, the Archbishop wanted to spend a week in retreat and reached Dharmaram. He was accompanied by another priest, apparently his secretary and the Dharmaram community welcomed them with due reverence.

The retreat of the Archbishop and the usual life activities of the seminarians progressed well. Meanwhile he was

keenly observing the community life, the community prayers and daily recollections of the seminarians. On the fourth day while the community was having supper the Archbishop suddenly entered into the refectory. The sudden appearance of the Archbishop, during a retreat, surprised everyone. "*Deo gratias!*" (Praise be to God!) he greeted everyone in the name of God and addressed the community:

... I came here to live with you and observe your life style in the seminary and not for a retreat; because I have been hearing many things about you since you came here three years ago...but now I am convinced beyond all doubts that the life you lead here is an ideal religious life. The community life you lead here, the community prayer for which you gather together every day and in all other activities you engage yourself in are cent percent akin to the ideal life in a monastery... I would like to congratulate you and your Rector... Do pray for me... Thanks.

This incident was an eye opener and reiterated the magnetic charisma possessed by Fr. Canisius. His presence always served as a spiritual catalyst in the life of others.

After this encounter the Archbishop Pothakkamuri became an intimate friend of Dharmaram apart from being the official head of the institution. He made it a point to visit the community as often as possible. He even helped Dharmaram when there were some financial difficulties.

While retiring, the Archbishop brought his successor designate, Msgr. Lourdsami to Dharmaram and introduced the community to him as, "one of the best formation centres in the locality."

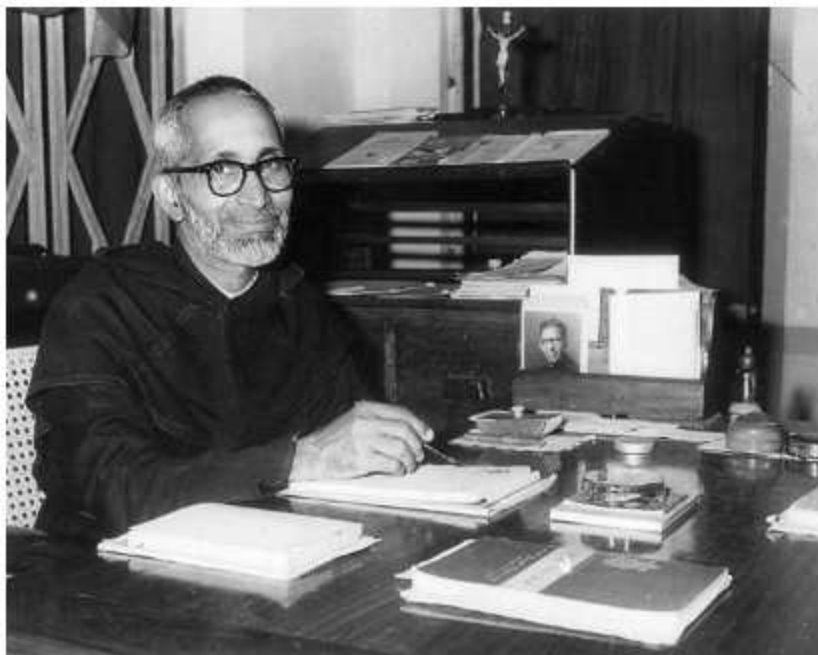


Fr. Canisius and the Archbishop had already become thick friends who developed a sense of admiration and respect for each other. The Archbishop fell sick and spent his last days at a convent of the St. Anne's sisters of which he was the founder. A few months before his death he called Fr. Canisius to his death bed. Immediately Fr. Canisius rushed to his room and the Archbishop during the conversation told him: "I have prepared my last will and you may please go through it." The content which read as follows was shocking to Fr. Canisius himself: "... I have decided to assign half of my properties to Dharmaram and the other half to the Congregation of St. Anne's sisters..." The incident depicts the magical quality of the personality of Fr. Canisius.

## **2. Prior General**

Fr. Canisius was elected to the highest post of the CMI Congregation as Prior General in January 1966 when he was 51 years old. He was the 21<sup>st</sup> Prior General of the Congregation.

His priority was the spiritual and internal empowerment of the CMIs. His vision about the duties and responsibilities of those in authority was three fold in its nature. A good leader should be able to guide, inspire and instil service mentality among those at his command. The vision of Fr. Canisius was that the Superior is bound to discharge his duties in a fearless and selfless manner. May I at this point, try to consolidate very briefly his contributions and the legacy he handed over to his successors:



Rev. Fr. Prior General in His Office

### **2.1. Guardian of Ideal Life**

Fr. Canisius as the head of the Congregation gave instructions to each of the provinces and institutions to grow and develop according to the demands of the situation and as per the spirit of the religious life. All his decisions were deeply rooted in the doctrines of Holy Catholic Church. He tried to understand the Will of God through long hours of prayer. Decisions were taken after thorough discussions. He was very strict in taking punitive measures against those who led an irresponsible life or those who were undisciplined and led a life away from the accepted

norms. This is very evident when one reads his numerous official letters and the notes he prepared for the canonical visits. There were occasions when he was strongly criticized for these actions and decisions.

## **2.2. International Acceptance**

Fr. Canisius actively participated in the important meeting of the Union of Superior Generals (USG), which was held at Rome in 1967. His presence and the ideas that he exchanged during the sessions made an impression on the participants. He deserves special appreciation for getting 'Exempt Order Status' to CMI Congregation in the subsequent years.

## **2.3. History of the Congregation**

Fr. Canisius was then sad about the fact that the history of the Congregation had not yet been documented completely in a scientific manner. Fr. Bernard's documentation (book) contained only the incidents and developments till 1929. Fr. Canisius formed a committee to overcome this drawback. The committee consisted of Rev. Fr. Anselm Perumalil, Rev. Fr. Thomas Edappadikarot, Rev. Fr. Antony Eettikal, Rev. Fr. Thomas Vadaparambil and Rev. Fr. Gregory Neerakal as the Convenor. As a result of their hard work it was possible to weave together the happenings of yester years till 1969 and publish the document 'A Brief History of the CMI Congregation'.

## **2.4. The Axis of the Renewal of the Congregation**

The modern ideas of the second Vatican Council created a new impetus in the Catholic Church, globally. It was the responsibility of the heads of each Congregation to revive

and revitalize their religious community as per the recommendations of the second Vatican Council. Under the leadership of Fr. Canisius as the Prior General the CMI's also took off their journey to revamp the Congregation with a firm footing in prayer and the scripture. He even convened a meeting of the General Synaxis in April 1968 for the renewal process. Such extraordinary renewal sessions were summoned at different stages which paved way for planning various projects and adopting constitutional amendments in the process of the renewal of the Congregation. Even after his term as Prior General, Fr. Canisius had to continue as the chief architect of the renewal programme within the Congregation. It is generally accepted that Fr. Canisius was the axis of the renewal activities and amendments of the Constitution, which occurred in the CMI Congregation during his life-time.

### **2.5. Renovated and Expanded Generalate**

During the time of establishing the Congregation the Prior General's headquarters was at Mannanam. Later the monasteries at Koonammavu and Thevara were also used as the headquarters of the Prior General. During the tenure of Fr. Canisius the Prior General's office and residence was at Karikkamuri in Ernakulam even though the premises had many difficulties with regard to the space available. During the time of Fr. Canisius under his initiative a big two storeyed building was completed adjacent to the existing building. The new building completed in 1968, was spacious enough to house a big hall for meetings and living rooms with all necessary amenities. He made the Prior General's

house self-sufficient in all respects. In 2007, the Prior General's house was shifted to Chavara Hills at Kakkanad.

### **2.6. Empowerment of Brothers' Community**

Many projects were implemented for the welfare of brothers in the Congregation. Fr. Canisius as Prior General established in 1969 a Brothers' Institute at Koonammavu. It is noteworthy that many steps were initiated during his time to enhance their intellectual and spiritual formation so that the Brothers got more recognition in the Congregation.

### **2.7. To Enrich the People**

The CMI Prior Generals were very particular that they were not confined to huge places but they used to work among the common people and tried to be with them. Fr. Canisius went two steps ahead and lived with them which gave the feeling to the people of the neighbourhood that he was one of them. He had a special affection towards the families around the Prior General's House in general and particularly towards the children and the youth. He was a model teacher who taught them lessons in Oration, English Grammar and Bible Studies. He was the one who introduced 'Catechism for Super Senior Youth' at a time when Catechism classes beyond standard ten was something unheard of. It helped a great deal to continue the youth to be attached to the Church and Christian values of life.

### **2.8. Keen on the Affairs of the Church**

Fr. Canisius was very particular about arranging and organizing the religious celebrations in the Church at

Karikkamuri in a very systematic and orderly way so that they appear very devotional and attractive to the faithful. Celebration of feasts, Mission Sunday observation, making Christmas Crib, etc., were meticulously planned and executed at the Karikkamuri Church with the participation of the people. Fr. Canisius during his busy schedule as Prior General found some time to be with altar boys to give them good pieces of advice to grow as God fearing and ideal Catholics. That he undertook all these activities with the co-operation of local parish priest show the keen interest and involvement he had in the liturgical activities of the Church, improving the sacramental life of the faithful as well as the development of the Catholic Church.

### **2.9. Chavara Cultural Centre**

Fr. Canisius was convinced and influenced by the opinions of some of the prominent educational, social, and political persons who lived nearby Karikkamuri to have a socio-cultural orientation to the Prior General's House. This resulted in the birth of Chavara Cultural Centre in 1971. The main goal of this centre was to cater the social, cultural, and educational needs of the local community. He read the pulse of the generation and even added a rich library in 1981.

### **2.10. Christ College, Bangalore**

The present Christ University, Bangalore is one of the centres of excellence in Higher Education in the country. It was started in 1969 under the initiative of Fr. Canisius the then Prior General as an institution under Dharmaram College.

### **2.11. Dedication for the Poor**

It was in 1971, the CMI Congregation celebrated the death centenary of St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara and in order to commemorate this auspicious and memorable event, Fr. Canisius wished to have a consolidated system under the Generalate for the various social works in the Congregation. He revitalized the welfare programmes for the slum dwellers, which was a project started when Rev. Fr. Maurus was the Prior General under the leadership given by Rev. Fr. Celsus. Fr. Canisius took initiatives to start sewing classes for women and day care centre at Karikkamuri. All these programmes and projects are best examples of his social commitment.

### **2.12. Kalabhavan**

It was Fr. Canisius, the Prior General, who was the main source of inspiration behind the establishment and development of the famous Kalabhavan (1969). The chief architect Fr. Abel became the nightingale of the altar, and the hymns for holy sacraments of Catholic Church became very musical and beautiful with the magical touch and support extended by Fr. Canisius.

### **2.13. In the Mission Arena**

It was only in 1962 that the Syro-Malabar Church was able to move towards mission activities in the north in a systematic manner. The CMI Congregation gave a definite plan and programme for such activities when they landed up in Chanda, Maharashtra. They took it up as a challenge

and went forward courageously in spite of many kinds of hindrances.

Fr. Canisius used his personal influence and continuous hard work while he was Prior General, to get the mission exarchates of Sagar (1968), Jagdalpur and Bijnor (1972) for the CMI Congregation for the missionary activities.

The CMIs had started their mission work in North Malabar area since 1935, but the missionaries had to wait till 1969 to establish at least a Vice Province in that area and the credit for this goes also to Fr. Canisius. I have learnt from certain reliable sources that Fr. Canisius was invited to become the first Bishop of the Diocese of Thalassery and that he declined it with all humility saying that he was not competent for the post. It was also heard that he was one among those who proposed the name of the Bishop who was later installed to that post.

Fr. Canisius, as Prior General, did his best to develop the mission fields and to instil the missionary spirit among the members of the Congregation. Even later in 1978 when he became the Vicar General and in-charge of missionary activities as Definitor, his contribution in this area of activity was praiseworthy. On this occasion, when we were celebrating the 'Mission Year', the progress achieved by the Syro-Malabar Church through CMI missionary work is a topic of special consideration. Even though it is unnecessary to mention it, let me draw your kind attention to tell you that the contributions of Fr. Canisius and the role he played in this particular phenomenon is to be recognized and appreciated without much discussion.



### **3. Reformer of Thrissur**

Fr. Canisius was short in stature like the dialect spoken by the people of Thrissur but just like the fully expanded name of the place 'Thrissivaperoor' he was majestic in personality and high in thoughts. The people of Thrissur were able to experience his calibre and dedication only for a short stint 1972-'75, during which the Servant of God was the Provincial of Devamatha Province, Thrissur. As a visionary, during his Provincial term, a number of projects and programmes were planned and executed. As a result of this the presence of priests and the assistance given to common people in their social, cultural and educational needs were experienced by the people of Thrissur. I would cite a few examples below.

#### **3.1. KESS**

Fr. Canisius successfully unified the social activities in Thrissur area and brought it under one umbrella, Kuriakose Elias Service Society (KESS). Today KESS' projects are successfully implemented not only in Thrissur and other districts of Kerala, but also in different states of the nation.

#### **3.2. Towards Cultural Richness**

Fr. Canisius started 'family unit meetings', which is a widespread phenomenon now in all the Catholic Dioceses in Kerala, aiming at the unity and integrity of Christian families. 'Kalavihar' was intended to rouse the inborn creative talents in young men and women, irrespective of caste and creed and mould them as ideal citizens of Thrissur – the cultural capital of Kerala. The renovated 'Devamatha

Library' was aimed at attracting the new generation readers who were hungry for acquiring knowledge.

### **3.3. President of Kalasadan**

Fr. Canisius became the first President of 'Kalasadan', a cultural organization established in 1972 by the Diocese of Thrissur. He was chosen by the then Bishop Mar Joseph Kundukulam to this movement. The first Director of Kalasadan Rev. Fr. Thomas Panjikanan certifies that Fr. Canisius had a pivotal role in determining the aims and objectives of this movement and also played a major role in the initial activities of this organisation.

### **3.4. The Church at Azhikode**

A part of the mortal remains of the first Apostle of India - St. Thomas, (a bone of the right arm) was brought to Kerala in 1953 under the leadership of the French Cardinal Eugene Tisserant, who was the Prefect of the Oriental Congregation. He handed over the relics of the Saint and the letter of authorization to the then Prior General Rev. Fr. Maurus. The holy mortal remains were officially kept for public worship at the newly constructed Marthoma Pontifical Shrine at Azhikode. The choice of the place as Azhikode was strategic since it was the cradle of Catholic faith, the pivotal point of Kodungallur, situated on the eastern banks of river Periyar. This shrine was a miniature model of the St. Peter's Basilica in Rome with its huge domes and arches on each side. It was constructed under the leadership of Rev. Fr. Clement Thottungal, Provincial of the Devamatha Province who later became the first Bishop of Sagar. (The construction of the

shrine as per the basic plan still remains incomplete). There was only limited space under the dome where the strong iron cellar in which the casket containing the relic was kept. Much inconvenience was felt by the faithful to kneel down and participate in daily Holy Mass especially during the months of July and November when large number of pilgrims gathered for the feasts at the shrine.

The inconveniences and complaints came to the notice of Fr. Canisius when he took charge as Provincial in 1972. That was the occasion when the 19<sup>th</sup> Centenary Celebrations of the martyrdom of St. Thomas, the Apostle of India was in progress. The present church with the Holy of Holies and the hall that we see today was reconstructed under the guidance of Fr. Canisius; he found it a necessity for the future and the occasion in the form of celebrations demanded it. As a part of the Centenary Celebrations he also organized 'Marthoma Exhibition'. Fr. Canisius requested Fr. Abel to prepare a hymn to be sung during the celebrations. The famous, melodious song '*Bharatham Kathiru Kandu...*' is the one which Fr. Abel wrote for the occasion.

### **3.5. The Birth of Jesus in Pooraparambu**

A Christmas crib with the theme 'Liberation of the People' was planned and executed in the pooraparambu at Thrissur in 1974 which proved to be an unique audio visual experience to the people of Thrissur. Fr. Canisius who was an artist and an expert in biblical analysis was the heart and soul of this crib. This event of Christmas Crib happened the year after Rev. Fr. Joseph Vadakkan made history by

celebrating Holy Mass in Pooraparambu at Thrissur. When we read these two incidents together, we understand the relevance and importance of this unique crib prepared by Fr. Canisius.

#### **4. As a Representative of Rome**

It was during this period, other great recognitions and responsibilities came in search for Fr. Canisius. First he was appointed the Apostolic Visitor of the Society of Medical Missionary Sisters (M.M.S.) in 1972. Again in 1974 he was chosen to serve as the Delegate of the Oriental Congregation to help sisters of the Sacred Heart (S.H.) congregation. His responsibilities consisted of preparing the Constitutions and unification of each Community and taking further steps to get them recognized and approved by Rome. These duties entrusted to him required fidelity, wisdom, and spirituality, which he possessed to a large extent. He was able to accomplish the above responsibilities very well within a very short span. He deserves special congratulations as a mediator for completing the task in such a way that it was accepted to the church authorities as well as to the sisters concerned. This again shows his calibre to negotiate and come to a consensus. The senior sisters of these Congregations still chew the cud of their sweet, happy memories of these events.

#### **5. Examination of Conscience**

Fr. Canisius made a self-assessment of his official life and activities as follows:

I had to shoulder many responsibilities in various capacities. As a matter of fact I have never been successful in any of them. My friends have told me that the Congregation has met with losses due to my failures.

#### **6. Fr. Canisius as an Author**

Fr. Canisius, who was a known retreat preacher and an expert on Biblical theology and spirituality during his period, was widely accepted as a man of God. He was specially invited to preach retreats for priests, and sisters. He was also an authoritative author, a multi-linguist and highly talented in art and drawing.

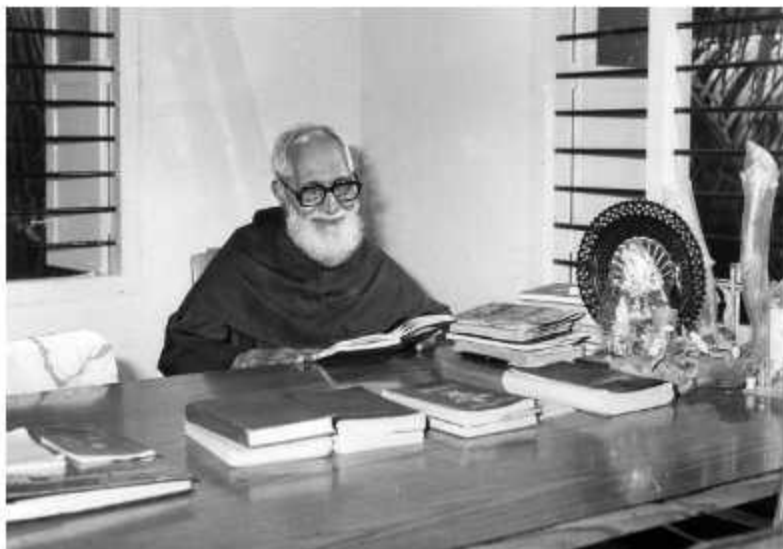
He learned foreign languages such as Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French, German, and Italian apart from being well versed in English as part of his research work leading to Doctoral Degree. He can also speak and write Tamil and Malayalam very well. The style with which he spoke and wrote Malayalam especially his clarity in prose writings earned him a special appreciation from his readers.

The publications to his credit include his Doctoral Thesis entitled 'Cardinal Seripando: An Exegete and Biblical Theologian' (1952), 'Keralasabha Samuddharakan', 'Vishudha Valsara Chinthakal', 'Salvation History Series', 'Bharanasevanavum Prarthana Jeevithavum' and a number of pamphlets aimed at the spiritual renewal of religious Congregations, and the Rosary in five stages, etc.



## **PHASE FOUR**

### **The Spiritual Aura**



In Prayer and Study at CSR Pariyaram

The essence of the vow of obedience is the chore that "My food is to do the will of my Father." The Congregation is an establishment that shows the will of God undoubtedly. Each member of the community with keen interest has accepted in life the will of God – 'only that' and 'fully that' – as the sole motive of life.

The superior of the community is the one appointed by the Lord, who helps to know the will of God, continuously who serves the community through prayer and interaction with the members. The religious community is an association of individuals engaged in doing the will of God and who through prayer and sharing engage in discerning the will of God and also share the responsibilities of the community. The model of Christ who was obedient unto death on the cross is widely spread throughout the Bible.

**Fr. Canisius**



The activities of Fr. Canisius outside the four walls of the monastery did in no way affect his spiritual fervour and commitment. These activities in fact only enriched his religious vocation and made him a more committed religious. He had special spiritual affinity towards Our Lady of Mount Carmel, St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara and St. Teresa of Lisieux (Little Flower).

### **1. Divine Light**

Fr. Canisius inspired his fellow religious to adhere strictly to the daily prayers, meditation, and spiritual exercises in the monastery. He himself was the best example for them who spent hours together in front of the sanctum sanctorum in the chapel trying to establish a prayerful intimacy with the Holy Eucharist. There are living witnesses who wondered as they observed the halo around him while he was immersed in prayer at 'Sakshatkara' in Pariyaram. The following lines written by a poet on Fr. Canisius posthumously aptly describe the experience:

When he prayed he rose in ecstasy  
Never was he seen in idle fantasy  
Was often seen in church at midnight hours  
Standing motionless like altar flowers.

In this way he was fully immersed in spiritual ecstasy.

The special style in which he celebrated the Holy Eucharist both in the country and abroad was a source of spiritual rejuvenation and paved way for faith enhancement in the participants. The then Prior General Rev. Fr. Vincent Alappatt received letters from the authorities in Rome where Fr. Canisius did his Doctoral Studies expressing their

deep sense of appreciation for his life style and particularly his deep devotion in celebrating Holy Mass.

## **2. My Desire Is to Pray**

Fr. Canisius prepared a note in 1978 to his religious superiors, expressing his personal desire: "If I express my wish, it is to spend a life of prayer and penance in an unknown and unrecognized milieu, to lead a very simple life doing good both materially and spiritually for the poor and marginalized sections of the society." However, he was elected to the Vicar General in 1978 and with due permissions he resigned the post in 1981 and since then 'Sakshatkara', which he designed along with others, became his scene of action to live according to his wishes and imagination. 'Sakshatkara' is situated on the banks of the river Chalakudy at Pariyaram. It is here that he put into practice 'Five hours of daily prayer', which came to be known as 'The Canisian Style of Prayer'.

During these last years, my bodily strength and internal strength have been deteriorating slowly. It is a period of my life when I feel that I am incapable of shouldering responsible duties in life, but because of the support and special considerations of the authorities, I have been able to lead a life style which I desired and also gave leadership to those who came there for such a prayerful life style with all humility. I am fully engrossed in my life and activities at 'Sakshatkara' putting in my maximum efforts at this stage of my life... I have been able to spend five hours daily, since 23 June 1981, in

front of the Holy Eucharist praying on behalf of our brethren, for them and with them in spirit.

These words have been quoted from the records he maintained.

People used to come to him seeking his prayers and advice. When they see him very tired they request him to go and take rest but he insisted on continuing the prayer sessions with them. He energetically replied them that 'Prayer is my rest'.

Fr. Canisius was of the opinion that prayer is truly an internal exercise and experience and not merely a lip service involving loud cries and roaring. He was considered the angel of prayer on earth, and therefore his prayer style was sincere, deeply rooted in the Word of God, and hence informative, inspiring, and imitative as a model.



Deep in Prayer

### **3. His Advice to Achieve Peace**

Fr. Canisius received those who came to him seeking his prayer and advice with much love and concern. He found time to pray for them and be with them. When people came to him and presented complicated issues, he used to tell them: "Let me pray for a while. Shall I give you a reply after that?" The reply he would give them after his personal prayer was acceptable to them.

Once a religious priest approached Fr. Canisius with a wounded heart. He was severely criticized by fellow members of his Congregation. The spiritual doctor (Fr. Canisius) tried his best to console him, instruct him, and said: "Aren't we religious? You have to understand one important aspect. We have no right to complain in such matters unless we are deprived of three basic rights." "What are those rights?" asked the priest with a heavy heart. The following was the reply given by Fr. Canisius:

One: The right to be abandoned by others.

Two: The right to be betrayed by others.

Three: The right to be kept as neglected by others.

When he heard the explanation of these rights, the priest cooled down with a peaceful mind and heart.

## PHASE FIVE

### Illness and Suffering



In a world where 'taking revenge' and 'retaliation' are counted as bravery and forgiving and reconciliation as weakness, is the reconciliation with fellow beings so easy? Is it possible for a human being? This is the issue...

When one brother comes for reconciliation with all humility, there are people in large number who again humiliate him by moving away tactfully because of their inner revenge and forcing them to come again and are happy in humiliating them. Fearing these experiences people postpone their efforts for reconciliation. And for the worst there are cases where the people pass away without fulfilling their desire to get reconciled.

**Fr. Canisius**

Once Fr. Canisius wrote the following in a note to the authorities: "I consider myself only as a useless brush that should be thrown away. I don't think I have enough strength and ability to involve myself and undertake any responsible work. I feel I am completely exhausted." He was honest; his old age, a life of hard work, rigorous penance, frequent fasting, and long hours of concentrated prayer sessions had made him physically sick. He became very exhausted; the physical sufferings and mental agonies he had to undergo were like tempests that were capable of uprooting his life.

Let us go through some of the sufferings of Servant of God Fr. Canisius in brief:

- (a) The pure hearted Fr. Canisius was much disturbed by certain new bad tendencies in the Congregation during that period. It was too much for a person like him who wanted religious to lead a life of spiritual discipline and strict adherence to the ideals.
- (b) He felt suffocated in his predicament of being a bed ridden patient at 'Sakshatkara' which was meant to be a centre for prayer and renewal activities of the Congregation; but at the same time the pious monk was not ready to leave the place asking for a transfer which was not a custom in the Congregation.
- (c) Till then he was in the habit of doing everything on his own, but now he had to seek the help of others and depend on them for reading, writing and even to move around in his room. The fact that he had become a dependent man even for ablutions made the model religious very sad at heart.

- (d) It was rheumatoid arthritis that made him physically suffer acute inconveniences. In addition to this he also had to suffer from spondylitis.
- (e) He had to undergo two surgeries in connection with urinary complications. He was also subjected to an optical surgery in 1995. In the same year he was massively attacked by herpes which caused acute pain and discomfort. He had to spend days together in an isolated room at St. James Hospital in Chalakudy. In acute pain he used to cry aloud, reports his helpers in the hospital.
- (f) Fr. Canisius was admitted in Amala Hospital, Thrissur when rheumatoid arthritis was at its zenith. He was not in a position to move the limbs, which had become stiff. He was unable to sit, stand, and move around. His eye sight deteriorated. He was in continuous pain, but all these bodily discomforts were accepted as 'a welcome suffering' by him: "A person who suffers may think that he has lost everything, but actually he is amassing credits to himself. The feeling that one is losing everything is only a hallucination and even when it is real, it is only temporary. And if we analyse it deeply we understand that the loss is only a worldly phenomenon." These words testify his approach to worldly sufferings.
- (g) He was again taken to Amala Hospital for treatment during his last days from Ampazhakad monastery where he was a member of the community. Once he commented expectantly: "I am ready to suffer to any



extent in this world provided my life in the other world would be free of sufferings."

- (h) During his last days, he told the people who came to visit him in his death bed: "Pray for me, not to be well from my illness but to enable me to be strong enough to withstand the sufferings."
- (i) He used his last days of visit by familiar people, priests, and nuns who were his disciples as a preparation for himself to enter into the world of eternity and to have the union with Our Lord. His only thought was to ascertain his union with the Lord. He requested them frequently to sing a famous hymn in Malayalam which started with "Vaa... Vaa... Yesunadha..." They sang those lines beautifully and he joined them by keeping the spirit of the beautiful song, and also joined in the prayer with them.



Suffering Servant of God Giving Spiritual Solace to Visitors

Doesn't total poverty make one pauper in this world? Doesn't it leave him as a roofless as Our Lord was? It may seem true. That is the uncertainty of poverty. But poverty offers a security: Christ takes care of those who fearlessly respond to His call. History stands evidence to it. In order to keep up the spirit of poverty let us go through the following points:

1. I should firmly determine that I will strictly abide by and be satisfied with what the Congregation offers.
2. I will not retreat to whatever I have denounced once in my life.
3. I will stick to the principle that whatever facilities are provided by the Congregation among them I will take the policy of 'the least possible' and that too 'as far as possible only at the cost of my labour'.<sup>27</sup>

**Fr. Canisius**



**PHASE SIX**  
**Into the Eternity**



**Tomb of Servant of God Fr. Canisius CMI**

Just like our Lord during the life's journey we may too have to sweat blood, be betrayed by close friends, be unjustly judged by others, be ridiculed and beaten up and even be hanged... When the life of Christ is flowing through our veins, His Spirit inspires us, as we celebrate His sufferings at the altar every day and as we are nourished by the reconciling Gospel, we will be able to face these trials and tribulations just as Our Lord managed them.

**Fr. Canisius**

In spite of all possible treatments given to him, Fr. Canisius breathed his last and said good bye to these worldly sufferings. This happened on 29 January 1998 when this shining star was born into the galaxy of heavenly luminaries.

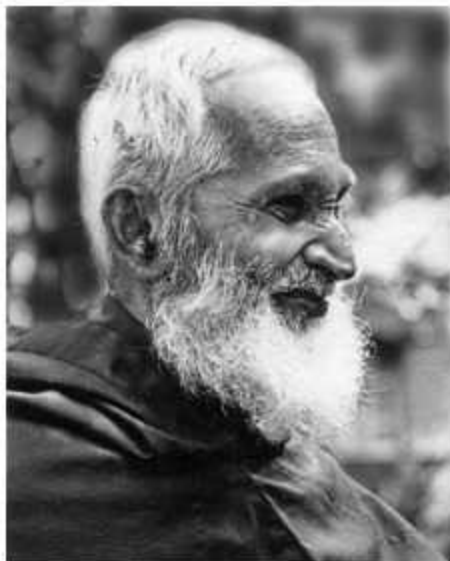
The mortal remains of Fr. Canisius were carried to Ampazhakkad monastery. The body was kept for a short while both at the Devamatha Provincial House in Thrissur and his home parish church at Anandapuram for the public to pay their last respects to the departed soul.

The following day the funeral services took place and his mortal body was buried in a tomb at the monastery chapel at Ampazhakkad. Mar Jacob Thoomkuzhi, Archbishop of Thrissur Archdiocese, Mar James Pazhayattil, Bishop of Irinjalakuda, Rev. Fr. Alex Ukken, CMI Prior General, Rev. Fr. Norbert Edattukaran, Provincial, Devamatha Province, Thrissur, and Rev. Fr. Eusebius Kizakudan, St. Teresas's Monastery, Amphazhakad, were the main celebrants who participated in the funeral service. Rev. Fr. Thomas Aykara CMI, the former CMI Prior General and for a long time confessor of Fr. Canisius, made the following comments during the funeral oration: "Fr. Canisius the saintly priest led a life of dedication to lead the faithful not to draw towards himself but to be one with the Almighty. Let us seek his intercession for our needs."

### **1. The Secret of His Life**

"God's Will... that alone... and that in full!" was his maxim and criterion when he had to choose and decide one among many at several stages of his life. He used to reiterate this

slogan without any artificiality during discussions, sermons and while solving problems. It was his motto and he tried his best to put it into practice in his own life as the minister of the Word of God.



The secret and success of the life of Fr. Canisius was based on finding out and imitating Jesus in each and every thing, the will of God through spiritual means; performing it into practice totally; and accepting all the mental and physical agonies joyfully that came across in his life as penance for the noble cause.

Again, the secret of his life unfolds itself through a message which he wrote to the members of his Congregation in 1990 were like his testament. The "living saint" wrote as follows:

I have an invaluable treasure which I got through decantation of my long years of life experiences... It is surely possible that if we endeavour sincerely with the help of God, we can be pure at heart before God, pleasant in appearance and innocent in our dealings with the fellow beings. This is my witness, experience, and treasure, which I try to transfer in abundance



joyfully to my brethren about which I have told previously.

Let us all look forward to the day we meet again in the Home of our Father; and let us fight with vigour and valour in the life's battlefield for achieving total success.

Let us, through prayer, help each other for that great reunion. Adieu!

The above words stand as a valuable testimony to the four main values: Purity in his personal life, the constant awareness of his vocation, the holiness he acquired, and the commitment he had always towards the fellow members.



## **2. The Power of His Intercession**

During his lifetime and even after his death, Fr. Canisius has given solace and miraculous healing to many who suffered from different kinds of physical illness. May I quote one such incident in which the devotee attained spiritual and emotional serenity and mental solace:

I recovered from my illness without any particular treatment or surgery. The only medication was nothing but my prayer at the tomb of Fr. Canisius. I believe strongly that by his intercession I was completely free from my physical illness. I profusely thank God Almighty and also to Fr. Canisius, for his intercession.

The above testimony was the content of a letter written to Fr. Prior by Mrs. Annie Martin who resides near Ampazhakad Monastery where Fr. Canisius was buried. Doctors diagnosed a swelling in her uterus and advised her for further treatment on the basis of a scanning report. On hearing this, she was completely upset both physically and mentally; for nearly one full month she spent hours together in prayer at the tomb of Fr. Canisius. During this period she had not taken any medicine.

Later she was examined by specialist doctors at Medical College, Thrissur. The second scanning report showed that she had neither any swelling nor had she any kind of complications in her uterus. It was indeed a miraculous healing and she leads a healthy and happy life even to this day.

May I conclude my work by quoting a few words from Mar James Pazhayattil while concelebrating a requiem Mass at the Monastery Chapel in March 2012 at Ampazhakkad:

It is because the people are convinced about the power of Fr. Canisius' intercession that a number of devotees come and pray at his tomb and make offerings. It is proved beyond doubt that he was a saint while living. There was a harmonious blend of humility, spirituality and wisdom in his personality... Let the formalities

regarding his canonization happen at a time as per the Will of God and in a way best suitable as per the design of the Almighty.

Jesus promised: "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life" (John 5:24).



Memmebrs of Ampazhakkad Monastery  
Bid Farewell to Fr. Canisius

Fr. Canisius who choose the Word of God as the pivotal point and foundation stone not only of his studies, meditation, teaching, and other activities but also of his whole life surely deserves the everlasting life as promised by Jesus Christ.

Therefore, it remains undoubtedly a fact that Fr. Canisius is a 'Living Saint' and even though he is no more

with us in body, still lives amidst us with very strong powers of intercession as a saint.



Priests, Religious Sisters, and Brothers, Family Members and People Bid Farewell to Fr. Canisius

## **Main Events in the Life of Fr. Canisius**

### **❖ Childhood**

1914 May 12	Birth, Anandapuram
1914 June 6	Baptism, Parappukkara
1919-1923	Primary Education, Anandapuram
1923	Bridge Class (Nalara Class), Parappukkara
1924-1927	At Home
1927-1930	UP School, Elthuruth

### **❖ Training Period**

1930-1933	Aspirant, High School, Pavaratty
1933-1934	Language Study, Alwaye
1934-1935	Novice, Ampazhakkad
1934 Nov 21	Vestition
1935 Nov 24	First Vows
1935-1936	Rhetoric and Language Study, Koonamavu
1936-1942	Philosophical and Theological Studies, Mangalore
1942 Dec 21	Ordination, Mangalore

❖ **At the Service**

1943-1944	Member at Prior General's House, Ernakulam
1944-1945	Studying for DD at Candy, Cylone
1945-1948	Seminary Professor, Chettipuzha
1948	Intermediate Studies, SB College, Changanassery
1948-1952	Doctoral Research, Rome
1953-1957	Seminary Professor, Chettipuzha
1957-1959	Seminary Professor and Spiritual Master, Bangalore
1960-1966	Rector and Professor, Bangalore
1966-1972	Prior General, Ernakulam
1972-1975	Provincial, Thrissur
1975-1977	Seminary Professor and Superior, Bangalore
1977-1978	Member Renewal Team, Ernakulam
1978-1981	Vicar General, Ernakulam
1981-1996	Spiritual Guru, Pariyaram

❖ **Last Days**

1996-1998	Member, Monastery Ampazhakkad
1998 Jan 29	Death, Ampazhakkad
1998 Jan 30	Funeral, Ampazhakkad
2014 March 29	Declared Servant of God

**Works by Fr. Canisius**

1. *In the Service of the Word of God* (Doctorate Thesis entitled 'Cardinal Seripando: An Exegete and Biblical Theologian')
2. *Vishudha Valsara Chinthakal*
3. *Keralasabha Samuddharakan*
4. *Davivanubhavam Sukaramakkunna St. Chavarayude Lalithamaya Prarthana Reethi*
5. *Salvation History Series*
6. *Bharanasevanavum Prarthana Jeevithavum*



