

M.C. George Achen

(Father of Most Rev Alexander Mar Thoma Valiya Metropolitan)



1874-1923



M. C. George Achen
Kuriannor Maliakal
(Father of Most Rev Alexander Mar Thoma Valiya Metropolitan)
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"Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever." Daniel 13: 3

Many people try to be stars in the world of entertainment, only to find their stardom temporary. God tells us how we can be an eternal "star"- by being wise and leading many to God's righteousness. If we share our Lord with others, we can be true stars, radiantly beautiful in God's sight! - (Life application study Bible)

This is the story of a priest who led many to God's righteousness. He was called to his heavenly abode when he was just 49 years old. Though his educational status was "Lower Secondary" (7th Grade), he was the translator of the Maramon Convention messages for many years. He is the first person to write a biography on Mar Thoma Church leaders (Biography of Abraham Malpan). He is also remembered as the only person to have addressed the Maramon Convention 18 times during a single Convention, out of the 23 messages planned for the 8 days. No other speaker has had the privilege to speak as many sessions during a single Convention.

Birth and Childhood

Rev. M. C. George (Maliakal Achen) was born in the Maliakal family of Kuriannoor on 17 April, 1874, as the son of Chandy and Mariamma who were agriculturists. Their house is situated on the banks of the famous River Pumba.

The Maliakal family is a branch of the famous Pakalomattom family. George was baptized in the Maramon Mar Thoma Church (There were no Churches in Kuriannoor at that time. People from Kuriannoor were the members of the Maramon Parish) by Thomas Mar Athanasius Metropolitan.

Kuriannoor Kolabhagathu Ashan (Geevarghese Ashan) taught him till 3rd grade. Ashan was the only teacher for all three classes, and there were about 100 students in the school. As there was no slate or paper, lessons were written on Palm leaves (Pana Ola) by the teacher. George was a bright student and taught his juniors, hence getting the name Kochu Ashan (Junior Teacher). He loved fishing as a hobby and used to fish in the near by river.

Ambattu Varkey Upadeshi and Kolabhagathu Ashan were his Sunday school teachers. George was also bright in religious matters and he received first prizes at Sunday school. After the morning Sunday school classes in Kuriannoor, afternoon he attended the Sunday school in the Maramon Church.

Education

In 1882, George joined the English School in Aranmula and passed the Lower Secondary Examination. Then he joined the Cambridge Nicholson Institute (CNI) in Kottayam for his Theological Training (1889-1890). CNI was an institute established by the Church Missionary Society (CMS) Missionaries in 1859 for training the teacher cum preachers (Ashan Upadeshies). The CNI curriculum was a two year course: first year for teacher's training and the second year for divinity (Theology). It was one of the best training institutes in South India that had accommodated students from Ceylon. (Sri- Lanka). The Institute was equipped with a huge Library. In addition to English, languages such as Greek and Syriac were also taught in the institute. Many of the old Mar Thoma priests including Titus II Mar Thoma Metropolitan were students of this institute. This institute continued until the establishment of a Biblical Seminary in Kannanmula near Trivandrum, in 1943.

Teacher

After the training at the CNI, George worked as a teacher at various schools in Perumbavoor, Paravoor and Moovattupuzha. These schools were run by the Church Missionary Society (CMS). He utilized his spare time for evangelical work and to improve his standard of English. He had the habit of writing summary notes of all the books he read. He had a good collection of his hand written note books.

Marriage and death of first wife.

In 1894, at the age of 20, George married Mariamma a member of the Chennattu family of Kozhencherry. After his marriage as per the instructions of Titus I Mar Thoma Metropolitan he resigned from the Church Missionary Society and joined in the Mar Thoma Syrian Seminary in Kottayam as a teacher. During their stay in Kottayam, Mariamma died due to typhoid, which was a severe blow to George. But he found consolation in the verse *"He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful."* John 15:2. He continued there as teacher and boarding master.

In 1898, George married Aleyamma of Anjilivelil, Maramon. It was a second marriage for Aleyamma as well. (Aleyamma's first husband Mavelikkara Plammoottil Yohannan died when Aleyamma was pregnant with their first child- Mariamma.)

Teacher in Maramon School

After teaching for five years in Kottayam Gorge joined in the Maramon School. There he introduced prayer meetings and Bible study groups. During this time he learnt Syriac from Poyyalil Achen of Kozhencherry.

Deacon and Priest

While George was teaching in Maramon, in January, 1903, he was ordained as a deacon by Titus I Mar Thoma Metropolitan. Then he was sent to the Syrian Christian Seminary School in Tiruvalla as a teacher. He found it very difficult to manage his priestly duties in Kuriannoor along with his teaching job in Tiruvalla. There were no proper roads and the only means of transport was by bullock cart. So he came back to Maramon School which is very near to Kuriannoor. In 1904, he was ordained as priest in the Kuriannoor Mar Thoma Church by Titus I Mar Thoma Metropolitan. Many priests including Vicar General Kovoore Ipe Thoma Kathanar and Ayroor Achen (C. P. Philipose Kasseesa) were present for the ordination.

Achen had a melodious voice. He was good at teaching hymns to his parishioners. "Deva Devanu Mangalham – Mahonnathanaam - Deva Devanu Mangalham" (Hymn No. 82) and "Yesu ennullha naamame - lokam engum vishesha naamame" (Hymn No. 39) were his favorite hymns. His regular house visits made him aware of the needs of his parishioners and he personally knew many of them. He had the courage to speak like the Old Testament prophets.

Mar Thoma Parishes in Kuriannoor

Marthomites in Kuriannoor were the members of the Maramon Parish. Lack of roads and means of transportation made it difficult to attend the services in Maramon. There was a Church cum school in Kuriannoor in which Sunday services were held with the help of the parish priests from Maramon. So George was ordained, as per the request of the Kuriannoor Parish (Established in 1879) by Titus I. Later people staying on the west of Kuriannoor established the St. Thomas Parish (in 1897), and George Achen became a full time vicar of that parish. The people staying in the north of Kuriannoor along with the members of Thelliyoore formed the Salem Mar Thoma Parish (in 1902). George Achen was the vicar for that parish as well. The Kuriannoor Parish was assisted by the Maramon priest; the St. Thomas Parish, was assisted by Kuzhumannil Kochuchacko Upadeshi; and the Salem Mar Thoma Parish was assisted by Thanathottathil Mathen Upadeshi in conducting the worship services.

Parish Work

George Achen was the Vicar of all the three parishes in Kuriannoor. In addition to his priestly duties at Church, he always tried to improve the social life of his parishioners.

Even before the establishment of the Sunday School Samajam, Sunday Schools were functioning in all the three parishes in Kuriannoor. Achen used to arrange meetings for the Sunday school teachers on Saturday afternoons. Achen himself was a well experienced teacher. He taught them how to prepare lessons and notes. Achen introduced examinations in Sunday school and books were given as prizes.

Prayer groups were introduced in all the parishes. Members were given the opportunity to witness and share the word of God. Disputes between families and their neighbors were also settled during these meetings.

George Achen started a branch of the YMCA in the St. Thomas Parish. YMCA meetings were held on Sunday evenings. Achen prepared Bible reading notes for each month and distributed it to the members. He encouraged the youths to work for the welfare of the sick and poor people. Kuriannoor YMCA is one of the best known YMCA's in Kerala.

Bible classes on the books of the Bible were held once a week in all the three parishes, along with intercessory

prayers.

Even before the establishment of the Mar Thoma Sevika Sanghom, George Achen arranged meetings for the ladies in his parishes. Usually the meetings were on Saturday evening. A centre meeting was conducted once a year.

Attendance book in Church!!

Just like schools, Achen introduced an attendance book in the St. Thomas Parish in Kuriannoor. Attendance books according to prayer groups were kept in the Church, and members were asked to mark their presence in the book. Because of this attendance system, the Church was always full.

Establishment of Schools

George Achen was a great educationalist. There were only two primary schools (Up to Std. III) in Kuriannoor. With the help of people in the Pullad Village, Achen started another school on the western boundary of Kuriannoor with classes up to STD VII.

Achen was instrumental in establishing three more primary schools and one High School in Kuriannoor. He sacrificed the money that he had kept towards the marriage of his daughter, for the construction of the Kuriannoor English School building.

Construction of Roads

Achen was a very able social worker who knew the pulse and needs of his people. He knew the importance of roads for the development of a community. Kuriannoor was basically a farming village. There were no proper roads to take the agricultural products to the nearby markets. The river Pumba was the main source of transportation. With the help of the villagers, Achen constructed the Thelliyoar - Thundiyl Kadavu Road, Pullad - Cherukolpuzha Road, M. T. High School Kuduthamuzhy Road and Thonipuzha -Charalkunnu -Thadiyoar Road.

Sabha Council and Vaideeka Selection Committee

Achen was a member of the Sabha Council and the Vaideeka Selection Committee. Those days the parishes in our Church were supported by the compulsory fees charged at the time of conducting various ceremonies like baptism, burial, wedding etc. Abraham Mar Thoma Metropolitan and George Achen were against the compulsory fee system. They believed that donations should be voluntary and not compulsory and argued in the Sabha Council meetings about this matter. Today, all Church affairs are run by the free will offerings and donations of our members.

Encourages M.N. Abraham to become a Priest

Being a member of the Vaideeka Selection Committee he encouraged many young people to become priests of the Church. One such person was Rev. M N. Abraham who later became Abraham Mar Thoma Metropolitan.

Prarthana Samajam

Achen was a man of prayer. He took the initiative to form an association called "Prarthana Samajam". Meetings were arranged for those who were interested in praying for the Church and its activities. Bible study, intercessory prayer and witnessing were the main events of the meetings.

Leader of Revival Movement

Revivalism is a special approach to religion or one's faith that gives importance to individual religious experience rather than the main doctrines. It is always associated with fervent emotional singing, preaching, confessing, dancing etc. We had experienced many revival movements in our Church. Tirunelveli in Tamil Nadu state was the birth place of revival movements in South India. It started in 1860, by the CMS Missionaries and came to

Travancore through an unknown preacher called Mathai Upadeshi and carried on by Vidwan Kutty Achen (Justus Joseph). In 1864, Mathews Mar Athanasius Metropolitan allowed Ammal, the daughter of a famous Tamil convert, Vedanayaka Sastri, to visit the churches and inspire the people through her Christian Songs. In 1873, Viduwan Kutty Achen became the leader of this movement. In 1894, Tamil preachers David and Wordsworth took over the leadership of revivalism. The starting of Maramon Convention in 1895 was a result of this great revival. Later this spirit of revival moved the hearts of thousands of people through the blessed leaders like CMS missionary Rev. Thomas Walker from Tirunelveli in Tamil Nadu, Punchamannil Mammen Upadeshi, Muthampackal Kochoonju Upadeshi and Maliakal M. C. George Achen. M. C. George Achen was a regular participant of the revival meetings of Mammen Upadeshi and Kochoonju Upadeshi.

Priest cum Homeo Doctor

To help the downtrodden and the sick in the community, George Achen learned homeopathy through correspondence and prescribed treatments free of charge to the poor people. He believed in the verse:

"This prayer made in faith will heal the sick person; the Lord will restore him to health, and the sins he has committed will be forgiven" James 5:15.

Village Development Society (Desha Parishkarana Sanghom)

With the help of mature dedicated leaders from the Hindu and Christian communities in Pullad and Kuriannoor, Achen initiated the formation of an association called Desha Parishkarana Sanghom. Instead of going to judicial courts and police stations the disputes between the families in both these villages were amicably settled through this association. Through this association they fought against alcoholism and for few years there were no toddy (liquor) shops in Kuriannoor.

A Well Read Man

George Achen used to carry his English Devotional book "Daily Light" with him. He was a regular reader of the English Weeklies "Life of Faith" and "The Christian" which were published in England. "The Christian" was a collection of the Christian news from all parts of the world. "Life of Faith" had details of Keswick Convention messages and articles regarding faith and worship. Both these weeklies were sent to Achen till his death by foreign missionary friends in England.

Translator and Preacher of Maramon Convention

Rev. Thomas Walker (a CMS Missionary) was the main speaker of the Maramon convention from 1899-1912. George Achen was the translator. Achen's loud voice was audible to all the participants of the Convention (there were no loudspeakers in those days). During one of these years, Rev. Thomas Walker did not come for the convention. George Achen was selected by the Mar Thoma Evangelistic Association to speak in that convention. It was the first and last time that an Achen of our Church became the main speaker of the convention. Out of the 21 messages of the convention 18 were given by Achen.

Mar Thoma Teachers and Students Association and Biography of Malpan Achen.

Because of his wide reading and intimate relationship with foreign missionaries his ideas and visions were much progressive than that of an ordinary Mar Thoma priest. Achen was willing to accept the good things from the western society which were helpful for the progress of our country. Achen was one of the leaders behind the formation of the association called "Mar Thoma Teachers and Students Association". For many years Achen was the president of this association. In 1916, during the annual meeting of this association it was decided that biographies of Church Leaders were to be written and published on behalf of this association. Till that time there were no Biographical books about any of our leaders. So the association decided to publish the biography of the reformation leader Abraham Malpan as the first book and this tedious job was entrusted to George Achen. Abraham Malpan Achen died in 1845 and it was very difficult to collect the data for writing the biography in 1916. But George Achen with his patience and great research work published the biography of Abraham Malpan in 1919. Being the first Biography in our Church it is a very valuable record. Later on biographies of some of our other

leaders were published by this Association.

Strict Disciplinarian

George Achen was a strict disciplinarian. He discouraged his parishioners from attending the heathen festivals and ceremonies. He warned people practicing in witch craft and devil worship which are against the teachings of the Bible. He was a strict observer of Sabbath (Sunday). According to Syrian Christian Tradition Sunday- Sabbath day- starts from Saturday evening, and ends on Sunday evening. So Saturday evening children were not allowed to study nor do anything connected with their secular education. Saturday evening was the time set apart to study the Word of God, 'The Bible'. It was also the preparation time for the next day's Sunday School Classes, Worships, Fellowship Meetings and other religious functions. Achen used to travel on his Kochuvallam (Small country boat) on Saturday nights through the river Pumba to check whether any of his parish members were at the river fishing. During the church service, he used to publicly scold the persons who violated the Sabbath.

Miraculous -Cure from Arthritis

One of our evangelists Koduvelil Thomas Upadeshi was suffering with severe arthritis. Medicines were prescribed by very prominent Ayurvedic doctors of the time, but to no avail. George Achen, Thengumcherril Philipochen and few other friends conducted a two day fasting prayer in Thomas Upadeshi's house. During the prayer, Upadeshi felt something powerful passing through his body and he was suddenly cured from the pain.

Divine Protection

Alcoholism is a sin. A large number of our church members were addicts to alcohol and drugs. Achen knew that alcoholism was the root of many social evils. Through his sermons in the church he made his people aware of the evils of alcoholism. Achen took it as his responsibility to help them out of the addiction as a mark of his concern for the least and lost. Those who were employed in the production and sale of Kallu (toddy- country liquor made from the coconut tree) didn't like Achen's sermons and advices. In order to ridicule Achen they used to hang pots containing liquor right in front of Achen's house. After drinking bouts they used to abuse Achen publicly. Achen was firm in his faith and belief, and continued preaching against alcoholism. This enraged the Alcoholic mafia and they decided to kill him.

One day Achen was coming home alone after the Bible Class from the Kuriannoor Salem Mar Thoma Church. It was about midnight and Achen was walking alone with a lantern in his hand and the umbrella in the other hand as it was raining slightly. All of a sudden the members of this alcoholic mafia surrounded him intending to kill him. Achen lifted his lantern to see the people, but suddenly they ran away and disappeared into the darkness. Achen had no idea what was happening but continued till he reached home safely. An hour later, those who tried to kill Achen came to Achen's house and told him what happened. According to them, when they approached Achen they saw guards with shining swords and rods walking around Achen. Now they wanted Achen to tell them who these guards were. Achen convinced them that he was alone and quoted the verse: *"you have made the Lord your defender, the Most High your protector, and so no disaster will strike you, no violence will come near your home. God will put his angels in charge of you, to protect you wherever you go"* Psalms 91 9-11. They all wept, confessed and apologized to Achen and went away peacefully.

Achen used to pray for all his parishioners and especially for his enemies by name. One day, during midnight while Achen was praying in his house, few of his enemies who did not like his policies went to his cow shed and untied the cow and took it through his courtyard. While passing through the courtyard they heard their names in Achen's prayer. Achen was interceding before God for them without knowing what they were doing. It was a real shock for them. They went back and tied the cow in the cowshed. The next day they went to Achen and narrated the complete story and apologized to Achen.

Final Days

In the early 1920, typhoid epidemic was very common in Central Travancore. On 4 October, 1923, Achen along with, Kalamannil K. E Oommen Achen and Kolathu Yohannan Vidayan went to Ranny on Kettuvallam (Country Boat - that was the only mode of transport available at that time) to visit Ettichuvattil Malayil Philipochen and his

son Rev. M. P. Thomas who were both infected with Typhoid. They went back the same night; but Achen became sick. Treatment was given by the Pulivelil Kunju Vaidyan and Kolathu Yohannan Vaidyan. But Achen's condition worsened. On hearing about Achen's sickness, both Titus II Mar Thoma and Abraham Mar Thoma shifted their residences to Kuriannoor School, which was near to Achen's house. They conducted prayers in Achen's house. But on 13 October 1923, while Abraham Mar Thoma was praying, Achen passed away.

The first part of the Burial service was held in Achen's house under the leadership of both the Thirumenis. About eight thousand people attended the burial held at St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church in Kuriannoor. Ayroor Achen (Rev. C. P. Philipose) spoke during the burial service based on the verses "*Just as man is destined to die once and after that to face Judgment.*" Hebrews 9:27.

Abraham Mar Thoma stayed on for two more days in the Kuriannoor School to console the family members and parishioners.

Children of Rev. M. C. George

George Achen's first wife Mariamma died before having any children. His second wife Aleyamma had one daughter (Mariamma) from her previous marriage. This child died at the age of six due to typhoid. George Achen and Aleyamma had nine children. Their first child died in his infancy. The remaining eight children are:

1 Thankamma -Husband: T. G. Easow, Tharekkattu, Puthencavu 2 Mariamma -Husband: Matthai Varghese, Palasseril, Mallappally 3 Aleyamma -Husband: T. K. Ipe - Rtd. Headmaster SCS School 4 Saramma -Husband: Rev. P. V. Abraham - Valakam 5 Kunjachen -Alexander Mar Thoma Valiya Metropolitan 6 Kunjuju -Wife: Sosamma, Polachirakkal - Cheriyanadu 7 Sosamma -Husband: Dr. P. V. Philip, Palathinkkal, Kottayam 8 Chinnamma -Husband: N. K. Mathai - Kanjirappally

God was faithful to all of them and they all followed the footsteps of their great father.

Posthumous Reward

George Achen's son Kunjachen (M. G. Chandy) became Valiya Metropolitan of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church. (Alexander Mar Thoma Valiya Metropolitan - 10 April, 1913 -11 Jan, 2000) Daughter Sosamma became a doctor and served our mission Hospitals in Kumbanadu and Sihora for many years. Taking account of her selfless service Mar Thoma Church has awarded her the "Manava Seva award"

Notes

Maramon Mar Thoma Parish - It is believed that Maramon Mar Thoma Parish was established on 28 August, 1440 (Chinghom 12, 616 M.E). Most of the present Mar Thoma parishes in and around Maramon were under this Parish. Maramon was Abraham Malpan's Mother Parish.

Maramon Convention -A mammoth religious convention of Christians, (started in 1895 by The Mar Thoma Church but attended by people belonging of all communities), is held at Maramon, every year on vast beds of River Pumba. The convention takes place in February in an atmosphere of devotion and lasts for a period of eight days. Addressed by speakers of international repute and attended by innumerable devotees, this is the largest Christian convention in the world.

Reformation - Reformation is a process of reforming for the better. It can also be an improvement. Reformation in the Syrian Church was started by a priest called Abraham Malpan, (1796-1845) of Maramon.

Rev. Thomas Walker - A CMS Missionary from Tirunelveli in Tamil Nadu. He was the main speaker of the Maramon convention from 1899 to 1912.

Ashan - Ashan is the Malayalam word for School Teacher (Schoolmaster).

Upadeshi: Upadeshi in Malayalam means a person who gives advice. But in Christian literature Upadeshi means a gospel preacher or an evangelist.

Main Events in the Lifetime of Rev. M. C. George

1874 17 April Birth of Rev M. C. George 1880 30 October Birth of Abraham Mar Thoma 1883 29 November Birth of Sadhu Kochoonju Upadeshi 1888 5 September Formation of Mar Thoma Evangelistic Association (MTEA) 1898 9 December Consecration of Titus I Mar Thoma 1903 January M.C. George-Ordained as deacon 1904 February M. C. George - Ordained as priest 1905 25 February Formation of Mar Thoma Sunday School Samajam 1909 First Mission field outside Kerala –Karwar Mission, Karnataka 1909 20 October Metropolitan Titus I passes away 1910 First Mar Thoma Students Conference 1914 28 June Beginning of the First World War 1917 27 January Kovoar Achen, Ipe Thoma Kathanar - passes away 1918 Sadhu Sunder Singh visits Maramon Convention 1919 14 February Formation of Sevika Sanghom 1919 28 June First World War Ends 1921 June Establishment of Union Christian College in Alwaye 1923 13 October Rev. M. C. George passes away

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All for HIS glory.

Your's in Christ,

John Joseph

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