

Fr Chavara Elias Kuriakose and Sr Euphraisa to be canonized November 23

Thousands to attend Indian canonizations at Vatican

Bl Fr Chavara Elias Kuriakose and Bl Sr Euphraisa of Sacred Heart of Jesus to be canonized November 23



At least 4,000 Indians are expected at the Vatican this weekend to see Pope Francis officially declare two Indians — a mystic nun and a social reformer priest — as saints.

Blessed Father Chavara Elias Kuriakose (1805-1871) and Blessed Sister Euphraisa of Sacred Heart of Jesus (1877-1952), both from the Syro-Malabar Church based in southern Kerala state, are set to be canonized on November 23.

The canonizations come six years after the canonization of India's first woman saint, Sister Alphonsa of the Immaculate Conception, said Cardinal George Alencherry, the Major Archbishop of Syro-Malabar Church.

Both the future saints are credited with spearheading a better spiritual and social awareness that have become the foundations of present-day Catholic life in Kerala, the cardinal told ucanews.com.

"We expect some 4,000 people from India at the Vatican. Also, hundreds of our priests and nuns working in Europe and other parts of Asia should be attending it," said Father Robin Kannanchira, public relations officer for the congregation Blessed Chavara founded — the Carmelites of Mary

Immaculate (CMI).

Social thinkers and historians say Blessed Chavara was a leading social reformer in 19th century Kerala, which was beset with social ills such as the caste system, discrimination and pervasive superstition.

Blessed Chavara was instrumental in establishing modern secular education along with parish churches to provide education to all people irrespective of caste and religion, said KS Radhakrishnan, former vice chancellor of Kerala's Sanskrit University.

The priest established a Sanskrit school in 1846, when Sanskrit was considered the language of affluent classes and learning it was reserved only for upper-caste people.

"Sanskrit at that time was not a language alone, it was the abode of wealth, power, position and fame in society," Radhakrishnan said.

By opening his Sanskrit school to all, "this visionary ... was pioneering a revolution, making low caste people enjoy wealth, power and position", he said.

In 1829 he established the CMI, the first indigenous religious institute for men in the Kerala Church, becoming its first prior-general.

Almost four decades later, in 1866, along with Carmelite missionary Leopold Beccaro, Blessed Chavara began the first Carmelite convent, the first indigenous order for women in the Syro Malabar Church, today known as the Congregation of Mother Carmel.

Sister Euphrasia, the nun who will be canonized with him at the weekend, is one of the congregation's pioneers, according to Sister Sancta Kolath, the order's present superior-general.

"She was not known for building up anything or social reform. She led an intense life of prayer. She was known as the 'praying mother'," said Sister Kolath who also described her as a "mystic".

During her lifetime "people flocked to her, seeking ... counseling and inspiration, and that was her way of helping people," she said.

Soon after her death people began to pray at her tomb and many claim to have received favors through her. Her saintly nature was accepted as a fact even during her lifetime.

Her inspiration helps the congregation engage in the fields of education, social work and healing across India and Europe, Sister Kolath said.

Christopher Joseph, Kochi - Ucanews