CHAPTER III
ESTABLISHMENT OF THE KOTTAR DIOCESE

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The catholic church of Kanyakumari grew in strength. The infant church had prosperity and in this circumstance the formation of a new diocese of Kottar in 1930 marked a milestone in the catholic mission of Kanyakumari district. The new diocese was carved out of the vast Quilon diocese\(^1\). This was done for the extension of religious work in the region of Kanyakumari. The Roman pontiff saw that the diocese of Quilon had an extensive size and it had numerous christian faithful were not able to rule by one Bishop\(^2\). The authorities wanted to create a new diocese. The jurisdiction of the catholic church favoured the reorganization of the southern portion of the diocese of the Quilon into Kottar diocese\(^3\). Bishop Aloysius Maria Benziger OCD, the then bishop of Quilon assigned much labour for the birth of the diocese of Kottar. He was a loving father and a great benefactor of the whole region of Kottar and he paved the way for the creation of the new diocese in 1930. The birth of the diocese was the fulfillment of his dreams\(^4\).

Bishop Benziger was born on 31\(^{st}\) January 1864 at the foot of the Alps in Switzerland, a multi-lingual state of Europe. He came to India in 1893 at the age of 29 serving in the Syrian territories supporting those people in the educational and social activities at Mavelikara and Adoor. He also worked in the catholic mission in Kandy, central Ceylon. He was ordained coadjutor Bishop of Quilon in Kandy on 18\(^{th}\) November

\(^1\) Lawrence, V., op. cit., pp.93-95.
\(^2\) Louis Roche, E., op. cit., p.443.
\(^3\) Directory, Diocese of Kottar, Nagercoil, 2001, p.8.
\(^4\) Pastoral Letter of Bishop Aloysius Maria Benziger, Quilon, 1924.
1900. He was the secretary to the Roman representative Arch Bishop Ladislaus Laleski for the whole Asia before he became the Bishop of Quilon⁵.

On 14 September 1905 he was enthroned as the second bishop of Quilon⁶. His residence was made at the school premises at Tangasseri, a popular catholic centre of the old commercial town⁷. Soon after he became the bishop of Quilon he found his heart and mind planning the programmes of his diocese as a whole, especially for the southern part. He appealed to the European countries like Italy, Switzerland, Portugal, Belgium etc for funds on behalf of this region⁸. He wrote to his Carmelite provincial about the sad condition of the southern part of his diocese that is Kottar region. He strove hard to improve the condition of the diocese by requiring each parish with a simple chapel to accommodate 500 converts for prayers and worship. Along with the parish church he wanted to have a parochial school, a cemetery and a simple residence for the parish priest and his assistants. His first task was to provide financial stability in the region of Kottar. He realised that money was much needed for conducting the activities of the large diocese extending from Alapuzha up to Cape Comorin in the south. His second task was to ensure adequate educational institutions throughout the diocese. He wished to have a school in each parish, a high school and an English school in each town, a monastery and a convent in each vicariate⁹.

In 1907, Bishop Benziger opened St. Francis institute at Nagercoil to train the youth as teachers and catechists. It was the first ecclesiastical institution opened in the

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⁵ Bernadine Vallathara, Bishop Benziger, Trivandrum, 2006, pp.8-11.
⁶ Ibid.
⁷ Catholic Directory of India, Delhi, 1969, p.333.
⁸ Marieli Benziger, op.cit., pp.461-463.
⁹ Ibid., p.467.
southern region of Kottar. On 24th May 1924 he proposed to Rome after having consulted with the Arch Bishop of Verapoly, Dr. Angel Mary Perez Celicia (1919-1934) to bifurcate the Quilon diocese into three parts as Quilon, Trivandrum and Kottar. He recommended three senior and capable priests as candidates for the new bishopric of Kottar. He first recommended his secretary and Diocesan counsellor Reverend Father Francis Pereira, a 58 year old priest, the Director of the major seminary and his administrative council member Reverend John Pereira, a 54 year old priest and Reverend Father Lawrence Pereira, a 53 year old priest who was in the Kattanam mission. The Arch Bishop of Verapoly visited Rome on 20th April 1929 with the proposal of the erection of the Kottar diocese and returned home in 14th March 1930. Based on this the 260th Pope Pius XI (1922-1939) had discussions and consultations in a high command with Arch. Bishop Edmond Modney, an apostolic delegate of India and the other venerable clergy and cardinals. This body judged it right to acquiesce to the request that was made and the response from Rome was the Apostolic letter Ad Pastorate Ministerianum dated 26th May 1930 constituting the taluks of Villavancode, Kalkulam, Thovalai and Agasteeswaram, except the parish of Azhakappapuram respectively of the Thovalai and Agasteeswaram, which is pertained to the diocese of Tuticorin and another portion of the taluk of Villavancode between Pattanamcanal and the Arabian sea, a group of eight coastal villages namely Erayumanthurai, Poothurai, Thoothoor, Chinnathurai, Eraviputhenthurai, Vallavillai, Marthandamthurai and Neerody which were linked to the
The new diocese was named after Kottar an ancient town, a part of Nagercoil where lived the traditional Thoma christians or Thomas christians and also the halting station of St. Francis Xavier, the Jesuit missionary who had been there for a long time. The significance of this separation was done on the linguistic consideration that Quilon had a Malayalam speaking catholic majority and Kottar had a Tamil majority. The new diocese of Kottar should be under the protection and patronage of Saint Francis Xavier and entrusting it to the care of the native clergy. The church in the same city built to God in honour of St. Francis Xavier rose to the dignity and right of a cathedral church.

After the bifurcation of the Kottar diocese, Quilon had only two divisions the northern unit with Quilon as head quarters and the south under Vicar Forane at Thiruvananthapuram. The reorganization and re-arrangement became a desideratum in view of the increase in catholic population, the number of churches and other ecclesiastical institutions. There were considerable speculations as to which part of Quilon diocese was first bifurcated namely Trivandrum or Kottar. The choice naturally fell on kottar as Bishop Benziger knew the facts and figures which were riper of the two for a division, as long Kottar had more catholic population than Quilon and Trivandrum. Also it had more schools and convents than the other two units. The order also wished to send the clerics of the new diocese for instructions to the diocese of Quilon and this

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14 Apostolic Letter, Ad Pastorale Ministerium, Dt. 26th May 1930.
15 Lawrence, V., op.cit, p.103.
16 Apostolic Constitution by which the Diocese of Kottar was erected, Rome, 26th May 1930, ACTA APOSTOLICAE SEDIS TOM XXIV n2.
17 Pastoral Letter, Diocese of Quilon, Dt. 18th May, 1929.
order did not favour to start a seminary in the new diocese. The newly erected diocese could be maintained on the income raised from the taxation or stipends to the diocese of Quilon. The devotional fee in terms of the offerings of the faithful in whose interest the diocese was erected as well as the cathedralium tax to be wished and established at the decision of the bishop. All documents and acts pertaining to the territories of the new diocese are to be shifted from Quilon diocesan chancery and to be kept in the chancery of Kottar. These documents are to be carefully preserved in the new diocesan archives.

The letter dated 16th August 1930 Bishop Benziger declared a news which was hailed with great joy and enthusiasm by the priests and the faithful that was about the erection of the new diocese. A committee was setup at Kottar under the chairmanship of Fr. Paul OCD, parish priest of St. Xavier church, Kottar which was raised to be a cathedral. This committee looked after the over all programmes for the celebrations of the consecration of the new pastor in the new diocese. On 5th October 1930 the diocese of Kottar was born. Rev. Lawrence Pereira was consecrated as the new bishop. That day the 66 year old Bishop Benziger quoted that he felt joy and pain like a father giving away his daughter in marriage, as he gave away the part of his diocese to a new pastor.

When the new diocese of Kottar was bifurcated from Quilon it had a total number of 93,915 Catholics, 94 schools with 9,588 pupils, 10 convents, while Quilon had 51,953 catholics, 6 schools with 8,220 pupils and seven convents and Trivandrum unit had 56,215 catholics, 59 schools with 7,159 pupils and seven convents. The new diocese

19 Ibid., p.11.
20 Ibid., p.12.
21 Lawrence, V., op.cit., pp. 97-98.
22 Ibid., p.99.
had a firm foundation of necessary personal and institutions. Kottar had 29 parish churches and chapels, 28 Diocesan priests, 4 other priests, 15 seminarians, 10 convents with 86 women religious and 336 trained catholic teachers. Out of the total 32 priests working in the parishes of the new diocese 28 were secular priests and all of them were native Indians and among the 28, seven were from within the territory of the new diocese itself. The seven priests of the local region were Fathers Ignatius Maria, Victor Rodriquez, Stanislaus Kostka, Rapheal Jesudhasan, Ambrose Beldams, S. Thomas Mathias and Stanislaus Maria.

Bishop Benzinger retired due to ill health in 1931. His secretary cum chancellor Fr. Bernadine administered the diocese of Quilon till 2nd February 1936. Msgr. Vincent V Derere was nominated Bishop of Quilon and he held office up to 1st July 1937. The diocese was further divided and the present Diocese of Trivandrum came into being. Bishop Jerome Maria Fernandez became the first bishop of Trivandrum diocese in 1937 and continued till 1978.

For many years Kottar remained a suffragan of the Arch Diocese of Verapoly which is in the civil state of Kerala. Kottar was under Verapoly from 1930 to 1963 under two Arch Bishops Rev. Dr. Angel Mary Perez Cecilia (1919-1934) and Rev. Joseph Attipetty (1934-1970). As pastoral and liturgical matters were discussed, planned and implemented more on provincial and regional levels in which language played a very important role there was the felt need for separating Kottar from the Malayalam speaking Arch Diocese of Verapoly and joining it with the neighboring Tamil speaking Madurai.

Narchison, J.R., op.cit., pp.41-44.
Marieli Benziger, op.cit., p.453.
ecclesiastical province\(^{26}\). It was considered all the more necessary after the district of Kanyakumari was separated in the year 1956 from the State of Travancore-Cochin and was merged with the state of Madras now known as Tamilnadu\(^{27}\), and on 11\(^{th}\) October 1963 Kottar was united with the Madurai ecclesiastical province. This event held while the second Vatican council was still in progress\(^{28}\).

### 3.2 BISHOP: LAWRENCE PEREIRA 1930-1938

Bishop Lawrence Pereira was born at Kayamkulam in central Travancore State (in the Alappuzha district) on 1\(^{st}\) January 1876. After his education in St. Teresa seminary at Quilon, he was ordained as priest in 1905 at the age of twenty nine. He was serving as priest in the Quilon diocese from 1905 to 1930, a period of 25 years\(^{29}\). He became the priest and he served as a missionary in the parishes of Chavara, Kundara and Puthoor provinces\(^{30}\). In the south he had been working as a parish priest as well as a missionary in the parishes of Vencode, Enayam, Ramanthurai and other places for some years and had the advantage of knowing the people of this region\(^{31}\). In 1914, when he was the parish priest of Ramanthurai he started the construction of a new church, and this church was blessed in 1938 when he became the bishop of Kottar and this church remains as a memory of him even today. During his time, in the southern parishes many conversions took place and Fr. Lawrence Pereira had rich missionary experience in these places\(^{32}\). After serving in the southern region he was appointed to work as missionary in

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\(^{26}\) Directory, Diocese of Kottar, Nagercoil., 1992, pp.11-12.

\(^{27}\) Felix Wilfred, *op.cit.*, p.133.


\(^{29}\) Lawrence, V., *op.cit.*, pp.101-102.


the northern region of Quilon. Three centres were noted important missionaries during
the time of Bishop Aloysius Maria Benziger. These were Neyyatinkara in south
Travancore, Kuzhathupuzha near Punalur and Kottanam near Mavelikara. Fr. Lawrence
Pereira worked as a missionary of Kottanam during May 1915 for the reunion mission
among the Jacobites. Fr. Panthalam Pereira and Fr. Lawrence Pereira worked together in
this mission. Leading the liturgical ceremonies, doing charitable services and
educational assistance were the voluntary services done in these places through the
catholic diocese of Quilon. It offered good scope to Bishop Benziger about the noble
services rendered by him. After successfully completing the Kottanam mission,
Fr. Lawrence was assigned to Charamood Mission on 2nd May 1915. Here also, he
threw himself heart and soul into the task of reuniting the Jacobites until his appointment
as bishop of Kottar. Father Lawrence Pereira appeared as the right person to be elected
as the bishop of the new diocese.

3.2.1 Consecration of the Bishop

Father Lawrence Pereira was chosen as the bishop elect before six months of his
consecration during April 1930. After this honour he consulted with his Bishop
Rev. Aloysius Maria Benziger and his Arch Bishop Rev. Angel Mary Perez Cecilia, got
their appreciations and blessings as he had to lead the folk of the southern region. The
joint circular letter of the bishop elect and the bishop of Quilon dated 9th September 1930
announced the making of the diocese. It was a letter of creation of the diocese.

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33 Marieli Benziger, op. cit., pp.440-443.
34 Bernadine Vallathara, op. cit., p.128.
35 Francis, E., op.cit, p.45.
36 Bernadine Vallathara, op.cit., p.130.
accordingly published in all the parochial churches during the Holy mass on 28th September 1930. On 5th October 1930, a grand function took place in the grounds and vicinity of St. Francis Xavier’s church, Kottar. The day was calm, bright and clear. A procession of the seminarians and the clergy treded its way through the crowd leading the first bishop elect Msgr. Lawrence Pereira to the decorated high dais erected on the ground. The joyous pealing of the church bells and the “Jubilant Streics of Perossis Ecce Sacerdoss Magnus” by the choir added charm to the celebrations. The procession reached the holy church and in the ensuring ceremony Father Lawrence Periera was consecrated as the first bishop of the Diocese of Kottar by his grace the Most Rev. Angel Mary Perez Cecilia, the Arch Bishop of Veropoly assisted by Bishop Benziger, Quilon and Bishop James Kolacherry of Changanacherry. To the catholics of the region it was a remarkable occasion and huge thongs of people gathered in the grounds and witnessed the holy ceremony.

The enthusiasm of the people was carnival as they behold their new pastor, standing among other prelates and imparting his first blessings. The ceremony was conducted with full solemnity. During the ceremony the pastoral letter of Bishop Benziger declaring the erection of new diocese was read. The letter quoted that the sovereign Pontiff was pleased to erect the new diocese in the land’s end and chose a son of India as its bishop. It was a departing letter of soul and heartful pains of a father.

38 Marieli Benziger, op.cit., p.72.
39 Francis, E., op.cit., p.46.
40 Lawrence, op.cit., pp.102-103.
41 Ibid., p-104.
42 Francis, E., op.cit, p.47.
addressing to his children. Bishop ChulaParampil of Kottayam, the new Bishop Mar Ivanios of Trivandrum and Bishop Theophilus were present on that day in the holy function. A large number of clergy from Quilon and the neighbouring dioceses of Tuiticorin and Kandy (Ceylon) attended the grand function. The new bishop’s close associate and mentor the grand old father John Roberio witnessed the function. Rev: Father Joseph Attipetty, later Arch bishop of Verapoly and Father Jerome Fernandez, later bishop of Quilon had been attending the ceremony. All the 13 major seminarians of the new diocese were present to this function along with the seminarians of the neighbouring dioceses. Brother R. Antony Muthu, later bishop of Vellore was present on that day leading his colleagues. These seminarians bore badges to guide the people throughout the function. His first address to the people contained the theme of his life and service in the new diocese. He called the people as “little flock”, assured them that with God’s help and under the protection of Mother Mary and the patronage of saint Francis Xavier, he would make them a great family. To the entire catholic people of the diocese it was a great event as the birth of their diocese with the new pastor. Bishop Lawrence Pereira was very tall in figure, had a pleasing look, hands and head always working, eyes so gentle yet penetrating his will was like a rock. He was a pattern of kindness and patience. He affectionately loved the whole diocese, took pain in doing programmes for the greater welfare of the people, as a parent to love his children and gladly forget his pain.

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43 Pastoral Letter, Quilon, Dt. September 9, 1930.
44 Francis, E., op.cit. p.46.
46 Lawrence, V., op.cit., p.103.
47 Ibid.
48 Francis, E., op.cit., p.47.
Bishop Lawrence Pereira took procession of the diocese on the same day of his consecration at 5 p.m at the cathedral church. The Bishop of Quilon handed over the keys of the cathedral to him[^49]. Bishop Benziger who attended the consecration ceremony of the first bishop left to the new bishop as his legacy about 95,000 Catholics, 25 parishes, 32 priests, 13 major seminarians and 6 minor seminarians[^50]. The fact that Kottar was the third diocese in India to be entrusted to the native clergy and Bishop Lawrence Pereira was the third native Indian to become a bishop after Bishop Tiberius Roche of Tuticorin who was consecrated in 1923 and Bishop Valerian D. Souza of Mangalore in 1928[^51].

### 3.2.2 Construction of Bishop’s House

The new bishop had to face stupendous task in the starting years of his administration. He had no suitable residence for himself except a quite of two rooms hastily improvised in the old parish house of Kottar, where he had his house for over two years from 1930 to 1932[^52]. The Parochial house attached to the cathedral was indeed quite inadequate and inconvenient for administrative purpose. His residence and the cathedral were very close that the bishop could enter the church directly through a passage from his room to the Holy Alter[^53]. From October 1932 to March 1935 the bishop had his residence at the new parish house in Kottar. In 1935 he shifted his residence from Kottar to Carmel English high school, Ramanputhur, Nagercoil which was three

[^49]: Idid., p.48.
[^50]: Pastoral letter, Diocese of Quilon, 9th September 1930.
[^51]: Lawrence, V., op.cit., p.104.
[^52]: Interview with Fr. Francis, E., Resident Priest, Puthenkadai, 20th February 1999.
[^53]: Francis E., opcit., p.49.
kilometers away from the cathedral. He occupied a portion of the newly constructed school building with an archivam, library, administrative cabin, and a bed room.

In the high grounds of Ramavarmapuram, Nagercoil, on the Asaripallam road a layout was prepared for the Bishop's House. The senior priests of the diocese Fr. Vincent Fernandez, Fr. Valerian Fernandez, Fr. Paul Sebastian Fernandez and Fr. Henry Pereira had consultations with the bishop to have a residence for the bishop with more administrative facilities. The renowned architect Mr. Robert Fernandez of Trivandrum started the construction work. The cornerstone was laid by His Excellency Msgr. Kierkek, the Apostolic delegate of India on 26th May 1936. The home was finally blessed by the bishop on the Epiphany day in 1937. Msgr. Vincent V Darere, the bishop of Quilon and Mr. Raman Pillai, the Diwan Peishkar, (Collector) a good friend of the bishop attended the function. The building was an architectural elegance, more convenient and homely than many of the bishop's houses in South India. It was one of the big and strong buildings of south Travancore in 1940's. The new house has bishop's administrative cabin, archivam and chancellor's secretariat, offices of the Vicar General, Secretary, Procurator, seminar hall, mess hall, bed rooms of the bishop and the honorary clergy, a chapel, a reading room, a library etc.

Ibid., pp.49-50.
Lawrence, V., op.cit., p.104.
Ibid., p.104.
Francis, E., op.cit.,
3.2.3 New Parishes Erected

The prime difficulty Bishop Lawrence had to face in the initial stage was the lack of priests. In between 1930 and 1937 three priests left the diocese and four others died\(^59\). On 21\(^{st}\) March 1931, the bishop ordained two priests in the cathedral church. It was the first priestly ordination blessed by him. Brothers Ubald Raj Fernando and Emmanuel Pereira were ordained priests. The bishop welcomed some priests from the neighbouring dioceses for long and short term services. But he was convinced that the only solution was recruitment of fresh candidates from the diocese itself. Accordingly he was able to usher twenty candidates into the major seminary in the first seven years\(^60\). The bishop met the seminarians and encouraged them. He had been with the major seminarians of St.Teresa College, Punaloor during a summer camp in 1934. He talked to them about the need of the mission and particularly sought the Tamil students to serve in his diocese\(^61\).

As on 1930, Kottar had 25 old parishes namely Kottar, Karamkadu, Kandanvilai, Kanyakumari, Manakudy, Mankuzhi, Mullanginavillai, Mulagumoodu, Madattatuvillai, Rajavoor, Colochal, Vaniyakudy, Thiruthuvapuram, Puthenkadai, Enayam, Ramanthurai, Kadiyapattanam, Puthenthurai, Kanjiracode, Asaripallam, Vencode, Thuckalay, Melpuram, Kurumpanai and Vellicode\(^62\). In the meantime, bishop created 14 new parishes namely Cheruvalloor, Kulasegaram (May 1931), Kallithattu (June 1931), Christunagar (October 1931), Palliady (November 1931), Midalam (October 1932), Puthur (February 1933), Mathal (October 1934), Kil Asaripallam (1936), Siluvaipuram (March 1936), Pakiapuram (August 1936), Kurusady (December 1936), Enayam

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\(^{59}\) Villavarayan, J.M., \textit{op.cit.}, p.35.

\(^{60}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p.36.

\(^{61}\) Lawrence, V., \textit{op.cit.}, p.105.

\(^{62}\) Kollam (Quilan) Diocesan Records, File XI, 1930.
Puthenthurai (December 1936) and Kovalam (December 1936). These parishes had mother churches a few years ago and after the establishment of parishes these gained the responsibility of their own administration. The total numbers of parishes were thirty-nine and more involvement was noticed among the clergy and the people of these places. Evidently pastors were not supplied immediately in the new parishes, and as when priests were available these vacancies were filled up.\(^{63}\)

### 3.2.4 Diocesan administrators

The bishop wished to improve the condition of the parishes of his diocese. He asked each parish to have its own committee with the parish priest and laymen to study about the cathedraticum, vocation to the seminary and catholic religious life. He wanted to find religious houses for men and women in the diocese. He had to constitute a parish committee of six members in each parish. With great patience and understanding, he set about bringing order and legislating workable programmes in every parish. He studied about the basic problems of the flock, and had to build up unity among the parishes.\(^{64}\)

The new bishop was largely supported by his clergy in the administrative activities of the diocese. Fr. A. Paul O.C.D. was Vicar General from 5\(^{th}\) October 1930 to January 1931. He was also acting as the parish priest of the cathedral church. As Father A. Paul left for Trivandrum on 20\(^{th}\) January 1931, Father John Pereira, the senior most priest was appointed Vicar General.\(^{65}\) He was in office from January 1931 to October 1934. He resigned his post in October 1934 and reverted to the mother diocese Quilon.\(^{66}\)

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\(^{63}\) Francis, E., *op.cit.*, p.54.


\(^{66}\) Lawrence, V., *op.cit.*, p.105.
On his retirement Fr. Stansilos Kosta became the Vicar General. In March 1935, Fr. Vincent Fernandez became the Vicar General. He was a stalwart figure, a man of vast experience in men and matters. He was one of the horse riding priests of the diocese. He assisted the two bishops of Kottar in this capacity till 1944. He laid down his office in April 1944 and took up a small mission at Amsi, where he died on 4th April 1956.

Fr. Emmanuel Pereira looked after the secretarial works of the bishop. He was in office from the inception of the diocese and was succeeded by Father Mary Ephrem Gomez. In 1931 Fr. Valerian Fernandez assumed charge as chancellor and secretary. He was able and resourceful. During his office the files and documents related to the diocese were transferred from Quilon curia to Kottar. The old documents of the parishes and the diocese are preserved in the diocesan archives. He was the first chancellor and he had the responsibility of preserving the archival records in the bishop’s residence and in the cathedral home itself. He was in office till March 1935, and afterwards took charge as parish priest of Colachel. Fr. Paul Sebastian Fernando succeeded Fr. Valerian as chancellor and secretary. This accomplished and capable priest served in this position for nine years under the early two bishops of Kottar from 1935 to 1944. After that he was transferred to Palliady parish. In 1944 Fr. E. Francis succeeded him as chancellor and secretary.

* In the olden days, the priests used horses as a means of transport in the coastal parishes. In the interior, they used palanquin. Source, Cheriyan C.V., History of Christianity in Kerala, Trivandrum, 1973, p.27.

68 Francis, E., op.cit., p.52.
69 Ibid., pp.49-50.
70 Lawrence, V., op.cit., p.104.
Bishop Lawrence Pereira constituted his first Diocesan Council on October 1931 with senior and seasoned priests of the diocese. The term of office was for two years. The members of this council were Fr. A. Paul O.C.D, Fr. Vincent Fernandez, Fr. Ambrose Fernandez and Fr. Boniface Robeira\textsuperscript{71}. In 1933 Fr. John Pereira replaced Fr. Paul O.C.D and the other members remained as same in the council\textsuperscript{72}. Fr. John Pereira was the first procurator of the diocese of Kottar from 1931 to 1934. Fr. Hentry Pereira took charge as procurator on 27\textsuperscript{th} February 1935. He continued in office under the two early bishops till 1947. Fr. Hentry Pereira was a dutiful and a hardworking pastor. Besides his official work he undertook the supervising duty of some of the schools and diocesan buildings including the new bishop’s house at Ramavarmapuram. In 1947 he took charge of the Kil Asaripallam parish and at his ripe age of 84, he passed away at Puthukurichi in 19\textsuperscript{th} March 1966\textsuperscript{73}.

3.2.5 Demise of Bishop Lawrence

From 1934, Bishop Lawrence Pereira was weighed down and his health began to decline steadily. He breathed his last in the early hours of 5\textsuperscript{th} January 1938 at the age of 62. On 6\textsuperscript{th} January his burial took place in Kottar Cathedral in front of the alter. On the day, funeral cartage proceeded from the Bishop’s house\textsuperscript{74}. A mammoth crowd of people of all walks of life gathered to pay homage to their beloved pastor attended the procession. His Grace, Arch Bishop Joseph Attipatty of Verapoly officiated the funeral functions. Bishop Vincent Dereve of Quilon, Bishop Jerome Fernandez of Trivandrum, Bishop F.T. Roche of Tutricorin and Bishop Victor Fernandez of Mangalore assisted the

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., p.105.
\textsuperscript{72} Villavarayan, J.M., op.cit., p.29.
\textsuperscript{73} Francis, E., op.cit., p.52.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., p.53.
Arch Bishop in the funeral ceremony\textsuperscript{75}. In pursuance of the provisions of the cannon law the diocesan councilors promptly met together and elected Rev. Fr. Vincent Fernandez the senior, the Vicar General as the Vicar Capitular\textsuperscript{76}.

### 3.3 BISHOP AGNISAMY 1939 –1971

The 260\textsuperscript{th} Pope Pius XI nominated Fr. T. Roche Agnisamy S.J as bishop of Kottar on 5\textsuperscript{th} January 1939 on the first anniversary day of the demise of the first bishop Lawrence Pereira\textsuperscript{77}. The bishop elect was a member of the Society of Jesus (Jesuit Order) of Madurai Province\textsuperscript{78}. He was born on 26\textsuperscript{th} March 1891 at Tiruchirapalli on the day of St. Cassian\textsuperscript{79} in a good catholic family. He lost his father during his childhood. He joined the Jesuit order on the wishes of his widowed mother. The young man sweetly specified and obtained her consent and blessings ultimately. After finishing his course of studies at Kuresong in West Bengal, he was ordained as priest on 25\textsuperscript{th} November 1923 at the age of thirty two\textsuperscript{80}.

He was serving a short while in a parish at Calcutta. He worked in a Jesuit mission to spread the catholic religion in Bengal state in the years between 1923 and 1924.\textsuperscript{81} In the later time, he also worked as a parish priest at Marambadi, a remote village in Madurai district. When he was working in the parish of Dindigal he undertook a mission work in the tribal areas of Alakkuvarpatti, Silapedi, Tamarapadi and Siluvathur. He commenced a gradation of posts in the Dindigal mission. He was able to

\textsuperscript{75} Lawrence, V., \textit{op.cit.}, p.78.

\textsuperscript{76} \textit{Ibid.}, p.79.

\textsuperscript{77} Letter from Rome, Pope Pius XI to Arch. Bishop of Verapoly – Dt. 26\textsuperscript{th} October 1938.

\textsuperscript{78} Lawrence, V., \textit{op.cit.}, p.106.


\textit{Report, Diocese of Kottar}, Nagercoil, 1940, p.3.

\textsuperscript{80} \textit{Catholic Directory}, Kottar Diocese, Nagercoil, 1987, pp.31-32.

\textsuperscript{81} Arul Das, M., \textit{Bishop Agnisamy of Kottar}, Madras, 1972, pp.9-11.
serve in the parish of Holy Redeemers, Tiruchirapalli and the parish of Palayamkottai in the capacity as parish priest and undertook works of charity and social development\textsuperscript{82}. At Palayamkottai he worked as a district supervisor of Jesuit province and he was the first Indian to hold that honorable post.\textsuperscript{83}

3.3.1 Consecration as Bishop in Rome

It was announced by the new Pontiff Pius XII that he himself would consecrate the bishop elect along with other missionary bishops all over India. This Papal order was read in all the parishes of the diocese that the new bishop is to be consecrated by the Pope himself. Accordingly, the consecration took place in Rome at St. Peter’s Basilica on 29\textsuperscript{th} October 1939 on the feast day of Christ the king\textsuperscript{84}. The day was observed throughout the diocese and very soon the new bishop returned to the gathering of priests and the people of Kottar.\textsuperscript{85} The second bishop of Kottar was perfectly a plain and a simple type of Tamil Jesuit, a person born in a christian province, some time worked in the northern states and mainly served in the Tamil region among the Tamil speaking people\textsuperscript{86}. The new bishop was calm in nature and possessed quiet and modest manners. He had a prodigious memory for names, dates and events. He used to call the people by name and to the people it afforded immense pleasure to be called by their name and identified by the bishop, when ever he had occasion to meet them. He very well memorized the names of the village headmen and the notable parishioners who had contact with him\textsuperscript{87}.

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., p.12.
\textsuperscript{83} Lawrence, V., \textit{op.cit.}, pp.106 -107.
\textsuperscript{84} The Text of the Papal Document Conferring Agnisamy as Bishop, Rome, Dt. 28-10-1939.
\textsuperscript{85} Francis, E., \textit{op.cit.}, p.59.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid, p.60.
\textsuperscript{87} Arul Das, M., \textit{op.cit.}, p.18.
The bishop received lot of letters and communications every day. He attended the four postal deliveries arriving at regular hours, two in the morning and two in the evening through the Travancore Post or Anchal. Nagercoil anchal and telegraph office was the biggest in the region established in 1865, and the catholic bishop received many letters and communications from the alien countries. From 1906 the post offices of Padmanabhapuram, Kulasegaram, Thiruvattar, Mulagumoodu, Eraniel, Colachel, Kuzhilthurai, Puthukkadai were active in service and during these days dispersing letters to the catholic parishes and to the people became more effective. The bishop-received petitions, help appeals, official and private letters from the priests, marriage invitations, greetings, death notices and the like. Every letter and communication was promptly attended to wish the effect that on the next morning his table was once again a clean slate. Practically, he accepted the realities of the situation and swiftly acted on them.

3.3.2 Parochial Visits of the Bishop

After taking charge of the diocese, he met all his priests for the first time in the hall at the parochial house of Kottar. In his address, he showered the depth of his trust in God and promised the people and the clergy that, he would lead the diocese to light. He wished to visit all the parishes of his diocese to have a study for himself the places, the people that the vast work that lay before him.

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88 Francis, E., op.cit., p.57.
89 *Travancore Almanac and Directory*, 1906, Government of His Highness, the Maharaja of Travancore, Trivandrum, 1920. Index.
91 Francis, E., op.cit., p.59.
92 Ibid., pp.59-60.
The pastoral visitation made the people and the clergy to have more affection for the bishop and his unassuming office. The undertaking of the pastoral visit gained strength to the memory of the bishop. He strove to recognize the visitation to be more pastoral and simple. From 1939 to 1945, he used to reach every parish at the dawn of the day, took part in the liturgical ceremonies, in which the whole flock attended to receive the blessings of the bishop. The whole day he was in the parish directing the priests and the laity in the administrative and liturgical activities. From 1945 he used to stay three days in large parishes and two full days in small parishes. This pastoral visit was looked upon as a spiritual event as well as a concrete involvement of the bishop in the community life of the parish. During his stay he utilized the time to attend the duties of the parish and this enabled him to know more about the parish priest, the people, the religious and so on. It built a close tie among the people, the priest and the bishop. He met the office bearers of the parish committee, the choir; the pious associations, appreciated and encouraged them for their sincere participation and involvement in the activities of the parish. He referred the parish records such as Baptismal Register, Matrimonial Register, Book of the Diseased, Minutes books of various associations, accounts etc and signed these records as a mark of supervision. He was free with the people, openly admired them for their good services and characteristics and chided them for bad ones. In every parish he established a father – children relationship. The people also responded him well and realized that he was a man of prayer and was more sensible. They very well believed in deep spiritual leverage that their supervising pastor

93 Lawrence, V., op.cit., p.104.
96 Interview with Fr. J.N. Ceasar.
97 Arul Das, M., op.cit., p.18.
possessed. The list of visitations was published in time and each pastor had to appraise the current problems. The bishop discouraged public receptions, inaugural meetings and grand celebrity of annual summons of associations which were liable to divert attention from the main issues and steal away the time of the bishop, his officials and the parish priests.

After the visit, a report was sent to the parish priest containing commendations for good things achieved and corrections for any thing not up to the mark. This report covered almost everything about the parish life such as maintenance of parish accounts, observations on catechism, general discipline, school, pious associations, general up keep of the church, vestments, sacred vessels, the scriptures and tabernacle. This attitude had its influence among the parishners that set about making things in order. It created perfection in the parish before the next pastoral visitation.

3.3.3 Diocesan Office, Fr. J.M. Villavarayan

The 260th Pope Pius, who administered the Roman church from 1922 to 1939 passed away in 1939. He was the Pope who, appointed Fr. Lawrence Pereira as the first bishop of Kottar, also he nominated Fr. Agnisamy as a bishop-elect of Kottar. In 1939, Pope Pius XII, became the new Pontiff, who ruled the catholic world up to 1958.

The diocese again started with a new life. The seasoned priests, the vicar general Fr.Vincent Fernandez, the senior, the diocesan procurator Fr.Hentry Periera, the chancellor and secretary Fr.Paul Sebastian, the rector of the minor seminary Fr. E.Francis

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98 Francis, E., op.cit., p.62.
99 Then Oli, September 1987, pp.21-23.
100 Lawrence, V., op.cit., pp.112-13.
worked hand in hand with the bishop and guided the matters of the diocese successfully. Fr. Vincent Fernandez, the senior was acting as Vicar General from 1939 to the middle of April 1944. He had a sharp sense to lead the community of priests in the whole diocese. On 17th April 1944, Fr. Vincent Fernandez, the junior succeeded him. He was a graduate in law. The new vicar general was gifted with a scholarly mind and practical wisdom. He along with the bishop attempted many reforms in the diocese. He could serve the diocese nearly for three years, and due to ill health he resigned his office at the close of the year 1952. The choice of the new vicar general fell on Fr. J.M. Villavarayan, Ph.D, STC, who was born at Cape Comorin on 26th December 1911. He was clever and precocious in studies during his studenthood. He had his priestly training at St. Raphel seminary, Quilon and in the Papal seminary, Kandy in central Sri Lanka. He was appointed Vicar General on 29th March 1947, at an early age of thirty-seven. He was sooth in doing the diocesan duties and helped the bishop in all walks of the parochial administration. The appointment of Fr. J.M. Villavarayan was a bold step taken by Bishop Agnisamy even though there were senior priests at fifties and sixties in the diocese. Fr. J.M. Villavarayan was crudité in Theology, a deep thinker, elegant writer, forcible speaker, talented musician and in total he was combined in himself the qualities of a great leader. The 57 year old bishop was assisted by the 37 years old personal assistant. In 1956, Fr. J.M. Villavarayan was chosen as one of the six members of the Indian delegates for the translation of the Rituale Romanum into the

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103 Ibid.,
104 Francis, E., op.cit., p.60.
105 Ibid.,
106 Arul Das, M., op.cit., p.28.
vernacular languages. As he had mastery over Latin, English and Tamil languages he could serve the mission successfully.\textsuperscript{107}

In 1959, Fr.J.M. Vilallavarayan was invited as a delegate from the mission churches for the international conference on "Mission and Liturgy", held in Nijmegen in Holland. This conference was organized in the first half of September 1959 by the moving spirit of Cardinal Fr. Joannes Hoffinger S.J. and His eminence Cardinal Careious Presided over the conference. It was a conference organized for the countries of Asia and Africa. Many delegates attended this international mission.\textsuperscript{108} Msgr. J.M. Villavarayan was elected president of the house to conduct discussions for the English speaking sessions. The man had high appreciation in the conference. This conference paved the way for the adoption of the vernacular in liturgy and integration of local customs and usages in the celebrations.\textsuperscript{109}

In 1966, the liturgical commission was setup by "TamilNadu Bishop’s Council", Fr.J.M.Villavarayan was elected vice president and the head of the translation committee of the commission. The translation committee translated the prayers of all the rituals for sacraments, the missal and the other rituals for the whole of Tamilnadu.\textsuperscript{110} Fr.J.M.Villavarayan was popularly known as Fr. J.M.V among the priests of the diocese.\textsuperscript{111}

\textsuperscript{107} Lawrence, V., \textit{op.cit.}, p.98.
\textsuperscript{108} Francis, E., \textit{op.cit.}, p.61.
\textsuperscript{109} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{110} The Liturgical Commission Report, Tamilnadu Bishop’s Carnival, Madras, Dt.23-8-1967, p-8.
\textsuperscript{111} Interview with Fr.J.N Ceasar.
On 2nd December 1972, he laid down his office after having meritoriously served the diocese in this capacity for twenty years. Since 1971 he was the Director of the Pastoral Institute Poonamallee, Madras for training the junior clergy from 1972 to 1973. On making a new policy or decision, the Bishop Agnisamy’s attitude was steady. He along with the elder priests used to choose matters at its intelligence and all the decisions were sharp. The bishop cared so much for the people of the diocese. He always wished to make the diocese a peaceful family without problems. He appointed a team of experienced and energetic priests to act as machinery for counselling, meditation or arbitration that he wanted to end problems smoothly and those should not raise its head again.\(^\text{112}\).

Fr. Emmanuel Pereira was the procurator of the diocese upto 23rd April 1947. Fr. Hentry Pereira succeeded him. He was a quiet, affable, sympathetic, workable and exemplary priest. He reserved as procurator till his death on 23rd March 1979. Fr. Paul Sebastian Fernandez was the Chancellor and Secretary of Bishop Agnisamy from 1939 to 1944. Fr. E. Francis succeeded him on 10th July 1944. He served in this office for 19 years from 1944 to 1963. Concurrently, he was also the Rector of St. Aloysious minor seminary, Nagercoil from 1952 to 1973.\(^\text{114}\).

### 3.3.4 Houses of Friers and Priests in Kottar

Two houses of Franciscan brothers’ missionary of Manjummel were established at Pacode and Kolvel, in the Vilavancode taluk. These missionaries had more involvement in the

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\(^{112}\) Lawrence, V., \textit{op.cit.}, p.109.  
\(^{113}\) Francis, E., \textit{op.cit.}, p.62.  
\(^{114}\) \textit{Ibid.}
charitable and catechetical duties. They visited the houses and kept a close watch over them in the upkeep of Catholic faith among the people. The Carmelite fathers of Manjummel were entrusted with the Manalikarai mission in 1950 during the time of Bishop Agnisamy. This mission has its headquarters in Belgium in North West Europe. Two members of "Societies Auxiliatris Missionum" (SAM) were invited for mission service in the diocese. Accordingly Fr. T.J. James and Fr. V. Melard arrived Kottar in 1950. These priests learnt Tamil and the ways and customs of the country and the region. They served more admirably and effectively in this region in the following years. Their service was undertaken in different mission centres and it gave scope for fresh conversions in the remote areas of the diocese. Kulasegaram, Thiruthuvapuram, Sivulaipuram, Puthenkadai, Vencode and Cheruvalloor were the main stations of their missionary work.

The veteran missionary Fr. Stanislas had a large share in this apostolate. He had his mission activities mainly at Kulasegaram, Puthenkadai, Thiruthuvapuram and the nearby stations of Attoor, Chitaral, Arumanai, Nagacode, Kadayal etc. In the subsequent years Fr. Dharmanathar carried away the missionary work at Thoduvetty, Thiruthuvapuram, Padanthalumoodu and Kaliyakavilai. The bare footed missionary Fr. Lazer had his missionary service at Vencode and Cheruvalloor (Parakunnu) locations.

3.3.5 St. Francis of Assisi Press

Bishop Agnisamy had been considering long for the possibility of opening a diocesan press as it was a primary need of the diocese. Some neighboring dioceses were

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117 Lawrence, V., op.cit., pp.108-109
119 Ibid.
having their own press. In the early time, the diocesan press at Quilon was much used by the Kottar diocese\textsuperscript{120}. This press was run by the Capuchin fathers of Tillery village of the Bishop's residence at Quilon. The press was named after St. FRANCIS of ASSISI\textsuperscript{121}. In 1941, the press was brought with its name in the town Nagercoyl and was installed in a hired building. In the early time the Capuchin fathers lent the services and supported the diocese of Kottar largely. The press was managed by Brother Rockie for a few months. The dedicated service and humbleness of the clergy set the press running in the service of God and man\textsuperscript{122}.

In 1947, the press was transferred to St. Francis school campus Nagercoyl. A new building was constructed and blessed for the printing activities. The Capuchin fathers left the press in the hands of the diocese of Kottar after serving it for nearly seven years. Fr. J. Augustine Fernando was appointed as its first director. He served the press as director for just one year. Later on, Fr. Benedict Alexander served as director of the press till 1961\textsuperscript{123}. Many publications were made on Martyr Devasahayam Pillai, and the saints. This press became a center of activity as it was catering to the official needs of the diocese\textsuperscript{124}. Printing the monthly "Then Oli, (Bell of the South)" was a great mission of the press. It was working as a powerful social and religious institution that mirrors all the process of life. It created more awakening and consciousness among the people.\textsuperscript{125}

\textsuperscript{120} Villavarayan, J.M., \textit{op.cit.}, p.80.
\textsuperscript{121} Report, Quilon Social Service Society, Quilon, 1980, p.4.
\textsuperscript{122} Paul Leon, \textit{Moving Toward the Council from Silver Jubilee to Vatican II (In Called To Serve)} Nagarcoyl, 1983, pp.88 -90.
\textsuperscript{123} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{125} Villavarayan, J.M., \textit{op.cit.}, p.49.
The Assisi Press owned by the diocese of Kottar had been publishing a number of books and booklets. "The Holy Book of Our Lady", "A Petty Catechism", "The Holy Week Liturgy", "Holy Hour", "Way of the Cross", "Priestly Ministry", "Ten Commandments", "Charity and Christian Life", "Hardships of Tsunamy", were the books widely published and circulated in the diocese. Many low priced booklets were published from Assisi publications on the religious theme and on the lives of Saints such as the life of St. Paul, St. Peter, St. Francis Xavier, St. Thomas, St. Antony, St. Joseph, St. Carmel, Arch Angel, St. George etc.

Numerous writings and translations of Fr. J.M. Nicholas of Tuticorin diocese deserve special mention. "The Cross", "Good Samaritan", "A Shepherded", "The Garden" are the creative writings of Fr. J.M. Nicholas. The press has been encouraging the priests and the laity to develop the writing skill and reading habit. The diocese gave significant support to all the spiritual writers. The translations of the Holy Bible in Tamil was largely done after 1960. The large sale of the Bible in the diocese through the press was remarkable in that period. Books on religious and moral instructions were published from this press.

The diocese had a majestic face on 15th August 1947, when Mother India got independence. The national flag was hoisted in all the parishes as a sign of honour and

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127 Arul Das, M., op.cit., p.38.
128 Ibid.
129 Check list (Books), Assisi Press, Nagercoil, 2005, pp.16-21.
pride. The diocese celebrated the day with offerings and prayers to make the nation more prosperous\textsuperscript{130}.

\subsection*{3.3.6 Then Oli - The Diocesan Journal}

"Then Oli", "The Bell of the South" – the diocesan monthly was started on Easter Sunday 28\textsuperscript{th} May 1948. Its designable policy was to teach a sound christian doctrine, to give the correct glance on world news, to defend the church from attacks, criticisms and to encourage all Christians with word and example in the effects at catholic action\textsuperscript{131}. The magazine was introduced by Bishop Agnisamy as a diocesan monthly. It announced the rays of the Lord and taught all religious and secular matters necessary for leading an exemplary christian life. It had articles like "World Catholic Community", "Indian Catholic Community, Diocesan Catholic Community of Kottar," "Religion and Politics", "Questions and Clarifications", letters to the editor, etc. The Catholics of the diocese welcomed this magazine and made its voice resound steadily in every house\textsuperscript{132}.

Since its inception the editor of this magazine had been Msgr.J.M. Villavarayan. He was the editor for ten years from 1948 to 1958. He kept the edition alive and proved that a race is got by running. From 1958, the editorship was handed over to Fr. D. Jesudasan, who was an young priest who contributed much to the literary field to hold words by ears. In the early days from 1948 to 1960, the volume was small with twenty six pages and from 1960 the volume had sixty pages with more contributions and informations\textsuperscript{133}.

\textsuperscript{130} Arul Das, M., \textit{op.cit.}, p.59.
\textsuperscript{131} Francis, E., \textit{op.cit.}, p.52.
\textsuperscript{132} \textit{Ibid.}, p.53.
\textsuperscript{133} Lawrence, V., \textit{op.cit.}, p.110.
Then Oli continued to be a powerful means of communication in the southern region and it acted as an agent of renewal among the Catholics of Kottar. It allotted sufficient space for the contribution of pious associations such as “Catholic Action”, “Sodality of BVM” and “Legion of Mary”. It carried up-to-date news in the diocese, the plans and proposals of the bishops etc. It informed its readers about the life of the church in other parts of the world and especially about the North Indian Mission. It carried numerous articles on the renewal of liturgical worship between 1955 and 1962. Fr. Benjamin, a native of Madathattuvilai was a kingpin who contributed much for this magazine. He was the joint editor for more than 8 years. His articles “The Cross”, “My India”, “Soldier of God” “DAWN” had much value. The magazine had annual subscribers throughout the diocese in all the parishes.

3.3.7 Twenty Six New Churches

The celebrations are noticeable throughout the Kottar diocese as when India became a republic on 26th January 1950, the whole diocese celebrated the day with pride and honour.

From 1937 to 1955 twenty six new churches appeared with good functional buildings. Most of these churches were built of stone, with decorated alter, statues, roof tiles etc. These churches were ventilated and had artistic distinction. The churches of Kulasegaram, Puthur, Kattuvillai, Mangalakunnu, Saral, Pacode, Aloor, Ettamadai, Ritapuram, Amsi, Kodimunai, Kattuvilai, Chemparuthivilai, Konamkadu,

136 Paul Leon, *op.cit.*, p.117.
Anchukuttuvillai, KilManakudy, Puthukudyiruppu, Osarathuvilai, Saral-Kattuvilai, Parakunnu, Edaikode, Kappiarai Maravankudiyirippu, Kottiode, Kottavilai and Kuzhithurai were blessed by him. It was a preparation for the silver Jubilee of the diocese. In 1954, on the fourth century of the demise of the patron saint Francis Xavier a commemorable volume of the saint was published. That day, a Historical Board was inaugurated in the diocese to bring out the important historical factors to the public. The board was headed by the Vicar General Fr. J.M. Villavarayan and an young priest Fr. J.R. Narchison.

3.3.8 Silver Jubilee Celebrations – 1955

The year 1955 was the completion of twenty five years of the diocese. In a meeting of the priests of the diocese held on 17th February 1955, it was unanimously suggested that the silver jubilee of the diocese should be a valuable occasion to be dedicated for the rejuvenation of the diocese. The twenty five year old ecclesiastical institution should have more spiritual awakening among the faithful was the ultimate goal of the celebrations. The sixty four year old bishop with the team of other priests decided to make the time more holy. The bishop’s circular letter dated 12th September 1955, was a clarion call for more prayers that was the follow up of the family rosary crusade and to introduce a systematic teaching of catechism in the catholic schools and churches. It was to make the pious associations to have a vigorous action in all parishes and to have the liturgy in Tamil and the participation of all the flock in the prayer services. Also it

137 Ibid., p.118.
138 Paul Leon, op.cit., p.87.
140 Then Oli, June & July, 1974, p.4.
wanted to enlighten the youth to join the seminaries to have ecclesiastical service in the
diocese. On 28th September 1955, the diocese of Kottar celebrated the silver jubilee of its
creation. To commemorate the completion of twenty five years a pontifical High Mass
was offered and the “te Deum” was sung as thanks giving for all favours and benefits
received from the Almighty in the forenoon at eight A.M. The same day, (28th September
1955) the work of the extension of the small cathedral was taken up. The church was
extended on is sides to accommodate more people for prayers141.

The celebrations held in a simple way. His Excellency, Most. Rev. Martin Lucas
S.V.D., Apostolic Internuncio, New Delhi wished and blessed the functions142. The Arch
Bishop of Veropoly Dr. Joseph Attipetty wished and expressed his abundant joy on the
happy occasion of the completion of twenty five years of the establishment of the
Diocese of Kottar143. A commemorative volume of the silver jubilee of the diocese was
published on 28th December 1955, gives a brief history of this territory before the
division from Quilon and a detailed account of the growth of the diocese after its
creation. The archives of Verapoly, Cochin, Goa and Quilon yielded precious
informations to make the profile. Rev. Father. J.M. Villavarayan was the main
contributor of this profile144. All the parishes had a holy mass on 28th September 1955
evening. It was a thanks giving mass. The faithful had a celebrity mood that day and
every catholic household celebrated the day in a good spirit and will145.

141Then Oli, August, 1974, p.28.
142Lawrence, V., op.cit., p.114.
144Ibid., pp.1-4.
145Ibid.
3.3.9 Union of K.K District with Tamil Nadu - 1956

The role of the christians and catholics was notable when the south region of Travancore was formed into a separate district with four Tamil speaking taluks of Travancore – Cochin state\(^{146}\), namely Thovalai, Agasteeswaram, Kalkulam and Vilavancode, emerged as part of the modern state Madras on 1\(^{st}\) November 1956\(^{147}\). The states of Travancore and Cochin were integrated on 1\(^{st}\) July 1949, under a district officer Rajpramukh, who was appointed by the chief minister. The Tamil people of south Travancore wanted to merge with the neighboring Tamil speaking Madras State. On 9\(^{th}\) December 1945, a Travancore Tamilnadu Congress Party was formed at Neyoor. Marshall Nersamany became the leader of this political unit\(^{148}\). Agitations were organized and the leaders wanted to separate nine taluks Thovalai, Kalkulam, Vilavancode, Agasteeswaram, Neyattinkara, Chenkottah, Devikulam, Birmedu and Chittor from Travancore Cochin state and to be united with the Madras State\(^{149}\). The catholic christians Williams, Daniel, A.M.Simon, Gnanamony ,Barnabas, Singarayar Jacob, Arullappan Nadar, Ponnaiyan etc were the agitators who took part in the risings of 1948,1954 and 1956\(^{150}\). Police firings held at Puthukadai, Moolachel and Eraniel in which more than hundred patriots died\(^{151}\). In this historical adventure* the catholics of this locality had an active participation\(^{152}\).

\(^{146}\) Arul Das, M., *op.cit.*, p.58.

\(^{147}\) State Reorganisation Commission Report, Government of India, Delhi, 1953.


\(^{149}\) *Ibid.*.

\(^{150}\) Arul Das, M., *op.cit.*, pp.59-60.

\(^{151}\) *Ibid.*.

\(^{152}\) *Native News Paper (Dinamalar)*, Dt.1-11-2006

* At Puthukadai ,Marshall Nesamony Memorial Pillar was opened by the congress leader Ananthan on 11-08-1986. This Pillar pays homage to the patriots who died in the police firing held in 1954 & 1956. Source, *News paper, Dinamalar*, Dt. 01-11-2006.

* Kumarikadal ( Tamil Journal), Nagarcoil, Nov. 1 to 15, 2006, pp.19-20.
3.3.10 Twenty Five Years as Bishop

On 9th October 1958, Pope Pius XII, who ruled the christdom for two decades from 1939 to 1958 breathed his last. The diocese of Kottar was mourning, as did the entire catholic world. It was Pope Pious XII, who consecrated Bishop Agnisamy and other bishops at St. Peter’s Basilica on 29th October 1939. The message from Rome declared the joyous news of the election of Pope John XXIII successor of Pope Pius XII on 28th October 1958. On 1st November 1958, Bishop Agnisamy announced this joyful news to the faithful through a circular. The coronation of the new Pope took place on 11th November 1958. The whole diocese had festivity when the 262nd Pope was enthroned as Holy Father. He continued till 1963. The new Pope wished to have an Ecumenical council. His will and wish was received with great enthusiasm by the entire catholic world. The new Pontiff wanted the development of the catholic church and its renewal, the reforms of the Cannon law and the fostering of christian unity. It was declared that Christendom as a Universal religion and was made free from the bounds of geography.

In 1963, Pope John XXIII died and the sad news spread in the diocese and the faces of the people sunk in darkness as hearing the demise of the Holy Father. In the same year the election of Pope Paul VI, the 263rd successor of Peter pleaded the whole catholic church.

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154 Paul Leon, op.cit., pp.118 -119.
156 Paul Leon, op.cit., p.114.
157 Catholic Directory of India, op.cit., p.31.
159 Then Oli, August, 1964, p.8.
Bishop Agnisamy S.J. completed his 25 years of service as bishop of Kottar in 1964. The diocese celebrated his silver jubilee on 3rd, 4th and 5th of January 1965. The priests and the whole people of the diocese expressed their love and attachment to their simple, affable and noble pastor on this occasion. On 3rd January 1965, at 3 p.m a spectacular and inspiring Eucharistic procession was arranged as a public manifestation of gratitude to the Lord for the blessings received by and through the bishop. The procession started from Carmel High School campus, Nagercoil went through the town and reached the cathedral grounds. People from all parishes attended the function. That day the concluding service was the Eucharistic benediction. It was a grand ceremony of the Jesuit order as well as the Latin diocese of Kottar. During the function Fr. D. Diaz. S.J, Director of the whole Jesuit province, India presided over the ceremony. The brethren from the Jesuit order all over India attended the function and felicitated the honourable bishop.

On 4th January at 6.15 p.m a pontifical high mass was celebrated in the cathedral church. The then Bishop of Tuticorin, Thomas Fernandeo presided over the holy ceremonies. In the evening, a public meeting was held in the Carmel High School grounds to honour the bishop. The ceremony was enhanced by five catholic bishops of South India: Joseph Attipetty of Verapoly, the bishop of Tuticorin, Bishop Antony Muthu of Vellore, the catholic bishops of Quilon, Trivandrum and the first C.S.I bishop of Kaniyakumari diocese Rev. R.H. Gnanadason participated in the celebrations. On 5th
January 1955, at 6 p.m, a high mass was celebrated in the diocesan church. Large number of bishops, the Jesuit priests, clerics, the diocesan priests, nuns and other religious attended the celebrations.

The Holy Father Pope Paul VI in his message sent on 20th September 1964 congratulated the bishop on his services to the diocese rendered with responsibility, vigilance and hard work. The Pope raised Bishop Agnisamy to the rank of Domestic Prelate and promoted him assistant to the pontifical throne by a decree issued on 9th November 1964. In 1966, Bishop Agnisamy was seventy-five years old and he submitted his resignation in conformity with the decree of Christns do Minus. He was willing to rest and to spend the last days in prayer. But it took five more years before he could be relieved from the Episcopal responsibilities. He had to serve the diocese at his ripe age of eighty till 1971.

3.3.11 Exhibition -1967

An exhibition was organised in May 1967 to the growth of vocation in the diocese of Kottar for priesthood and religious life. The major seminarians of the diocese took the initiative under the encouragement of the vicar general Fr. J.M. Villavarayan and Bishop Agnisamy S.J. Accordingly the bishop wrote a circular letter in March 1967, which was read in all the churches on 2nd April 1967. It was to rehabilitate the youth of the diocese to join missionary work. The exhibition

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166 Felix Wilfred, *op. cit.*, p.190.
167 Then Oli, July, 1974, p.4
held in Nagercoil from 8th to 14th May 1967 for seven days. Thirty one religious congregations took active part in conducting the exhibition. Each congregation tried its maximum to present to the public its charism and way of life. Seventeen congregations of women religious put up their stalls in “Little flower” Convent High School, Nagercoil and fourteen congregations of men religious put up their stalls in Carmel High School, Nagercoil[^168]. The people could visit the stalls which were managed and exhibited in the same place Ramanputhur, Nagercoil[^169]. Various programmes were conducted and public functions were organised during these days in which large crowds of people participated. On 14th May the last day, the final ceremonial function took place, and the glorious event of the day was the ordination of a few deacons to priesthood. The exhibition was an opportunity for the people to know concretely the various possibilities that are open for serving the catholic religion. It awakened the people especially the youth to join vocations at home and various missions in north India. This exhibition made Kottar a breeding ground for vocations[^170].

3.3.12 Demise of Bishop Agnisamy -1974

After his retirement in February 1971, Bishop Agnisamy was resting in Beschi college Dindigal. He led a prayerful life there. Even after retirement, he had contact with the clergy of Kottar diocese and he wrote letters to many. In the last days he was served by Fr. A.M. Varaprasadam S.J, a former Principal of the Madurai Jesuit Province (1964-1969). The Bishop was taken ill and was treated in St. Joseph’s hospital, Dindigal. From 6th May

[^169]: Felix Wilfred, op.cit., p.212.
[^170]: Ibid., p.213.
1974, he was laid in bed. The situation became highly critical. He was administered the last sacraments by Archbishop Justin Diraviam of Madurai. In the mean time, the new bishop Arokiasamy of Kottar rushed to Dindigal and visited his predecessor at his bed. Bishop Agnisamy passed away on 7th May 1974 at 5.20 a.m, at the age of eight three\textsuperscript{171}.

His mortal remains were taken to Nagercoil and were laid at “Kottar Social Service Society” hall adjacent to the bishop’s house. People thronged in great numbers to have a last glimpse of their beloved pastor to pay their homage. On 8th May 1974, at 3 pm the funeral procession moved from the Bishop’s House towards the cathedral grounds. Priests, nuns and the choir chanted the psalms. The church bells sounded the death knell as his body was taken in, to be laid to rest in the cathedral. The exsqueial mass was celebrated at the cathedral by Arch Bishops and other bishops. Nine catholic bishops from south India and the C.S.I bishop of Kanyakumari diocese attended the funeral\textsuperscript{172}. Arch Bishop Justin Diraviam of Madurai delivered analogy extolling the qualities of mind and heart of the deceased bishop. The mortal remains of Bishop Agnisamy were laid to rest in St. Francis Xavier chapel in the cathedral of Kottar. A lot of messages of condolence reached the bishop’s house and the condolence of Cardinal Villot and Herman Sehaufele, Arch bishop of Freiburg, Germany remain the pastor in rest\textsuperscript{173}. Bishop Agnisamy was a friend and a guide to the priests of his diocese. He had

\textsuperscript{171} Lawrence, V., \textit{op.cit.}, p.114.
\textsuperscript{172} Felix Wilfred, \textit{op.cit.}, p.213.
\textsuperscript{173} Bishop Marianus Arokiasamy (Kottar), Arch Bishop Justin Diraviam (Madurai), Arch Bishop Kulenthara (Verapoly), Arch Bishop Mar Gregories (Trivandrum), Bishop M. Ambrose(Tuticorin), Bishop Iruthaya Raj (PalayamKottai), Bishop Thomas Fernando (Tiruchirapally), Bishop Jerome Fernandez (Quilon), Bishop Bernard Pereira (Trivandrum) and the CSI Bishop of Kanyakumari diocese C.Selvamoni attended the funeral ceremony. Source, Report, Funeral Ceremonies of Bishop Agnisamy, Kottar, Nagercoil,1975, p.7
\textsuperscript{174} Lawrence, V., \textit{op.cit.}, p.115.
good relationship with the people. Always he developed a person-to-person relationship with the priests. He laboured more to know about the priests and he had a picture in the mind about every priest. He was very much interested to know about them and to know about their problems. He used to advice and soothe their wounds with his consoling words. The priests were also free to him to open their hearts. The priests on their part found easy access to him, patiently listened to him in sharing their victories and failures.

The curia of the Bishop Fr. Emmanuel Periera, Msgr. J.M. Villavarayan and Fr. E. Francis stood as mountains to serve the diocese as fountains. Bishop Agnisamy achieved great things during his tenure of office. When he took charge of the diocese there were thirty nine parishes, and when he left the diocese in 1971, the number of parishes were sixty eight. The number of chapels and churches had risen from 123 to 257. The number of priests increased from 41 to 107. The number of convents rose from 10 to 49. He was shouldering his responsibilities for 31 years from 1939 to 1971 with great trust in God.

The national events of Indian Independence, Republican celebrations and the merger of Kanyakumari district with Madras state were the main political events held during the office of Bishop Agnisamy.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Fr. Francis, E., 28th February, 1999.