CHAPTER – III
DEVOTION AND MIRACLES

India is renowned for its devotion and piety. It is a hallowed place of numerous religions and sects. In spite of this people live in peace and harmony. Mary, the Mother of Jesus Christ is also the Mother of all people of the world. Peoples of all religions and countries have felt and attested to the loving care and tenderness of the Mother Mary. India abounds with many churches and chapels dedicated to the Mother Mary.

It is an incontestable fact that the Mother of Jesus has appeared in several countries of the world and lavished her blessings on her devotees. Lourdes in France, Fatima in Portugal, Loretta in Italy, Wallsinga in England, Kairag in Ireland, Guadalupe in Mexico, Madu in Sri Lanka, Vailankanni in India and several more shrines attest to the glory of Our Lady. Devotees feel fitting to pay homage and tribute to Mother Mary in Vailankanni where she has distributed innumerable favours to the poor, solace to the sick and offspring to the barren. It is necessary to discuss here; the meaning of devotion, the Origin of Marian devotion and various forms through which the tourists and pilgrims pay tribute and respect to the divine mother of Vailankanni. The main focus is given to the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church through which the special devotion is performed to the deity at Vailankanni.
Meaning of Devotion

The word ‘devotion’ denotes; prayers and religious worship. The tourists and pilgrims who pay their visit to Vailankanni never forget to pay their homage and tribute to Mother of Good Health at Vailankanni. Devotion is higher kind of knowledge, which gives the devotee the experience of God. Thomas Aquinas, a Catholic theologian understands “devotion as a virtue by which a human person inclined to God the worship to which God is entitled by right”. He also conceives devotion as a will to serve and worship god by which the worshippers come to full knowledge of God. A real devotee is a person of wisdom, faith and devotion. According to Gabriel M. Braso, devotion consists in “giving oneself to God in order to remain submissive and ever well disposed to whatever refers to his worship or his service: this is devotion”. Genuine devotion is a kind of union in which the devotee who is an ardent lover of God is united with the supreme.

The Origin of Marian Devotion

Marian devotion is prevalent in Vailankanni. It is a special gift for India and for the whole world. It is to discuss, how the devotion towards Mary originated in the history of the Church and more particularly and popularly in Vailankanni. Pope Paul VI in an excellent teaching about devotion to Mary in the life of the Christian and of the Church points out that Marian devotion necessarily leads people of God through Christ in the Holy Spirit. According to him, Marian Devotion fits into the only worship that is rightly called

‘Christian’ because it takes its origin and effectiveness from Christ, finds its complete expression in Christ and leads through Christ in the Spirit to the Father. In the sphere of worship, this devotion necessarily reflects God’s plan of redemption, in which a special form of veneration is appropriate to the singular place, which Mary occupies in that plan. There are excellent logical reasons to encourage a special veneration of Mother Mary. Marian devotion is immensely popular in the Church about. Marian devotion is a gift of God. People come closer to God through a relationship with Mary. Mary is only mother and protectors of many people and the danger is that such devotees may remain self centered, focusing their devotional energy only on receiving favours.

**Marian devotion from 1st to 7th century AD**

The first evidence to the dignity of the Mother of Jesus found in the New Testament of Bible as part of the pattern of salvation history. Mary is involved in the masteries of the life of Jesus Christ the Savior of the world. The gospels in the Holy Bible proclaim Mary blessed in her maternity. Elizabeth mother of John the Baptist hails Mary as ‘Mother of My Lord’. Earlier than this, right in the beginning of the New Testament era, Mary was greeted by Angel Gabriel as ‘Hail Mary’ and thus the devotion to Mary started before the birth of Jesus Christ. Later Epiphanius (AD 403) called Mary ‘Mother of the Living’. There is also evidence in the writings of Epiphanius (AD 403) to prove the existence of and obscure sect, the Collyridians that gave divine honors to Mother Mary. Origin (AD 253) and Athanasius (AD 373) proposed Mother Mary as an example to dedicated virgins. Ambrose (d 397) devoted a series of

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4 Interview with Fr Stanislaus, Ooty on 9th July 2006.
writings to Mary is the model of Christian virginity. Churches were dedicated to Mary as early as 4th century AD. Severian of Gabala (d 408) called the praise of Mary a daily custom. Nilus (d 430) said the praise of Mary was found in every land and in every language. Leaden seals have come down from the 5th and 6th centuries with the inscription ‘Servus Mariae’ – servant or slave of Mary. Emperor Maurice (AD 602) made universal in his territory the feast on August 15 of the “Falling – Asleep of the Mother of the Lord’, the later Assumption feast. The Nativity of Mary on 8th September, the feast of Vailankanni shrine celebrates every year dates from the late 6th century AD. In the 7th century AD, Oriental monks introduced these feasts to the West. In the Roman liturgy Mother Mary has a place in the first prayer of remembrance before the consecration of Eucharist in the mass, since the 6th century AD. This has been called the highest expression of the official Marian devotion of the Church.

Marian devotion from 8th to 15th century AD

During the period between 8th and 15th centuries A.D, there was a great concentration on Mary’s present role as heavenly queen, spiritual mother and all-powerful intercessor. The Marian devotions of the high middle ages accorded with general devotion to the saints. A rich Marian literature, sermons and prayers came into use in 11th century AD. In 1072 AD, Peter Damian wrote a book called ‘Our Lady helping the poor souls in purgatory’ and by 15th century AD this took the form of popular piety. In the 13th century AD, doctrine and piety were on the praise of Mary along the great cathedrals of Marian dedication. Marian devotion was manifest in the lives of Bonaventure

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6 Interview with Fr Roche SJ, St Joseph’s College, Tiruchirappalli on 26th July 2006.
The familiar prayer the ‘Hail Mary’, combining the scriptural greeting (Luke 1; 28, 42) of the first part of the petition of the second part, attained its current form only in the 15\textsuperscript{th} century. At this time, the independent litanies of Our Lady developed out of lists of Marian titles in the form of litany.\footnote{Interview with Fr Roche SJ, St Joseph’s College, Tiruchirappalli, on 26\textsuperscript{th} July 2006.}

\textbf{The reformation and Marian devotion}

Marian devotion became an object of attack for reformers. Luther and Calvin rejected totally the veneration of Mary, but they limited it to the imitation of the humble, obedient, virgin Mother of the Gospels in the Holy Bible. The Reformers of the church and early the Protestants uniformly rejected calling upon the saints for assistance. The cult of the saints, especially of the Mother Mary, has remained a point of division and tension between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism.

The Roman Catholic theologians under the leadership of Pope conducted the ‘Council in Trent’ and defended the cult of Mother Mary and other saints. In order to defend the practice of venerating Mother Mary the then Pope Peter Canisius (AD 1597) replied to the Protestant positions in a long work, ‘\textit{De Maaria Virgne Incomparabli}’. Thus, the internal development of devotion continued in the church. The sodality of Our Blessed Virgin Mary was founded under Jesuit guidance in AD 1567; many Marian sodalities and associations developed from this proto type.\footnote{Interview with Fr John Britto, SJ, St Joseph’s College, Tiruchirappalli on 25\textsuperscript{th} July 2006.} Therefore, it is certain that the Jesuit priests who had sweated themselves to bring up the livening spring of
Christian faith in the Coromandal coast in 16th century A.D would have fostered and developed the Marian devotion in Vailankanni.

**Marian Devotion from 17th to 21st century AD**

The 17th century flowering of Marian studies, especially in Spain and France, had a corresponding development in devotion. Practices of the ‘Slavery of Mary’ grew up, variously rooted in the queenship and imitation of child Jesus in his dependence on Mary. In the French school of spirituality founded by Cardinal de Berulle the cult of Mary was intimately joined to the mystery of the word made flesh. JJ Oliver developed the role of Mary in the interior life, especially of seminarians for priesthood. John Edes preached the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The most famous form of consecration is the ‘Holy Slavery of Mary’ of Louis Grignion de Montfort (AD 1716). Alphonsus de Liguori defended Marian devotion with solid arguments, especially in the book called ‘Glories of Mary’ (1750).

In 19th century AD, during the aftermath of Enlightenment and the French Revolution the newly founded congregations like Marists, Oblates of Mary Immaculate and Claretians; played a great role in restoring the old order and showed a special concern for Mary’s role in the apostolate. Apostolic zeal was recognized as an authentic note of Marian dedication.

Another factor in Marian devotion of 19th century was the shrines of Lourdes (1858), Lasalette (1846), both in France, Knock (1879) in Ireland, and elsewhere (in 20th century Fatima, 1917) all these shrines where Marian apparition had taken place as it took place in the 16th century in Vailankanni, continue to attract pilgrims from various parts of the globe. The Church has
approved these practices particularly because of the good fruits of prayer and
penance and frequenting observance of the sacraments by the pilgrims.

Devotion to Mary in 20th century was stimulated by many factors like en-
cyclical letters of Popes on the Marian devotion. Pope Pious IX defined the
Immaculate Conception. Pope Leo XIII work an encyclical on the devotion of
rosary, Pope Pious X wrote on the spiritual Motherhood - “Mary is Our Sure
Way to Christ”, Pope Benedict XV addressed incessant appeals to the queen of
peace in World War I. Pope Pious XII showed his great interest in Marian
doctrine and cult by the following acts; the definition of Assumption of Our
Mother Mary (1950); the consecration of the world to the Immaculate Heart of
Mary (1942) and the proclamation of Marian year (1945). Features distinctive
of the 20th century devotions to Mary have been Marian congresses, local,
national, international and great pilgrimages to many Marian shrines in the
globe. And according to Luman Gentium, the dogmatic constitution on the
Church from Vatican Council II, Marian devotion has to be reassessed
perspective and the role of Mary in the liturgy has been proposed as the norm
of devotion to Mary.⁹

The Practice of Marian devotions

Marian devotions like pilgrimages to shrines like Vailankanni and
making novenas; have always been popular throughout the world and
throughout the history of the church. In a study of important shrines in Europe,
around 72 percent were found to be exclusively devoted to Mary. In India too
all the Catholic churches are known as ‘Matha Kovil’ (Marian Churches). A
million and a half people a year visit the shrine in Paris, where the Virgin Mary

⁹ Interview with Fr Joseph Srinivasan SJ, St Joseph’s College, Tiruchirappalli on 25th July 2006.
appeared to Catherine Laboure in AD 1830. Four and half a million visit Lourdes per year, where Mother Mary appeared to Bernadette Soubirous in 1858, nearly two million visit Fatima in Portugal where in the Virgin Mary appeared to three children in 1917, and incredible thirteen million visit our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico, where the Mother Mary appeared to Juan Diago in 1531 AD. In India too, devotions to Mother Mary have been widespread. The devotion to Mary has exceeded the devotions to other saints. Among the popular devotions, Rosary, a Marian devotion topped the list.\(^\text{10}\) In terms of number, the highest number of devotees visits Vailankanni being a tourist and pilgrimage centre. Through the effective methods of interviews and questionnaire, one could analyze that most of the devotees come to Vailankanni either as an act of gratitude for the favours received or to get favours. “Our lady always helps me whenever I pray to her” and “She has always helped me in times of need” were the common statements.\(^\text{11}\)

**Popular Devotions**

The word ‘popular’ is in contrast to the word ‘elite. It refers to the spontaneous and free actions of the people, which have no formal and structural shape. Devotion is the word that denotes the attitude of surrender by the human being in front of divinity. It also refers to the symbolic actions performed by man in attaining a relationship with God. Popular devotions are the forms of worship that emerge from popular religiosity of the ordinary faithful. For the ordinary tourists and pilgrims popular devotion is the wellspring of joy and a reason for festivity even in the midst of sufferings and


\(^\text{11}\) Interview with Mr. Pushparaj, Madurai, 06.09.2007.
worries. Since the term ‘popular devotion’ is a recent origin in Christianity, the Christian theologians have formed no clear definition so far.

The position of the Church, regarding the popular devotions is more and attitude of caution and warning rather than appreciation. Church is always cautious of the mixture of both good and superstitious elements in the popular devotions. To certain extent, it is true that there is always a danger of superstition and commercialization in the liturgy. Thus, the church documents make a clear distinction between popular devotion and liturgy and make liturgy far superior to the other. It is to examine in the following discussion how the tourists and the pilgrims enjoy the freedom in paying their homage and ardent prayer to Our Lady of Vailankanni, and how the seven sacraments, the official form of Catholic devotion is being executed in Vailankanni Basilica.

**Marian Devotion in Vailankanni**

The most important fact for the reader to note is that no pilgrim is compelled to attend the celebration of the seven sacraments, performed by the Catholic priests of this church. However at the same time, all are welcomed to adore God the Almighty by participating in the liturgical celebrations of this church. Mostly a good number of devotees without any discrimination do take part in the religious services of the church, give thanks, and praise to God.

A wonderful and marvelous scene that the research scholar has seen in this Arockia Matha Church is the amount of liberty given to the devotees of Arockia Matha to pray to the deity in the way and manner they like. The Hindus come and worship according to their customs and traditions of Hindu

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religion. The Muslims enter into the church as they enter in to their Dargas with their heads covered with a piece of cloth. The Hindu devotees of Arockia Matha come to this church with tremendous faith in their hearts and perform their prayer by breaking the coconuts and by lighting Karpooram.\textsuperscript{13}

Neither the Christians nor the non-Christians pass any objection with regard to the mode of offering and prayers to the deity in Vailankanni church. Each one is permitted to offer his or her prayer without any restriction. Some come and pray loudly as if they talk to a person in front of them. Some just come and sit for a while and leave the church in silence.\textsuperscript{14} Pilgrims are permitted to conduct their prayer services in their vernacular language.

Table IV

The languages in which religious services are conducted

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>On Annual Feast Novena Days 28\textsuperscript{th} August to 8\textsuperscript{th} September</th>
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<tr>
<td>Tamil</td>
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No discrimination

All the devotees of this Vailankanni Matha, without discrimination of race, colour and creed, enjoy the freedom to enter into the church and to move

\textsuperscript{13} Karpooram is a flammable material used by Hindus during worship.
\textsuperscript{14} Interview with A. Arpudaraj, Church watchman, Vailankanni on 6\textsuperscript{th} October 2006.
\textsuperscript{15} Printed Note of the daily time table of Liturgical Services in Vailankanni 2007.
\textsuperscript{16} Printed Note of Vailankanni Annual Feast Programme 2007.
everywhere except in the sanctuary where the Higher Altar of Our Lady of Good Health is located.\textsuperscript{17} They can sit at any place they like, without obstructing the fellow devotee. No one is prohibited to sit on the limited number of benches that are provided inside the church. Certainly, there is no division in the congregation of pilgrims in this church.

Next the ‘Posture for Prayer’, no particular position or style is imposed on the pilgrims who pay flower tributes and prayers to the Miraculous Vailankanni Arockia Matha.\textsuperscript{18} Pilgrims are free to sit, stand and kneel down when they pray in this church. Thus, this church, stands as the translation of great values of the humanity, namely liberty, equality, fraternity and love.

\textbf{The Seven Sacraments}

1. Baptism, 2. Eucharist, 3. Confirmation, 4. Penance,
5. Marriage, 6. Holy Orders, and 7. Anointing of the Sick\textsuperscript{19}

The purpose of sacraments is to sanctify men, to build up the body of Christ, and finally to give worship to God; because they are signs they instruct.\textsuperscript{20} The documents of the Second Vatican Council further states that the vernacular language may be used in administering the sacraments.\textsuperscript{21} According to the new code of Canon Law of the Catholic Church, the sacraments of the New Testament were instituted by Christ the Lord and entrusted to the Church. Sacraments are signs and means by which faith is expressed and strengthened, worship is offered to God. By performing the sacraments, it is believed that they are sanctified. Thus the Canon Law of the Church insists that the members

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{17} Interview with Fr G. Arul Irudayam, Former Parish Priest, Vailankanni on 7\textsuperscript{th} October 2006.
  \item \textsuperscript{18} Interview with A. Shafer Ali, Church Staff, Vailankanni on 7\textsuperscript{th} October 2006.
  \item \textsuperscript{19} Interview with A. Chinnappan, Mission Catechist of the Church, Vailankanni on 9\textsuperscript{th} October 2006.
  \item \textsuperscript{20} RJ Knox, \textit{The Documents of Vatican II}, St Paul’s Publications, New Delhi, 1966, p. 44.
  \item \textsuperscript{21} Ibid, p. 145.
\end{itemize}
of the church and the sacred ministers, the priests must show great reverence and due care to the sacraments.\textsuperscript{22}

\textbf{The Baptism}

Baptism is the gateway to the sacraments and the Catholic Church insists that it is necessary for salvation, either by actual reception or at least by desire. It is the belief of Christians that by it people are freed from sins, are born again as children of God.\textsuperscript{23} According to George Mecauley SJ, there are different types of baptisms in Christianity. Baptism is for remission of sins, Baptism in the name of Jesus, finally Baptism into death and resurrection of Jesus. By baptism, the Holy Spirit is bestowed on the recipient and he becomes incorporated into the body of Christ. God the Father is so impressed by Jesus’ death that he raised to a new life and promises the same to every one who is baptized. However, there is no magic parallism between a Christian baptism and Jesus’ death and resurrection.\textsuperscript{24} As part of the religious activities of the Vailankanni Arockia Matha church, it conducts a good number of infant baptisms every year. The church in no way compels the devotee of Arockia Matha to be baptized. The priests here do not even mention the need of baptism, when they deliver speeches during the liturgical services. Thus, the religious tolerance and unity are well expressed at this Church. Baptism is given after every Mass, if there are candidates with proper records from the respective Parish Priest.

\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 158.
The Sacrament of Eucharist

The most venerable sacrament of Catholic Christians is the blessed Eucharist, in which Christ the Lord himself is contained. It is believed by the Catholics that by the power of the blessed Eucharist the Catholic Church continually lives and grows.\(^{25}\)

By the celebration of the Mass, the Eucharist, as the Catholic Church tells, the communal nature of Christianity is best expressed and celebrated.\(^{26}\) The heart of the Eucharist is thanksgiving. Although the name itself is not found in the Bible the very word Eucharist means thanksgiving.\(^{27}\) Jesus life was on of constant thanks to His Father God the Almighty, for his protection and goodness. Today the Catholic Church by the meaningful manner of the celebration of Eucharist recalls the blessings it has received from God through Jesus’ redemptive death and resurrection.\(^{28}\)

Memorial and Covenant

According to Nicholas Lash, the primitive Eucharist was a commemoration. Not a commemoration of last supper of Jesus Christ but a commemoration of the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the Cross at Mount Calvary. But according to the Bible, as the matter of historical fact that Catholic Church celebrates the Holy Mass the Eucharist in obedience to the Christ is command ‘Do this in commemoration of me’.\(^{29}\)


\(^{28}\) Interview with Mgr. P. Arockiasamy, Former Bishop of Thanjavur on 23\(^{rd}\) October 2006.

The Fathers of the Church about Eucharist

The Fathers of the Church state expressly that God rewards with special graces those who attend the Mass. Cyril says, “Spiritual gifts are freely given to those who assist at mass reverently”. Cyprian says, “This supernatural Bread and this consecrated chalice are for the health and salvation of mankind”\textsuperscript{30}. Pope Innocent III says, “Through the power of the holy sacrifice of the masses all virtues are increased in us, and we obtain a plenteous share of the fruits of grace”. Maxims says, “Christians should never neglect Holy Mass”\textsuperscript{31}. Antonio Piolanti states, “There is no figure in human history greater than Jesus Christ … it is Christ who is the given of salvation … died on the cross.”\textsuperscript{32} The Bible says Jesus steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem\textsuperscript{33} in order to die on the cross. “In dying upon the cross, Jesus makes offering, also of all human suffering which had gone before, and the suffering of the whole mankind”.\textsuperscript{34}

Martin Luther on Eucharist

According to Martin Luther, the doctrine of the Eucharist is a deep rooted and ancient theology in the Catholic Church. “What I am attacking declared Luther in 1520, is and approved by the consent of all men…”\textsuperscript{35} The Sacrifice of the Mass is the same as the sacrifice of the cross because in both there is the same divine victim and the same high priest, and the same salutary effects are made available for men.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid, p.207.  
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid, p. 207.  
\textsuperscript{34} Antonio Piolanti, op. cit, p. 105.  
\textsuperscript{35} Francis Clarke SJ, op. cit, p. 991.  
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid, p. 250.
Table V
Parts of the Holy Mass

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<td>c. Breaking of Bread</td>
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<sup>37</sup> *Kyrie* is a Latin term, means ‘Lord have mercy’.

<sup>38</sup> *Gloria* is a Latin word, means ‘Glory to God’.

The Origin of the Holy Mass

Jesus Christ, his apostles and his other disciples lived in a world that was formed by Jewish thinking and Jewish liturgical practice. This is enough to tell that the initial forms of the Holy Mass were taken from Judaism.

Research, especially during the last fifty years, has made it clear that Christian worship has its roots in Judaism. The Eucharistic prayer, which is the central component of the entire Eucharistic worship, derives from the blessings of praises (bearakahoth Eucharistiai) of domestic Jewish liturgical celebrations.\(^{40}\)

The signs of Wine and Bread

The material elements used in the celebration of the Holy Mass are bread and wine. According to the Holy Bible, the Jewish people had already used bread and wine in the cult of Passover Meal. For the Jewish of the Old Testament period, bread was basic in nourishment, wine was that which cheers gods and men\(^ {41}\) and gladdens the heart of man.\(^ {42}\) Bread and wine are the characteristic of a Jewish festive meal as contrasted with the usual simple evening meal of Palestinian peasant, at which water was drunk.\(^ {43}\)

The Catholic Church in the celebration of the Holy Mass has adopted the Jewish cultic Passover meal and its elements such as bread and wine. At the heart of the celebration of the Holy Mass are the bread and wine that by the words of Christ as recited by the priest, and the invocation of the Holy Spirit, become Christ’s body and blood. Faithful to the Lord’s command the Church

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\(^{41}\) Jud 9:13.

\(^{42}\) The Holy Bible, OT, New International Version, pp. 242 – 588. (Ps 104:15)

continues to do, in his memory and until his glorious return, what he did at the
eve of his passion. “He took bread…”  

During the Holy Mass, the celebrant asks God the Father to send his
Holy Spirit (or the power of his blessing) on the bread and wine, so that by his
power they may become the body and blood of Jesus Christ. In addition, the
priest prays that those who take part in the Holy Mass may be on body and one
spirit.  

According to Cardinal J. Ratzinger, “the believer of Christ has an
obligation to take part in the Holy Mass on Sundays and feast days, and
because the bread and wine have been made Eucharist”. No one may take part
in it unless she believes and has received baptism for the forgiveness of sins”.  

**The Homily**

The Homily is a religious speech delivered by the priest during the
celebration of the Holy Mass. It is an utmost important task of the priest to
explain the word of God to the people. Since the early days of Christianity, and
the following is the example of the Jewish synagogue teaching system of Holy
Scripture, the family has been an integral part of the Christian liturgy of the
word. Its purpose is to actualize the proclamation that is to apply it and make it
relevant to the concrete world today. After the Second Vatican Council (1962),
the Catholic Church has permitted the priests to preach in vernacular languages
so that the Christians in different parts the world may understand well the word
of God.

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44 The Holy Bible, NT, New International Version, Mt 26:26, p. 963.
46 Ibid, p. 262.
47 Liturgy of the word is part of the Holy Mass.
The priest should be well prepared to provide a commendatory on the Bible reading and bring the message alive for his hearers.\textsuperscript{48} In the Vailankanni Church homily is given in all the Holy Masses the preacher usually connects the gospel message of Jesus to the current problems of the world. No preacher here insists conversion in the homily.

1. Attaching other religions
2. Speaking controversial issues like politics

are carefully avoided in the homilies delivered in Vailankanni Church. Thus, the Arockia Matha Church respects the belief and good thing that are found in other religions.\textsuperscript{49} According to Johannes the purpose of the homily is to help the people to understand the Bible by presenting the life situation. These lines of the Holy Bible tell that Christ himself was a powerful preacher who has no equal elsewhere.\textsuperscript{50}

\textbf{Chart – 1}

\textbf{Homily at Vailankanni}

\begin{itemize}
  \item A. Short Stories
  \item B. Good Jokes
  \item C. Anecdotes
  \item D. Church teachings of Christ and the Church
  \item E. Gospel Explanations
  \item F. Actual Incidents
  \item G. World Happenings
  \item H. Social Problems (Like dowry systems, women’s right, equality, etc)
  \item I. Miracle
  \item J. Life Witnesses
  \item K. Message and Suggestion
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{48} Johannes H. Emminghaw, \textit{op. cit}, p. 147.
\textsuperscript{49} Interview with Fr G. Arul Irudayam, Parish Priest, Vailankanni on 9\textsuperscript{th} October 2006.
The homilies delivered at Vailankanni Church covers the above-mentioned factors and anything that would hurt the feelings of non-Christian devotees are carefully avoided. Without any discrimination all the devotees are treated as sons and daughters of Miraculous Mother Mary. To certain extent, the jokes, stories, gospel message, miracles and life witnesses that are said in the homily during the Holy Mass, lighten the burden of the pilgrims who come here with heavy load of worries, sorrows, sufferings, unsettled problems and incurable sickness.

**The First Holy Communion**

Jesus Christ has given the baptized Christians His own body as the Bread of life in the Eucharist. The Mission Catechists, the sisters, school teachers, and priests spare their valuable time to prepare the Catholic children to receive the Holy Communion in a worthy manner. The Holy Communion may also be given to the children in danger of death, if they can distinguish the Body of Christ from ordinary food and receive communion with reverence.

**Confirmation**

The Sacrament of confirmation is administered on the Children who have prepared themselves well with proper and adequate knowledge about the presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist, the teachings of the Church and the Ten Commandments given by God to Moses on the Mount Sinai.

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51 Interview with Fr G. Arul Irudayam, Parish Priest, Vailankanni on 9th October 2006.
52 Interview with K. Jose, South India Bank, Nagapattinam on 3rd October 2006.
54 Interview with Mgr. SL Gabriel, Former Bishop of Tiruchirappalli, 9th July 2006.
The Sacrament of confirmation is usually celebrated in the Church during the Holy Mass. It is conferred by anointing with consecrated crism oil\textsuperscript{56} on the forehead and by the words prescribed in the approved liturgical books. This anointing, highlights the name ‘Christian’ which means ‘anointed’ and derives from that of Christ himself whom God anointed with the Holy Spirit. By this anointing, he received of the sacrament of confirmation, receives the ‘mark’ the seal of the Holy Spirit, and thus strengthened in the Christian faith.\textsuperscript{57}

**The Sacrament of Penance**

Confessions, in other words the sacrament of penance is administered by the priests in this church regularly. Not only the Catholics, but the non-Christians also approach this valuable sacrament with respect and faith and they get lot of consolation, absolution and solution. Thus, this wonderful sacrament of penance serves as the counseling place for the non-Christian devotees. In the confession the Christians come and reveal the sins they have committed and asks God’s pardon and mercy, the priest who hears the confession and serves as mediator between God and the sinner, prays to God on behalf of the penitent and grants absolution in the name of God.\textsuperscript{58} There are two elderly priests here namely Fr John Membulikaval and Fr A. Parimala Doss, to render their valuable service in hearing the confessions from the Catholic pilgrims.

In order to participate in the Holy Mass, it is must for a Catholic Christian to prepare himself with proper confession. “Truly I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in

\textsuperscript{56} Crism oil is a perfumed olive oil which is used in Christian liturgy.

\textsuperscript{57} Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *op. cit*, pp. 251 – 252.

\textsuperscript{58} Interview with Fr R. John Membulikaval SJ, Confessor, Vailankanni on 30\textsuperscript{th} August 2006.
you". To respond to this invitation of Jesus Christ, the Catholic Christians have the duty to prepare themselves well. Paul urges to examine the conscience: “whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of performing the body and blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself. For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgement upon himself”.

“I will leave this place and go to my father” (Luke 15:18). The sinner leaves the place where he was the situation in which he found himself and which he recognized as God-less. Under the influence of the spirit the sinner becomes involved once again, and more deeply in the life and work of God in the world. He starts a new stage in his life, after making a good confession, recognizing what is past and putting it behind him in order to embrace the new future that God is offering him. While other notable Catholic writers insist on the importance of the sacrament of confession William J. Bausen discourages the Catholics making confessions. According to him the Catholics do not strictly need to go to confession to have their sins forgiven. In the Catholic life the devout non-Catholic, can find forgiveness through penance, love and charity.

According to Francis J. Bucklen SJ, confession is a dialogue between God and man. God speaks to man in many ways, but more impressive and mysterious than any other is the way God speaks to men through other man.

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61 Ibid. p. 10.
Christ says in the Bible “who ever hears you hears me”. The priest as a man of God helps the penitent to face the future as well as the past.

In the words of Bernard Haring, in the sacrament of penance, Christ is the teacher of internal law of grace. By the grace of God the penitent becomes aware of his obligation to live according to a renewed spirit. As the representative of Christ the priest has the duty to remind the penitent of his having been raised to life in Baptism and to his obligation then of dying to sin. Another author Louis Mondon SJ, opines that the modern man wants to receive this sacrament again in its religious integrity and the priests must satisfy his need. This makes it desirable that confession and eventual spiritual direction should be carefully carried out by the priest. According to him psychological counselling should take place outside the confessional. “The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand, repents, and believes in the Gospel”.

**Sacrament of Marriage**

Marriage is a social contract. According to the Catholic Church it is a covenant by which a man and woman establish between themselves a partnership of their whole life. All can contract marriage who are not prohibited by law. The Catholic Church insists that the Catholics who have not received the sacrament of confirmation are to receive it before being admitted to marriage. Before a Catholic marriage takes place, it must be established that

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68 The Holy Bible, NT, Mark 1:15, New International Version, p. 968.
nothing stands in the way of its valid and lawful celebration. Abiding by the customs and regulations of the Catholic Church, the Catholics, after selecting their life partners, by themselves or by the elders, go to the parish house with proper witnesses and register themselves for the celebration of their marriage. This registration is called ‘Bann’ writing. For three subsequent weeks the ‘kovil pillai’ or the mission catechist makes an announcement on Sundays at the end of the Holy Mass, the details of the marriage parties who have registered their name in the Bann Book for the celebration of the sacrament of marriage. The parishioners have the duty to inform the parish priest, if they find any legal fault in the marriage that is announced in the church.69

In his book ‘The Catholic Marriage’, William A. Lynden tells that marriage is probably the most popular institution in the world, and it should be, because it leads to the happiness of more people, generation, than perhaps anything else.70 According to the Holy Bible, God created Eve, the first woman, as the life partner of Adam the first man in the world and thus marriage was instituted by God.71 Marriage is a contract entered into freely and solemnly before God and man. The Catholic Church teaches, the purpose of marriage is to produce and educate children and thus the parents have the duty in building up the future society.72 According to the Catholic religion the marriage takes place by the grace of God, the consent of man and woman has effected a contract that no human power can ever make void. “What God has joined together, let man not separate”.73

69 Interview with Fr G. Arul Irudayam, Former Parish Priest, Vailankanni on 6th October 2006.
72 William A. Lynden, op. cit, p. 13.
The Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick

Illness and suffering have always been one of the gravest problems of human kind. In sickness man experiences his powerlessness and his limitation.\textsuperscript{74} Some times illness can lead a devotee of God to anguish, even despair and revolt against God. Some people of God even forget to come to the church because of sickness. At the same time, the Christianity holds a positive of illness.\textsuperscript{75} According to Cardinal Ratzinger, “illness very often provokes a search for God and a return to him.\textsuperscript{76} That is why the ministers of the Catholic Church at Vailankanni make it a point the sick persons and anoint them with the holy oil in the name of Jesus that they may get well and accept the will of God.

Burial Services

Vailankanni Arockia Matha Church is not only a centre for pilgrims but also a parish in the Diocese of Thanjavur. As it is the duty of a parish priest to conduct burial services according to Christian rituals, the priests and Vailankanni Church play a vital role in conducting funeral services of their parishioners as well as the Christian devotees who breathe their last at Vailankanni.\textsuperscript{77}

Jesus Christ said, “I am the Light of the World”. He who follows me can never walk in dearness; he will possess the light that is life.\textsuperscript{78} On the Jewish festival of lights, Jesus spoke to the Jews, claiming that he was the true light

\textsuperscript{74} Interview with Fr S. Adaikalam SJ, at Vailankanni on 30\textsuperscript{th} November 2006.
\textsuperscript{76} Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, \textit{op. cit}, p. 287.
\textsuperscript{77} Interview with Fr S. Fabian, Assistant Parish Priest, Vailankanni on 17\textsuperscript{th} November 2006.
\textsuperscript{78} \textit{The Holy Bible}, NT, John 8:12, New International Version, p. 1037.
that illumines all men.\textsuperscript{79} The Catholics, believing the fast that the lead will be saved from the darkness of hell and enter into the permanent heavenly bliss and the eternal light will shine upon them, they conduct the burial services with devotion and love.

The Church authorities at Vailankanni permit to conduct the burial services only at the lower extension church; no funeral service is conducted at the main church where the miraculous statue of Our Lady of Good Health is enthroned.\textsuperscript{80}

**The Holy Rosary and Novena Prayer**

Next to the Holy Mass, the holy rosary at religious practice of Catholics occupies a prominent place in the religious services of the Vailankanni Arockia Matha Church. One may learn to pray by praying\textsuperscript{81} by reciting the holy rosary the Christian devotee comes closer to Mother Mary.

Along the Christians, non-Christians devotees also enter into a prayerful mood when they attend the Rosary and the novena prayers, conducted every day at 6.00 pm in this shrine. Hindus, Mohammedans, Parsis and others recognize the Rosary beads as an instrument of prayer.\textsuperscript{82}

**The Rosary Procession**

The Rosary procession around this holy church takes place on every Saturday at 5.45 pm during which a small \textit{Ther} (Car of Arockia Matha) is carried by the devotees and in the front of it pilgrims form in line and recite the

\textsuperscript{80} Interview with T. Antony, Ariya Nattu Street, Vailankanni, on 13\textsuperscript{th} November 2006.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid, p. 173.
Rosary prayer. The Rosary procession is followed by the Benediction.\footnote{83} On the first Saturdays of every month there is blessing of the sick in which sick people are blessed with the blessed sacrament of Eucharist after the Rosary procession.\footnote{84}

**The Legend of Rosary**

The legend of Rosary begins with Dominic in the thirteenth century AD when the foundations of Christianity were shaken by the Albigensian hereby. According to it, Dominic was having little success in his preaching to the Albigenses when one day Mother Mary herself came to his rescue. She told him that he would be successful in his preaching, provided he should recite the rosary which contains the Lords prayer ‘Our Father’ and the ‘Greeting of the Angel of the Lord’; the ‘Hail Mary’. Dominic after experimenting great miracles in his life, he started to propagate the devotion of Mary through out the world.

In AD 1571, there was a terrible war between the Mohammedans and Christians at Lobaths. The Christians attained glorious victory, as it is believed by the Christians because of the Rosary prayed by the Christians. Thereafter the practice of rosary prayer got various development.

- In 1572 October honoured Mary as the Queen of Victory.
- In 1716 Pope Pious the X announced Rosary as the Prayer of the Church
- In 1716 The Pope added the celebration of the Rosary with the list of the Roman celebrations
- In 1863 Mother Mary appeared to little girl in 11\textsuperscript{th} February to 18\textsuperscript{th} July Bernadet for 18 times and Mother Mary moved the Rosary beads in her hand when the little girl recited Rosary

\footnote{83}{Interview with P. Danapal, President, Legion of Mary, Vailankanni on 9\textsuperscript{th} October 2006.}
In 1854 Pope Pius IX announced Mary as Mother Most Pure
In 1858 Mary announced her name as Immaculate
In 1971 Mother Mary appeared in Fatima to the three children Lucia, Francis and Jesintha for 6 times, on 13th day of every month, they recited the Holy Rosary.85

**Use of Beads for Mantras and Meditation**

Pious Hindus use the beads to keep count of invocations to their deities and as means of promoting concentration. The Buddhist rosary helps the user, through the soothing repetition of mantra, to attain stillness. Muslims call the rosary, Tasbin meaning ‘to praise’ or ‘to exalt’. The prophet Mohammad gives great merit to reciting the name of God and giving praise to Allah, a hundred times in the morning and again in the evening.86

**A vow to tonsure**

According to the Holy Bible Paul said far Syria with Priscilla and Aquilla reached Cenchre ‘cut his hair for he had a vow’.87 Like wise also the hair that adds beauty to man’s personality is being sacrificed at this Holy Church at Vailankanni by the devotee of Arockia Matha.

### Table No. VI

**Tonsure & Earboring List**

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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Devotees with Coconut and Garland offerings*

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Holy Oil, Garlands, Silver and gold Offerings, and Coconut Saplings

Hamis Swanston argues that the word, ‘oil’ comes from the word Christ the great healer. Therefore, the holy oil, which is sold to devotees at this church, serves as the miraculous blessed oil with lot of healing power for those who trust in God and his healing power. According to him, to be Christ, is to be anointed man – the word Christ itself comes from the oil or chrism used at the anointing of the kings and priests of the Hebrew and other societies. To be a Christian, therefore, is to share in the anointed one.\(^8^9\)

![Devotees with Coconut Plants](image)

In this Church, candles, silver and gold offerings, coconut saplings and coconuts are the common religious offerings offered by the pilgrims to Arockia Matha. As Vailankanni Church majestically stands as the symbol of national unity, brotherhood, and integrity, though lighting the candle in a Christian mode of worship, the non-Christian devotees too, with out any instruction, are very much interested in lighting the candles to Arockia Matha, that God may

bless them with bright future, and everlasting peace and joy. Those devotees who do not enjoy the gift of children come to this church and offer coconut saplings to Mother Mary that their family may grow like that coconut sapling.

Vow to roll around the Vailankanni Church

Fulfilling the vow
Paadha Yathra to Vailankanni

Going on pilgrimage, a spiritual journey is a vital part of many world faiths. During the festival of Vailankanni Arockia Matha a large number of devotees come on foot from far away places. The Hindu Newspaper reporter writes, “…during the festival thousands of pilgrims had come by foot from far off places like Chennai, Dindigul, Tiruchirappalli, Madurai and Tuticorin leaving their places about 15 days back to witness the ceremony of flag hoisting.90 Participating in the pilgrimage on foot to Vailankanni Arockia Matha Church becomes more fulfilling and attractive than the daily routine practice of prayer service. Those devotees of Arockia Matha who intend to reach Vailankanni on foot take the Kavi (maroon colour) dress and the Holy Rosary; get them blessed by priest, put on the Kavi dress and Rosary, keep penance and fasting prayer for 30 days. Then they start the yatra to Vailankanni Church and until they reach Vailankanni they recite the praise of God and Mother Mary with great devotion and strict discipline. After offering the prayers of petitions, candles, flowers and other offerings, they remove the kavi dress and put on the normal dress as usual.91

One can find at Vailankanni large number of paadha yatra groups during the festival season in the season of Lent. Every year during the festival, the fact that the out going busses from Vailankanni taking a greater number of devotees than the incoming busses devotees the truth that a large number of devotees, come to Vailankanni, by foot, during the festival.92

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90 The Hindu, Madurai, 4th September 1998, p. 5.
91 Interview with Fr Jeyaseelan, Chaplin for ‘Paada Yatra Group’, Tuticorin on ?.
92 Interview with R. Sundarajian, Indian Express Reporter, Nagapattinam, on 2nd September 2006.
The Paadayatra Devotees

At a formal request of the Parish Priest of Vailankanni church all state owned transport corporations in Tamil Nadu operate day and night, special bus services to Vailankanni from their respective districts.93

The Vailankanni festival

Festival is an event, usually and ordinarily staged by a local community, which centers on some unique aspect of that community. Among many religious, a feast or festival is a set of celebrations in honor of God. However, the term ‘feast’ also entered common as synonym far and large or elaborate meal. Etymologically speaking the word feast was derived from Latin word festovus. Festival was first recorded as noun in AD 1589. Before it had been used as an adjective from the fourteenth century AD, meaning ‘to celebrate a Church holiday’.

93 The Hindu, Madurai, 4th September 1992, p. 5.
The great annual festival at Vailankanni not only provides entertainment and spiritual satisfaction but also a sense of belonging for religious social or geographical groups. Thus, Vailankanni festival provides a sustainable religious and cultural unity that leads to a strong sense of national integration, international understanding and universal brotherhood\(^94\)

The Madras District Gazetteer, under Vailankanni has this wonderful remark on the Vailankanni Arockia Matha Church; “it is chiefly important for a large Roman Catholic festival which takes place there every eighth of September month and the nine proceeding days in honor of the Virgin Mary, as ‘Our Lady of Health’. Not Christians only, but Hindus also come to this place from many parts of the Presidency in the hope of obtaining relief from sickness and many miraculous cures are said to take place. “This has indeed been called the Lourdes of India… On the festive occasion the petty village is transformed into a busy, noisy, city-with its mass of people, its bazaars of every description, and booths of various sizes”.\(^95\)

The increasingly important Vailankanni Arockia Matha Church is a symbol of communal harmony.\(^96\) People flock from all over the world, irrespective of caste, creed, colour and religion to offer prayers. Since Vailankanni Church is situated on the beautiful shores of Bay of Bengal, it attracts a good number of tourists throughout the year.\(^97\) Therefore, at Vailankanni everyday festivity is on because of the continuous flow of devotees and tourists. However the congregation becomes vast during the

\(^94\) Interview with Fr Xavier, Rector, Vailankanni, on 7\(^{th}\) September 2007.
\(^95\) Vailankanni, the Monograph found in the Madras District Gazetteer.
\(^96\) Interview with Fr PK George SJ, Ayyampalayam on 30\(^{th}\) November 2006.
\(^97\) The Hindu, Madurai edition, 4\(^{th}\) September 1998, p. 5.
annual feast which starts on 29\textsuperscript{th} August every year.\textsuperscript{98} This church also celebrates the other feast days of Mother Mary in a small scale.\textsuperscript{99}

The Annual Feast of Vailankanni Arockia Matha

Towards the end of the 17\textsuperscript{th} century AD, a Portuguese sailing ship that was sailing with all its merchants in the Bay of Bengal was caught in the cyclone. By the grace of God and to the wonder of the sailors the ship safely reached the shore on 8\textsuperscript{th} September, the feast of the Nativitiy (Birthday) of the Blessed Virgin Mary\textsuperscript{100} who is popularly called ‘Arockia Matha’ by the devotees of Vailankanni. Every year, in memory of that great event, the feast day of Arockia Matha is celebrated on that day.\textsuperscript{101}

The Hoisting of the Flag

The festival begins on 29\textsuperscript{th} August and officially concludes on 8\textsuperscript{th} September every year. It begins with the hoisting of a flag (Kodi) bearing the image of Vailankanni Arockia Matha and ends with the lowering of flag in the evening of 8\textsuperscript{th} September, the last day of the feast. On the intervening days, there are car processions (Ther Pavani Urvalam) which reach the climax in the night of 8\textsuperscript{th} September, and there are hoisting of flag daily, a different one on each day.\textsuperscript{102}

\textsuperscript{98} Ibid, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{100} Marianus Arockiasamy, \textit{Order Sacred Liturgy}, Mavigam K. Pudur, Madurai, 2006.
\textsuperscript{101} Interview with Mgr. SL Gabriel, Former Bishop of Tiruchirappalli on 30\textsuperscript{th} October 2006.
\textsuperscript{102} Interview with Fr Arul Arockiasamy, Editor of Vailankanni Calling, Thanjavur, on 10\textsuperscript{th} October 2006.
Flag Post

Earlier the flag was of 15 mts. With the image of Arockia Matha is taken in procession through the beach street, and Aria Nattu Street of Vailankanni along with the decorated car (ther) carrying the statue of Mother Mary. Where ever one turn around in Vailankanni one may find only a sea of human heads. The beautiful flag is raised on a cart at the beginning of the procession and then at the end of the procession it is lifted over the church compound wall by a team of elders from Vailankanni Ariyanattu Chettiyar community. The grand flag hoisting on the 29th of August every year, is conducted jointly by members of Vailankanni and Nagapattinam Ariyanattu Chettiyar Communities.

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103 The Hindu, Madurai, 30th August 1998, p. 3.
104 Interview with S. Arumairaj, Ariyanattu Street, Vailankanni, on 16th November 2006.
After the flag hoisting, the Benediction (Christian prayer service and blessing) is performed Vailankanni. The entire church used to be decorated with colourful lights and at the end of the day a special mass is conducted by the Bishop of Thanjavur.105

**The Hoisting of Flag on the Novena Days**

Hoisting of the flag is repeated each day from 30th August to 7th September. The flags, donated by individuals or families are hoisted on the novena days of the annual feast. The hoisting of flag announces that the festivity is on. The colourful flag waving in the sea-breeze seems to invite all the devotees to come and participate in the celebrations and carry home the abundant blessings of God.

At 12.00 noon the flag is hoisted. No sooner does the time for the flag hoisting come than the pilgrims pour in, in front of the Church. To have a glance of the flag of Arockia Matha being hoisted the devotees even climb up on buildings and other high places around the Church. The devotees without bothering about the hot sun they start to assemble around the flagpole by 11.30 a.m. Passes are issued by the Parish Priest to the *Ubayatharar* (sponsors) on that day’s car procession, the flag donour and family, foreign visitors, VIP’s and nuns. As the 12 noon approaches, the flag is brought out of the church to the flag pole, where it is spread open, the designated group of donours who have the right to make the donation (ubayam) for that day hold the flag and they meet the expenses for the flowers, lights and fire works for the grand car procession at 8 p.m. By tradition each day of Vailankanni festival novena is

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assigned to two different groups. These two caste groups give the Ubayam for 6th September and 7th September respectively, the days on which the car processions and festival celebrations are most grand.

At 12.00 noon the church bells ring out. The priest begins to bless the flag with the holy water after reciting a small prayer. Then the priests recite prayers in English and Tamil. When the prayers conclude, once more the church bells ring out and a recorded song written especially for the event is played as the flag being hoisted and raised up.

The Grand Car Procession

From 30th August to 7th September, the car and chariot procession takes place every day at 8 p.m., after the evening liturgical services litany and Novena prayers are over. As Vailankanni is a coastal village it is impossible to pull the chariots along the sandy path. Hence the theirs (cars) have to be carried, and the pilgrims eagerly come forward to carry the car on their shoulders. A large majority of the bearers of the car and chariots are Mumbai devotees, East Indian devotees from Vasai, Goans and a very few Tamil devotees from Chennai and Bangalore. There are even donors to supply tea and T Shirts to the privileged bearers of the car. It is said that those days when there was no electricity facility, the devotees in and around Vailankanni used to come and help the car procession with the country made fire torches made of oil and cotton.

106 Interview with S. Kannaiyan, Ariyanattu Street, Vailankanni on 30th September 2006.
107 Interview with A. Arul, Ariyanattu Street, Vailankanni on 30th September 2006.
108 Interview with Arumairaj, Church Office, Vailankanni on 31st August 2006.
110 Interview with S. Amirtham, Vettaikkaraniruppu on 2nd October 2006.
In 1921 a pilgrim who paid his visit to this holy church on the occasion of the annual feast writes as follows:

“Next, the grand torch-light procession started. This is an item, the Catholic festivals in India, of thrilling importance and great excitement. And a few Catholic processions in India can boast of equal pathos about them. Over two hundred study men are needed to move along the magnificent car which towers tens of feet above the heads of the people in pure gothic style-the car itself being a facing smile of the spires in front of the Church. And Our Lady has then a closer look of all her children who follow her singing her praises. The crowd is immense; you see nothing but a sea of heads. Three quarters of an hour later, the procession returns.”

111 The Catholic Register, Mylapore Archives, 1st October 1921.
Today, because of the electricity facility, the entire Church and of its high gothic towers, cars and chariots are gloriously illuminated with bright and colourful electric bulbs. Thus the bright illumination and the colourful flowers that add the immense beauty of the Ther in which the statue of Mother Mary is seated draw the attention of the entire congregation of devotees. The original and ancient statue of Arockia Matha is kept in tact at the High Altar of the main Church and for the use of chariot procession a different statue of Arockia Matha is used. To be frank, one needs thousands of eyes to see the beautiful sight of Arockia Matha being seated in the chariot. Arockia Matha is like a mighty cloud that showers abundant graces. That is why, at Her festival, anyone can see only a sea of heads at which ever direction one look.\footnote{Interview with M. Rajasekar, Church Office, Vailankanni on 20\textsuperscript{th} September 2006.}
The Small Chariots are carried by women

Vailankanni Festival in 1892

It is about a hundred and ten years ago a devotee from Mylapore who witnessed the festival has left a short account of his trip from Mylapore to Vailankanni. This letter will certainly throw light to the reader of this research work to understand the unchanging festival customs of the Vailankanni Church.

Vailankanni 6.9.1892

“To the Editor – Mylapore Catholic Register”

“Sir, I presume to offer you for insertion into the Mylapore Catholic Register, if you deem it worth laying before your numerous readers.

I took the Egmore train on the above date at 5 p.m. and arrived here on the 31st August ......................after a tedious journey on the SIR up to Nagapattinam .................... During the present festival the place is literally over crowded with people who have flocked here from distant parts to join the celebration of the festival and to make their vows and
other religious offerings .......... I joined in the Car procession. There were five beautiful-got-up Cars containing respectively five statues of saints. The first Car contained the statue of St Michael, the Second that of St Joachim, the third of St Sebastian, the fourth of St Francis Xavier and the fifth a statue of the blessed Virgin Mary of Good Health. This devotion takes place every evening. Every morning during Novena there are about nine or ten masses........ and the Church is filled with worshippers at every Mass ............ A fine body priests I find these clergymen (Sic. Clergymen to be kind sociable and obliging ............ I admit the orderly way in which the religious services in this church are daily conducted. The devotion of the assembled multitudes ..........is almost conducted. The devotion of the assembled multitudes .......... is almost incredible; whilst the gold and silver and other offerings made by Catholics, Non-Catholics, Hindus and so many others, exceed all that I had ever seen before ............ I feel confident that through the intercession of this great Lady my prayers shall be heard and my visit here rewarded”.

As the age old festival custom of Vailankanni Church the number of chariots being carried by the devotees, and the particular statues of the saints with which they are carried remain the same till today. Thus the church administration keeps up the ancient tradition with respect and devotion. On 6th and 7th September, on the peak days of the grand feast of Vailankanni Matha, a bigger chariot is included in the procession, and it is a great feast to the countless eyes to see its crawling on the sea of heads with colourful

113 Mylaporean, Mylapore Catholic Register, Mylapore Archives, 1892, n.p.
illumination and flowers. In fact, the devotees from different parts of the nation and abroad flock to this place to have the gracious glimpse of the wonderful festival of Vailankanni Arockia Matha.\textsuperscript{114}

The grand car procession which starts at 8.00 p.m. from the entrance of the main church, is led through the Beach road, Ariyanattu street and reached the church after an hour. A good number of pious devotees from various parts of India, form their groups, recite the Rosary and sing the praises of Mary in their respective vernacular languages and follow the car procession with great devotion and overwhelmed joy in their hearts.\textsuperscript{115}

\textbf{Faith is the cause of Devotion and Miracles}

Faith is a basic necessity in Christianity and it plays a vital role in the spiritual life of the devotees of Vailankanni. It is because of their strong faith the pilgrims pay their homage and offer faith ardent prayers to the deity in Vailankanni. Faith is the most important factor that generates love for God in the hearts of mankind. Miracles occur in Vailankanni just because of the faith of the pilgrims. Therefore it is appropriate to discuss about the faith which is intrinsically connected with both devotion and miracles in Vailankanni.

\textbf{Meaning of Faith}

Paul defines faith as “the substance of things to be hoped for, the evidence of that appears not.”\textsuperscript{116} According to Thomas Aquinas, the act of believing the act of faith is the assent of the intellect under the notion of the will; both intellect and will are involved in the act of faith. Thomas Aquinas,

\textsuperscript{114} Dhinamani, Madurai edition on 1\textsuperscript{st} September 2002, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{115} Interview with A. Aruldoss, Church Office, Vailankanni on 11\textsuperscript{th} September 2006.
\textsuperscript{116} The Holy Bible, NT, Hebrews 11:1, King James Version, p. 1251.
one of the leading theologians of the Catholic Church states the difference between the act of faith and the virtue of faith. He opines that the virtue of faith is a habit of the intellect. Faith thus resides in the intellect which assents to truth and holds onto it possessively.

Faith in itself is one virtue, and it is also one in its constant of truths, that is in its object. Of course, there is subjective distinction between John’s faith and Raja’s faith; in as much as these are two individual persons, each with his own faith. But the faith itself is one and the same, whether, it be in John or Raja. Therefore, Paul in the Bible says: “One Lord, one faith, one baptism”.

**Cause of Faith**

According to Thomas Aquinas, a famous theologian of the Catholic Church, the truths of the supernatural faith surpass the power of human reason to discover. Man is moved inwardly by grace to accept what is divinely proposed for belief. Therefore, faith is infused into the soul by almighty God. God is the cause of faith. Thus faith is a gift of God. Even lifeless or formless faith, which is not the virtue of faith, is God’s gift. For a gift is a gift, even when it is mistrusted and spoiled by the receiver.

**Effects of faith**

Faith makes the man aware of God’s omnipotent power and exuberant presence. It is mainly faith that motivates the pilgrims to throng to this holy shrine Vailankanni in order to submit their petitions and to offer ardent prayers. Intrinsically induced by faith and with total trust, the visitors pay their homage

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to Our Lady of Good Health in Vailankanni. Thus some of pilgrims experience miracles in their life, just because of their tremendous and inexplicable faith in God. Faith raises the heart and reason to the love of God, and so takes away or lessen the tendency to cling to creatural goods. Thus another effect of faith of is purifying of the heart. Jesus Christ said in the Sermon on the Mount, “Blessed the poorer in heart for they shall see God”. Faith facilitates the man to purify his heart and thus leads him to have the God experience in his life.

**Miracles**

The intervention of God in the history of man is propagated in many religious traditions and theological teachings. The remarkable event of the incarnation itself is considered as a great miracle. According to the Bible, Jesus who was born of the Blessed Virgin Mary did tremendous wonders on earth in order to redeem the mankind from the clutches of sin and death. He was crucified for the (cause of the) salvation of the world and the Bible says that he rose again from the dead miraculously. With great expectations and deep faith in their hearts, people from all over the world travel to this Holy Shrine Vailankanni in order to obtain the showers of blessings from God through the blessed Mother of Jesus Christ. The devotees and tourists who pray with simple but deep faith to receive favours in a miracles and inexplicable way. Let now discuss the meaning of miracle, the criteria for a miracle, miracles which Jesus performed miracles of Mother Mary and register in this study some of the selected miracles that occurred in Vailankanni right from the origin of the Holy Shrine to till today.

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120 The Holy Bible, NT, Mathew 5:8, King James Version, p. 994.  
121 The Holy Bible, Theological Publications, Bangalore, p.29.
Meaning of Miracle

According to the new concise Catholic Dictionary, miracles are marvelous events or extraordinary, observable moments that cannot be fully explained by natural laws and circumstances and in which God’s unlimited, caring power and saving presence to the humanity are manifested in a purposeful and striking way\textsuperscript{122}. Catholic tradition emphasizes that Jesus of Nazareth had miraculous powers and, by the power of God’s loving spirit, was empowered to perform a number of miraculous signs and works, such as healing the sick, calming the raging sea, feeding a large gathering of individuals (with very little food available) and raising back to life some persons who had already died. The word derives from Latin words \textit{miraculam}, ‘a marvel’ and \textit{mirari}, ‘to wonder’\textsuperscript{123}.

Many religions and culture have spoken of miracles and wondrous signs attributable directly to transcendent power. The Holy Bible tells about the various kinds of miraculous events, through which, Yahweh revealed His support for certain individuals or groups. For example, the Bible says that Abraham, Jacob, Moses and Elijah each were gifted with direct revelations from God. Plagues befell on those who persecuted the Israelites. Miraculous healings, stunning visions and mysterious deliverance were granted to some in need. The Christian scriptures indicate that the apostles, other disciples and eventually the primitive Christian communities all came to truly understand who Jesus of Nazareth was, and what his mission was about, through the miraculous signs and wonders he worked. The Gospel of John says that true

\textsuperscript{123} \textit{Ibid}, p.189.
believers recognized in particular signs\textsuperscript{124} (e.g., healings) that Jesus had been revealed to be the Messiah. The Acts of the Apostles says that many close followers of the risen Jesus worked miraculous signs during the apostolic era. Hence there is no doubt that the miraculous Mother of Good Health in Vailankanni who is closely related and connected with Jesus as his Mother has the power in doing wonders for the pilgrims.

**Catholic teachings on Miracles**

Much of contemporary Catholic teaching on miracles can be traced back to the First Vatican Council (1870). Vatican I declared that the miraculous deeds performed by Jesus of Nazareth were signs of God’s revelation in him. Vatican II later recognized Jesus’ miracles in its document *Dei Verbum* (Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation). It identified the contemporary Catholic teaching that certain marvelous, miraculous events (or signs) did occur during Jesus’ earthly ministry, but that it is difficult to identify or prove in a scientific way just what happened during these events.\textsuperscript{125}

Some people today choose to dismiss the whole notion of biblical miracles, saying they didn’t really occur. Others interpret them fundamentally saying they happened exactly as reported in the Holy Bible. And still others seem to hold that is it not at all important if they actually took place or not; what really counts is faith in God’s saving power, care, and revelation, which the biblical miracle stories express. The Catholic community teaches that Jesus of Nazareth worked miracles and that biblical miracle stories can help deepen the faith of the Christians. According to Mathew the miracles were an essential

\textsuperscript{124} *The Holy Bible*, NT, John 20:30-31, King James Version, p. 1126.

\textsuperscript{125} Reynolds R. Ekstrom, *op. cit.*, p. 190.
element in Jesus’ disclosure of the Kingdom of God, and everlasting good news of hope in it\(^{126}\). Among the many miracles reported in the doctrines of the Church, the greatest miraculous event was the resurrection of Jesus by God.

**Criteria for to be a Miracle**

These words are used in the Gospels to describe Jesus’ miracles:

A. *Teras*, meaning marvel, something that amazes people (Mk 2:12)\(^{127}\)

B. *Dunamys*, meaning power (Mk. 5: 30)\(^{128}\)

C. *Semeion*, meaning sign: people asking what does it mean.

When someone has a narrow escape in an accident, one say that he / she had a miraculous escape. In daily life, when an unexpected good thing occurs, one thinks it is a miracle. To be a miracle;

1. The event must be visible

2. It must be beyond the powers of nature so that one say that God intervenes, and

3. The event must have a message from God.\(^{129}\)

**Visibility**

A miracle must be an externally visible event. The miracles of Jesus walking on the water\(^{130}\), changing water into wine,\(^{131}\) instantaneous healing of lepers\(^{132}\) etc are visible events. Changes of attitudes, intentions, emotions etc, are really more radical personal changes; but they are external to the person and one cannot observe them; so they are not strictly miracles.

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\(^{126}\) The Holy Bible, Theological Publications, Bangalore, p.10.

\(^{127}\) Ibid, p.34.

\(^{128}\) Ibid, p.38.


\(^{130}\) Ibid, p.15

\(^{131}\) Ibid, p.90

\(^{132}\) Ibid, p.33.
They should go beyond the powers of nature

Miracles are such radical changes. Sometimes instantaneous – with no such similar happenings in the past. These changes cannot be the result of man’s efforts or powers of nature. They require God’s special intervention. Such events are miracles. Modern medical sciences and psychology show that the mind and the body are so intimately connected and influence each other, that by worrying, a person gets psychosomatic diseases like ulcer, eczema, hypertension, enlargement of heart etc.

Similarly, these ailments can be gradually or even instantly cured. One does not need to call them miracles. Fr T. Joseph Srinivasan opines that some of the miracles of Jesus Christ belong to the above said category. Simple people look up to leaders as little gods; their feelings reach such a pitch that they get hysterical when they see them, run after them to be near them, touch them (political leaders or sports stars). Mob psychology takes over. At the stage people become very susceptible to suggestions, they forget their hunger and thirst, and even their ailments vanish. “They have been with me for three days and now have nothing do eat”. There was a tinge of hero worship in the crowds that followed Jesus for three days.

The event signifies a divine message

Jesus did not work miracles for magical effect. In every miracle Jesus had a message for the people in their surroundings. His miracles were performed in an atmosphere of faith. The woman who touched the hem of Jesus’ robe was instantly cured. Jesus explicitly praised the faith of the people

133 The Holy Bible, NT, Mathew, 15:32, King James Version, p. 1009.
who sought his help to work miracles. To a Roman soldier, he said; “I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with faith like this …. Go home, and what you believe will be done for you”.\footnote{Ibid, p. 998. (Mt 8:12)} When a paralyzed man was lowered from the roof, ‘seeing how much faith they had’\footnote{The Holy Bible, NT, Mark 2.5, King James Version, p. 1031.} Jesus cured him. Crowds in the market place begged him to let them at least touch the hem of His cloak; and all who touched  it were made well.

On the contrary, in his own village, Nazareth, “He could not work any miracles there except that he placed his hands on a few sick people and healed them. He was greatly surprised, because the people did not have faith”.\footnote{Ibid, p. 1037. (Mk 6:5-6)}

A miracle is a sign relative to its time. Events which are extraordinary at one period of time may become ordinary events with the advance of science. What is not experienced now may be explained later. If miracles were a proof, it would be dishonest of God to take advantage of the ignorance ‘to grab them’. Because it is a sign, the supporting evidence is not important. One can read in the Holy Bible, Joshua “when those who bore the art had come to the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the brink of the water… the waters coming down from above stood and rose up in a heap far off, at Adam, the city that is beside Zarothan.\footnote{The Holy Bible, OT, Joshua 3; 15-16, King James Version, p. 251.} One knows that due to an earthquake the waters of Jordan were blocked at Adamah twice in history, once in AD 1276 for 12 hours and again in 1927 for 21 hours\footnote{Interview with Fr. Roche, SJ., St. Joseph’s College, Tiruchirapalli, 2.10.2007.}. Through similar natural phenomenon God the Father revealed his loving and saving power for all the mankind.
Miracles and Mother Mary

Right in the beginning of the ministry of Jesus Christ, it was Mother Mary who was the cause of the first miracle of Jesus at Cana in Palestine. Till today Mary’s role in obtaining the graces for the devotees is remarkable and great. In an article titled “The Enduring Mystery of Mary” published in October 2006 issue of Reader’s Digest, Susan Machlland states about Mother Mary by relating a miracle that was supposed to have taken place in 626 AD through the intervention of Mary. Heraclius, the Byzantine Emperor had left the capital, Constantinople, to fight the Persians in Asia Minor. Taking advantage of his absence, the Avars, a nomadic race from the Volga river area, attacked Constantinople. But they were unable to defeat the Capital. The reason for their failure, according to some, was the military maneuvers by Heraclius abroad. But the more popular version given for the retreat of the nomads was the miraculous intervention of Mary. According to this version of history, a Byzantine official of high rank circled Constantinople, hoisting a painting of Mary. And when he dipped a gown purportedly worn by Mary into the sea, a storm arose and engulfed the enemy’s ships.

Besides this miracle, it was believed that Mary had saved Constantinople from many other disasters. Consequently, churches were built in Mary’s honour and Marian icons, including figurines and paintings, were widely circulated. While Byzantine may have been the first civilization to view Mary as their heavenly protectress, Russia, Poland, Italy and Mexico were soon to follow suit. And so, since the 5th century AD Mary has been a figure of great power and devotion the world over. The author, quoting the words of Jessy Pagliaroli of the Centre for Study of Religion at the University of Toronto
says, “Mary has ever been a patroness of war, and opposing armies fought each other under the separate banners of Mother Mary.”

**Museum of Offerings**

According to the Greek theologians, “God became man so that man might become God”. The belief of the Catholic Church is that Christ, the son of God, the great savior and healer of all disease, was born of Blessed Virgin Mary that the entire mankind may be released from the clutches of sin and sickness, and get transformed into divine nature. Arockia Matha, endowed with the same healing power of Jesus, she stands as mediator and interceder, to plead to God, that he may shower his benevolent and gracious blessings upon the devotees of Vailankanni Arockia Matha. As a token of love and gratitude the pilgrims who experienced great miracles and blessings of God, have offered a great number of articles made of gold and silver. Those articles are exhibited in the museum that is located in front of the main Church.

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**From the Museum Offerings**

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141 Virgin Mary is a Catholic belief that Mary Mother of Jesus is ever virgin.
142 Interview with Fr A. Xavier, Vicar General, Bishop’s House, Thanjavur on 27th November 2006.
The museum building was constructed in the year 1971. Earlier, three rooms in the priest’s residence were used as museum offerings. The present museum building is designed as a structure with RCC columns, beams and slabs. The building is two storied; ground floor is rented out for shops. In the first floor the museum is provided containing a great number of valuable offering made of gold, silver, iron and wood. A book stall is also arranged. Walls are constructed with country mortar, all wooden members are country wood, flooring is finished with ellis pattern. Height of ceiling is 9.25 feet. Inside and outside walls are painted with cement paint. All wood and iron members are painted with synthetic enamel paint.

\[\text{From the Museum Offering}\]

Area of the Museum : 10,545 Sq. ft
Cost of the construction : Rs 31,63,500\(^{143}\)

In 1987 the burglars, at midnight entered into the museum utilizing the free area besides the building and jumped in side the hall through the ventilator and broke opened the show case of jewels worth 2 lakhs. In 1989, the stolen

\(^{143}\) Auditors Report, Church Office, Vailankanni.
gold offerings were recovered by a band of police under the able initiative, ability and leadership of Srinivasan, IPS, Thanjavur. There are 12 watchmen work in the museum in two shifts.\textsuperscript{144}

\begin{figure}
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\caption{From the Museum Offering}
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Interesting information to the reader of the research work is in the museum of offerings one can find three large coconuts (skin un removed) and two pieces of bamboos at the length of 2 ft. these coconuts and bamboos, filled with some offerings and sealed with wax were sent from Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Java and Sumathra islands. When those offerings, addressed to Arockia Matha Church reached the shore at Vailankanni the priests were informed, they went to the seashore said the prayers, brought them to the church, and have kept in the museum.\textsuperscript{145} How did, those offerings reach the shore at Vailankanni, through the roaring sea? Most probably, the devotees of Arockia Matha who were unable to come from those islands might have sent their offering through the ships which pass by Vailankanni – Nagapattinam shore. Since the sea is not that deep for a ship to be harboured, the sea men might have thrown those

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{144} A. Antony Rosario, Vailankanni Sila Varalatru Unmaigal, Namm Vazhv, 1993, p. 3.
\item \textsuperscript{145} Ibid, p. 5.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
offerings from far after identifying the Vailankanni shore, and thus those offerings of coconuts and bamboos offerings are found in the museum.

**Universal love of Mother Mary**

Through the marvelous and instantaneous miracles Our Lady of Good Health in Vailankanni radiates her universal love and a concern for the whole mankind. People from world over travel to this Holy Shrine in Vailankanni to experience impartial and universal love of Mother of God. She extends her hand of grace to all who touch her feet with faith. Discrimination is not found in the dictionary of Mary. Thus Vailankanni stands as an existential and excellent proof by which Mary is shown for her indiscriminate and universal love. The researcher is privileged and proud to register some of the miracles of Our Lady of Vailankanni.

**Sailors from far away country**

According to the oral tradition, in the era of Portuguese navigation (i.e. in the 17th century AD), a Portuguese merchant vessel sailing from Macao (China) to Cyon was caught in a terrible storm. Only divine intervention could save the sailors in such calamity. They all, trembling with fear, knelt down and invoked Our Lady the Star of the Sea to save them and their vessel. Very soon the storm subsided and the sea become calm and their vessel landed on the shore of Vailankanni. It was on the 8th of September, the birthday of Our Lady of Vailankanni. They entered the small church of Our Lady and thanked profusely for saving them from the storm. In grateful remembrance they made a vow to build a bigger church and beautify her altar.

On their next visit, they completed the new chapel and the altar was decorated with porcelain plates, which they had bought, illustrating biblical
scenes. These plates are giving testimony to Our Lady of Vailankanni. The above said miracle, which is believed to be the cause for the origin of the Vailankanni shrine.

A Non Christian Boy and Mother Mary

Every morning a shepherd boy went with milk pot to Nagapattinam, a town about 12 kms from Vailankanni to supply the milk to his customer. One day, on the way he reached the tank near Anna Pillai Street in Vailankanni. On the tank there stood a large banyan tree. Keeping his milk pot close to him, he took rest under the banyan tree. Amidst the wind and the rays of dazzling light he opened his eyes and to his great surprise, he had a vision of a beautiful lady asked him if he could give some milk to her child. Filled with fear and joy, he offered the milk. No oral message was communicated to the boy, except the sweet motherly smile in her face.

Resuming his journey, he reached Nagapattinam where the master was harsh of him for being late with the pot not quite full. He received the milk in haste to feed his hungry child. He found the milk surging up to the brim and flowering over. To his astonishment he learned from the boy what took place on his way. Both hastened to the tank, the spot of Our Lady’s apparition, which even today is called, “Our Lady’s Tank”. The news soon spread everywhere and the devotion to the heavenly mother took note in the hearts of the people.

Mother’s love for the poor and needy

A few years later, Mother Mary appeared to a lame Hindu boy. In Vailankanni there was a central high place called Nadu Thittu (Where a chapel

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146 Interview with Mgr. SL Gabriel, Former Bishop of Tiruchirappalli, on 30th November 2006.
147 Interview with Fr Xavier, Rector, Vailankanni, on 28th October 2006.
has been erected recently), where a fig tree was giving shelter to the travelers in the scorching sun. The mother of the lame boy used to leave him everyday under the tree to sell buttermilk to thirsty travelers. One summer day, the heat was seen glowing from the sand. Sitting all alone, the boy suddenly saw a light brighter than the sun approaching him. Fear gripped his heart and he began to shout for help. But soon his fear disappeared as he saw a lady in splendor with her child in her arm. She smiled at him with great affection and said, “Please give me some drink”. The boy offering drink, fell prostrate before her. The vision continued, “I have chosen this place to shower blessings on my children in this country”. She then directed him to go to Nagapattinam and inform certain Catholic gentleman to build a church on that spot. Sadness prevailing in his face, he replied, “How am I to walk, for I am lame!” Mother Mary smiled and said, “Arise and carryout my request”. The boy felt new strength in his legs and jumped with great joy. This miracle spread confidence, love and great devotion towards the heavenly mother among the people. They began to call Mother Mary as Mother of Health (Arockia Matha).

The Catholic gentleman had a similar dream previous night, in which the same request was made by Mother Mary. A small church was erected on the spot indicated, and a beautiful statue, similar to the apparition was placed on the altar. People soon began to gather from different places to worship and to obtain favours from Our Lady of Health at Vailankanni.148

In this wonderful manner the glory of Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ and the Mother of all the peoples of the world, is spreading from Vailankanni.

148 Interview with T. Sargunam, Vailankanni, on 26th October 2006.
It is she who proves herself to be the mother of health both of soul and body of every human being.

And it is a point of pride in this country that only here in Vailankanni Our Lady appeared to non-Christian children and through them she has shown the maternal care and affection to the people in India and abroad.

**Lame by birth gets up and walks**

Selvaraj and S. Maria Arputham, Chettivillai, Periathalai Post, Tuticorin district report that their daughter Maria Hilda Mary, who lame by birth and was given up by doctors as incurable was miraculous cured of her disability by Our Lady of Good Health Vailankanni and they have offered two silver legs in fulfillment of their promises.

**Miraculous Escape**

Konda Reddy owns Eves Beauty Clinic, Pattabipuram 3rd Line, Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh states that on their return journey from Vailankanni they met with a miracle by the intervention of Our Lady of Vailankanni. On Diwali festival day, 7th November 1999, as they were traveling by train his son Pradheep studying ninth class was standing near the door and watching the sceneries out side. Unexpectedly he slipped from the fast running (50 km ph) train and fell down between the railway platform and the bogies at the station of Venkatagiri, Andhra Pradesh. Seeing the tragedy people in the train pulled the chain and stopped the train. By that time 8 bogies had passed him. Everyone thought that the boy was smashed to pieces and was dead. To the great surprise of all, when they took the boy Pradheep out of the track, he was

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149 Interview with Sr Nirmala, Tuticorin, 22nd September 2006.
unharmed but was only unconscious. Within two minutes he regained consciousness.

To the thrill of all around him (some hundred persons) and to the tears of joy of his parents he narrated his experience. As he fell down from the train one of his legs was on the track. He wanted to get up without knowing the critical position he was in but someone held him tightly and pressed him down. Raising his eyes he saw Our Blessed Mother Vailankanni next to him. It is a real life experience of the Heavenly Mother’s physical assistance which neither ordinary people nor the doctors here could believe. Konda Reddy, the father of the boy says’ “Our whole family is much indebted to Vailankanni Matha.

**Childbirth after 10 years**

Prabukumar and Krishnaveni reside at No. B.13, Des Housin’s Colony, Indra Nagar (New Land), Domtur, Bangalore – 71, narrated that they did not have children for the past ten years after marriage. They were much worried but prayed to Our Lady of Good Health in Vailankanni for a child. With the help of the Blessed Mother Mary they had a pretty female child on 15th January 1998. On 28th December 1998 they came to the shrine to give thanks to Our Heavenly Mother who wiped away their tears and bitterness in their life.150

**Recovers the lost sight**

Juje Basteav Dias, Kodibair Temple, Behind KEB Office, Karwar – 581 301 told that on 23rd August 1990 he met with an accident and lost his eye sight, he consulted many eye-specialists. But they gave him no hope of recovery. Then he turned to Our Lady of Good Health for help. On 1st

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150 Interview with Mgr. SL Gabriel, Former Bishop of Tiruchirappalli on 3rd October 2006.
September 1990 he regained the gift of seeing images. He thanked Our Lady of Vailankanni for the miraculous favour and presented a gold chain as a token of gratitude.\textsuperscript{151}

**Tumor in the stomach disappears**

Jonathan, after a fortnight of his birth started throwing up a lot of milk. Barely, he was fed he would bring it all out. His mother C. Michael, ITC Limited, 93/T Karl Marx Sarani, Calcutta – 700 043, stated that the family doctor advised them to take the baby to a child specialist. But specialist was unable to do anything. In the middle of January 2000, they took the baby to a paediatric surgeon. He asked them to take an X-ray. The X-ray report revealed the existence of a tumor in the stomach. The doctors advised surgery. While they were running from pillar to post for a correct diagnosis, Jonathan’s grandmother had been praying to Our Lady of Vailankanni and asked Our Blessed Mother to heal the baby of any tumor he may have and save him from surgery.

The doctors could not understand how the baby was putting on weight in spite of throwing up milk since he was fifteen days old. Our Blessed Mother of Good Health was taking care of baby Jonathan all along.

After further investigations conducted by way of Ultra Sonography and Barium Meal X-ray, it was found out that there was no tumor in the stomach. The doctors were astonished at the findings. Jonathan is healthy, his parents are grateful to our Blessed Mother and in thanksgiving, they enclosed it small mite

\textsuperscript{151} Interview with Sr Selva Mary, Museum of Offerings, Vailankanni, on 3\textsuperscript{rd} October 2006.
of Rs 500/- vide cheque No. 211644 dated 24th February 2000 drawn at State Bank of India.  

**Boat turned turtle but men saved**

P. Elias and Rajakani went to sea from Kombuthurai, Kayalpattinam, Tuticorin. When they were about 45 kms away from shore were caught in a storm and rising waves sunk the boat. They appealed to Our Blessed Mother in Vailankanni. After two days of struggle in the sea, they were able to get to shore. They say, “it is a second life given by Mother of Good Health”. They thank her profusely.  

**Blessed with a child 25 years after marriage**

At Kallori near Kangeyam, Palanichami and Perumayee married in 1972 had no issue for the last 25 years. They perseveringly to Our Blessed Virgin Mary in Vailankanni. Finally they were blessed with a girl child whose date of birth is 3rd September 1998.  

**Boats safely brought to shore**

On 27th November 1998, two steam boats TU 186 and TU 266 started from Bamban port on its way to Port Blair, Andamans with captain Amalraj and Engineer Alexander Susaiah a crew of 10 were in the boat. At 6.00 PM on 28th November 1998 the crew came to Vailankanni by sea and prayed. They started their voyage towards Andamans. On 2nd December 1998, at about 6.00 PM diesel ran out and the engine became useless. They were struggling until 5th December 1998. Nobody including big ships cared to help them. On 6th...
December 1998, praying to Our Lady of Vailankanni, they set the masts fly. The boats took their own course. Nobody was able to know the direction to which they were taken. They had food but no water. Blessed Virgin Mary brought the rain which helped them for cooking and drinking. Meanwhile their two boats separated on 12\textsuperscript{th} December 1998 still without losing hope they kept on praying to Our Lady. On 17\textsuperscript{th} December 1998 they could see light from the shore. On 18\textsuperscript{th} December 1998 the two boats came to one and the same place, and they were overjoyed to find the place of their arrival at the southern shore of Nagapattinam which is very near to Vailankanni.\textsuperscript{155}

**Mother of Mercy**

The holy Mother Mary shows herself as the Mother of Mercy in her apparitions, “A mother does not forget her children. I have not forgotten you, all you who are suffering”. Message at Guapa (Nicaragua), 8\textsuperscript{th} October 1980. “I wish the sick and all my children to come to this miraculous well. Your mission is now here amidst the sick and all who need your help”. Message at Fontanalle dated 17\textsuperscript{th} April 1966.

Our Lady of Guadalupe (meaning one who crushed the head of the serpent) said to Juan Diego; “Here I will show my love and compassion for all who seek my aid. Here I will comfort those who are sorrowful and be with those trials are the greatest”.\textsuperscript{156}

“Go to her, beloved invalids and inform, you who are crushed by maternal misery, defenseless against the hardships of life and the

\textsuperscript{155} Interview with Susiah, Bamban, 3\textsuperscript{rd} June 2006.

\textsuperscript{156} Interview with Fr Antony Joseph OFM, Chhattisgarh, on 9\textsuperscript{th} September 2006
indifference of men. Go to her, you who are mourning and assailed by moral trials”

“Vailankanni attracts”, says Pope John Paul II, “Not only Christian Pilgrims but also many followers of other religions, especially Hindus, who see in Our Lady of Good Health, the caring and compassionate mother of suffering humanity”.

In various places of the world, Mary has appeared to the devotees with certain message. There was no message given here in Vailankanni except that of building a chapel to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Our Lady really meant to establish her reign in Vailankanni. For the chapel is not meant to be left there as a monument commemorating the apparition; but the chapel must be a house of prayer. In accordance with the wish of the Blessed Mother pilgrims come in crowds and pray for her compassionate intercession. Prayer and penance get the top most importance in Vailankanni. In obedience to Our Lady’s with people here recite many rosaries. The penance is done by passing the whole distance from the shrine to Our Lady’s Tank by kneeling or rowling. The construction of a beautiful reconciliation chapel is a standing proof for the conversion of souls. That is the wonderful fruit of the apparitions at Vailankanni.

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