Palackal Thoma Malpan [മല്പാൻ ടോമ മല്പാൻ] (b. circa 1780 at [South] Pallippuram [പാലീപ്പുരം], near Shertallay [ഷെർട്ടല്ലല്‍], in Alleppey [ആല്പില്‍], Kingdom of Travancore [ത്രാവാന്ത്രേ], d. there, † 16th January 1841) was an illustrious secular priest [മല്പാനം] from the Catholic Church of St. Thomas [സൗരോ-മലബാർ വിഭാഗം] then under the Vicariate of Verapoly [വെരാപോല്ല്] and later under the Archbishopric of Ernakulam [േകാണ്ട് ആര്ക്യബിസിപ്പ്] (to which the preponderance of St. Thomas Christian priests and seminarians wearing cassocks [മലൂവും കാസ്കോറും] near Kottayam [കോട്ടയം]) denote his status as a preceptor of priests.

After his ordination in 1807 consequent to studies under Thachil Abraham Malpan [തച്ചിൽ ആധ്യാത്മിക മലൂന്‍] (the younger brother of Thachil Thariyath Matthoo Tharakan, Esq. [തച്ചിൽ താരിയാത് മത്തൂ താരക്കൻ], d. there, † 16th January 1841) was an illustrious secular priest [മല്പാൻ] (from the Syriac word malpānâ, denotes his status as a preceptor of priests.)

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As secretary and counsellor, he was instrumental to several reforms in the Catholic Church of Kerala: the practice of St. Thomas Christian priests and seminarians wearing cassocks [മലൂവും കാസ്കോറും] was made obligatory in all churches; walled cemeteries [വെട്ടുകൊട്ടുപാത്രങ്ങള്‍] were built for all churches (earlier, the dead had been buried in the open compound); and confraternities [സൊണ്ട്രിലോക്ക് മാധ്യം] were started in the St. Thomas Christian churches borrowing the custom from the Latin churches in Kerala; the custom of episcopal visits [അവാർഡോ വിസിസി] was made obligatory in all churches; the practice of confessional [പോഷണം] was introduced (previously, they had dressed in a way resembling the Jacobite clerics); the custom of diocesan visitation [ധിയോസിനി വിടെജ്യ്] to parishes was begun; the confessional [പോഷണം] was made obligatory in all churches; walled cemeteries [വെട്ടുകൊട്ടുപാത്രങ്ങള്‍] were built for all churches (earlier, the dead had been buried in the open compound); and confraternities [സൊണ്ട്രിലോക്ക് മാധ്യം] were started in the St. Thomas Christian churches borrowing the custom from the Latin churches in Kerala; the confreres [സൊണ്ട്രിലോക്ക് മാധ്യം] assisted the orderly conduct of solemn feasts [അവാർഡോ വിവാഹസം‌ഘടന], funerals, and other ceremonies.

After leaving the position of secretary, he returned to Pallippuram in 1818. Since there were several acolytes desirous of studying for priesthood under him, the Malpan was compelled to start a seminary at Pallippuram, with Mangalath Chandy [മംഗലാത് ചാംട്ടി] of Pallippuram, later secretary and counsellor at Verapoly, as the first student. Among the first to join his seminary was Chavara Kuriakose [ചവര കുരിയാസ്] (1805–1871) of Kainakary [കേയിണ്ടാരാഡി], later Vicar-General for the St. Thomas Christians at Verapoly, then aged 13; the Malpan brought him up as if he were a son and considered him the spiritual heir. Seeking to bring order to the seminary, he wrote a regula [അവാർഡോ രീഗുലാ] for the seminarians, following it himself more stringently than all else. Even otherwise, he had kept an austere routine and diet from his early years.

Considering teaching and scholarship as his vocation, the Malpan devoted his life to that aim. He took particular care that his seminary had an exemplary collection of books, especially modern books in Tamil and the few in Malayalam, printed chiefly by members of the Society of Jesus. He had a special interest in languages. Learning Tamil on his own, he translated the spiritual books in Tamil into Malayalam; as a consequence he began to be called in jest the ‘Tamil Malpan’. He asked his students to scribe all the books they considered valuable, including liturgical books in Syriac. These may have inspired his disciple Fr. Chavara to start a Malayalam printing press at Mannanam, only the third of its kind in Kerala, in 1844. The Malpan also took every care to have his able students learn other languages such as Latin, sometimes from European priests.

Since his early years the Malpan seems to have cherished the notion of a Cœnobite Order of the Dominican kind; his experiences in running the seminary might have strengthened the resolve. In this endeavour he found an eager and able collaborator in Porukara Thoma Kathanar [പോറുകര തോമ കഥനാർ] (1799–1846) of Kalloorkad [കലൂര്‍കരാഡ്], Champakulam [ചാമ്പക്‌ജുളം] (to which the Malpan’s maternal family, Puthenpurackal [പുത്തെ പൂർബ്ബേക്], also belonged), who had known and admired the Malpan since his days as a seminarian. As for Fr. Chavara, as he says in his Chronicles [ചെറിചൈനിക്സ്], he had always been of one mind with his Malpan in all matters. With the blessing of the Bishop Mgr. Maurelio Stabellini, O. Carm., Vicar-Apostolic during 1828–1831, the Monastery [മല്പാനം] was founded at Mannanam on 11th May 1831.

Two years later, the Malpan started a seminary at Mannanam to teach priests both secular and religious; a new movement in the spiritual formation of St. Thomas Christian clergy, this became the cradle for several priests and bishops such as Mar Louis Pareparambil [മലൂവ് പാറപ്പെറാമ്പില്‍], Mar Matthew Makil [മലൂവ് മത്തീയ മകിൽ], and Mar Augustine Kandathil [മലൂവ് അഷ്ടീനൂസ് കാന്താതില്‍], from the St. Thomas Christians.

He passed away in 1841 and was buried at the main altar in the Forane Church of St. Mary, Pallippuram (connected by tradition with the apostolate of St. Thomas in South India); judging from the account of Fr. Chavara, the funeral was worthy of a bishop.

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