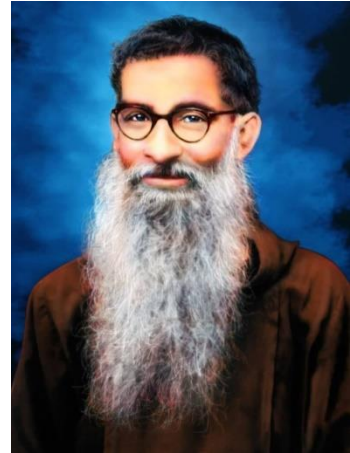


## The Man with the Hand of God

-Ebin Pappachan Attapparambil OFM Cap

“How can someone be like this?” — This is a question people often ask in amazement about certain individuals. It is usually said in two very different contexts: either when witnessing an extraordinarily holy and exemplary life, or when someone falls far below the standards of ordinary humanity, becoming almost inhuman or foolish.



When people remember Fr Theophane, it is always in the first sense—deeply positive and filled with admiration. If one were to ask, “How did he become like this?” there is only one answer: **the hand of God was with him**. That is why, even after many years, Fr Theophane remains an unforgettable presence in our hearts—*Manushyasnehi*— a radiant flame of love for humanity, which is, in kernel, the love of God for the humanity (cf. Jn 3:16).

Memory must be profoundly important, for Jesus himself said: “*Do this in memory of me*” (Lk 22:19). To truly remember someone is not a trivial matter; it requires intimacy and deep affection. Among the many people dear to us, how many do we actually remember daily? In earlier times, during family prayers, when we prayed for the souls of the departed, their faces would come alive in our minds. But as prayer faded from our lives, so did memory. Today, we often fail to remember even the anniversaries of those who once meant so much to us.

Yet, for many, the face of Fr Theophane spontaneously comes to mind. This reveals how deeply loved he was in their lives. He became a landmark in our hearts—a living sign of holiness, love, and hope. And the reason is simple: **he was a man accompanied by the hand of God**.

From the time I came to the Ponnurunni Ashram in 1998, Fr Theophane captured my heart. During vocation camp, Fr. Andrews, the vocation promoter, would share many stories about Fr Theophane and would take us to pray at his tomb. Later, during my seminary years and even afterwards, every visit to Ponnurunni included a stop at his blessed tomb—a source of deep peace for my soul.

One particular incident from his life stands out vividly in my memory. He was once on his way somewhere in Kochi to perform a blessing—if I am not mistaken, an exorcism. He walked there prayerfully. At Thoppumpady bridge, a group of people mocked him and behaved rudely. Calmly, he said to them, “Stay here until I return.” Until he came back, they found themselves unable to move, as if their feet were fixed to the ground.

This was not an act of punishment. Rather, like the prophet Elijah who shut the heavens for three years to bring people back to God (1 Kgs 17:1–18:46), it was a divine intervention meant to restore faith. That day, they realized that the same **Hand of God** that was with Elijah was also with Fr Theophane (1 Kgs 18:46).

Scripture repeatedly affirms the power of God’s hand. Since the hand of God was with Joseph, he prospered in all things (Gen 39:2–20; 41:9–57). Since it was with Ezra, he could

rejuvenise the people returning from Babylon (Ezra 7:6). The Lord's right hand is always with those who trust in Him (Is 41:10). Fr Theophane trusted deeply in the Lord, and thus God's hand was with him. The Word of God testifies that those specially chosen by the Lord are marked by the presence of His Hand with them. John the Baptist had the Lord's hand upon him (Lk 1:66). The apostles experienced it as they confirmed the Word through signs and wonders (Acts 11:21). In the same way, through his teachings and miracles, Fr Theophane became an instrument through whom the Lord's Hand reached human hearts.

In the history of the Church in Kerala, Capuchin priests have earned a unique place, and Fr Theophane—one of the early Malayali Capuchins—played a significant role in this. Among the people, Capuchin priests are often known as *Pishaachupiduthakkaar*—the exorcists. As one of the early Capuchins in Kerala, Fr Theophane was outstanding in this ministry. His authority over evil spirits became widely known across the region. This deep impression can even be seen in relation with popular culture. In the well-known Malayalam mini-screen serial *Kadamattathu Kathanar*, the famous exorcist priest—though traditionally Orthodox—is depicted not in Orthodox robes, but in the habit of a Capuchin priest. This reflects how deeply the legacy of early Capuchins like Fr Theophane, especially in exorcism ministry, has shaped the cultural imagination of Kerala.

The hand of God was with Fr Theophane to break down the strongholds of Satan. This becomes clearer when we relate it to the ministry of Jesus. When Jesus cast out a demon, some accused him of doing it by the power of Beelzebul. But Jesus replied that He did it **by the hand of God** (Lk 11:20). In Matthew's Gospel, the same is expressed as the *Spirit of God* (Mt 12:28). The early Church described the Holy Spirit as the "right hand of God." In essence, having the hand of God with someone means to be led by the Holy Spirit. Thus, Fr Theophane was a holy soul who, guided by the Spirit—the right hand of the Lord—broke down the strongholds of evil.

Those who have the hand of God with them also have the responsibility to raise their own hands in faith. Just as Aaron and Hur upheld the hands of Moses (Ex 17:12), the Church, by conferring Fr Theophane as *Venerable*, lifts up his hands so that he may intercede for us in our struggles. Walking in holiness by holding firmly to the hand of God is not a calling reserved only for people like Fr Theophane. We too have received the same divine call. For that, Scripture exhorts us: "*Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God...*" (1 Pet 5:6).

May Fr Theophane, the man with the hand of God, intercede for us.