

## Indian Catholic priest who claims parents' sins cause autism in children cancels Australia tour

By [Ben Knight](#)

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Father Dominic Valanmanal claims to have cured autism. (Facebook: Father Dominic Valanmanal)

An Indian Catholic priest who claims to have "cured" autism through prayer and compared autistic children to "animals", has cancelled a planned series of religious retreats in Australia.

Father Dominic Valanmanal was recently forced to cancel similar events in Ireland and Canada, after a video clip appeared online showing him preaching that autism in children was caused by the vice of their parents.

"Adultery, masturbation, homosexuality, porn — if you are addicted to these, I say to you in the name of God ... when you get married and have children, there is a high possibility of bearing these type of children," he said in the video.

"They lead an animal-like life. They copulate like

### Key points:

- Father Dominic Valanmanal was due to hold a sold-out retreat on Phillip Island and another in Canberra
- The Indian Catholic community in Australia hails largely from the Indian state of Kerala, where Father Valanmanal is based
- A campaign to stop his visit was backed by Autism support groups

animals. They bear children like animals. Therefore those children also, will be like animals."

Father Valanmanal — who claims to have "cured" two children in Ireland of autism — had sold out a five-day retreat on Philip Island in September, in which he charged around \$400 per person to attend.

He also had another event scheduled in Canberra.

But yesterday the tour was cancelled.



Binoy Zacharias has an autistic son and led the campaign to stop Father Valanmanal's Australia tour. (ABC News: Danielle Bonica)

A member of Melbourne's Indian Catholic community, and the father of an autistic teenager, Binoy Zacharias said "he should never have been invited in the first place".

Mr Zacharias led the campaign against the priest's visit.

"A lot of people urge me to take my son along to his retreats so that he can be treated," he said.

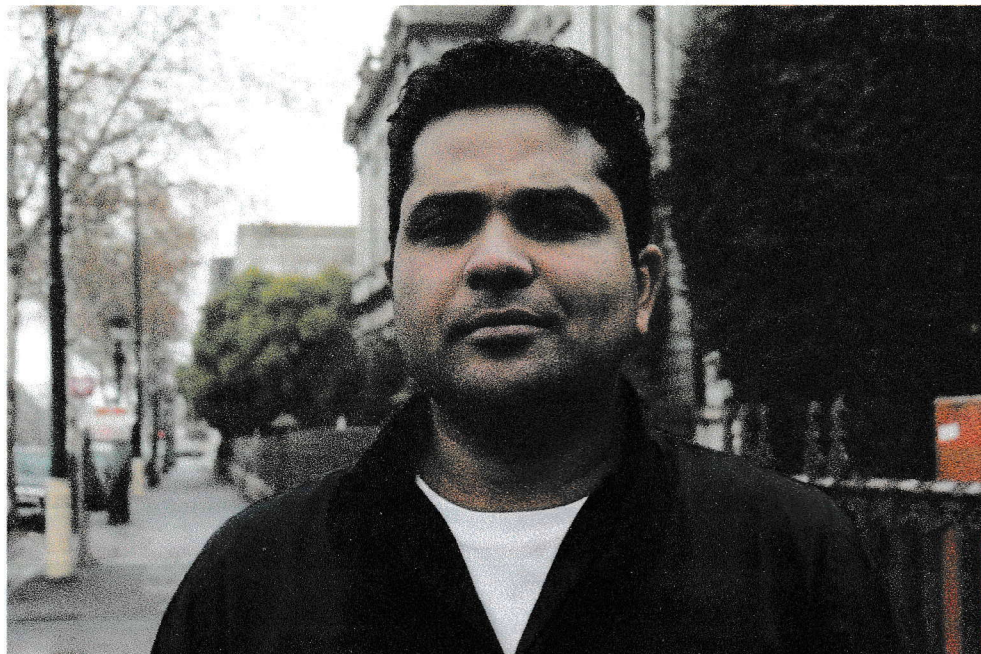
"It makes me very sad. When he says he has removed autism as an evil spirit from families, people take it seriously."

Australia's Indian Catholic community hails largely from the south Indian state of Kerala, where Father Valanmanal is based, and has historically included a large number of health professionals.

"That's what makes the acceptance of his views on autism so upsetting," said Linton Thomas, who is a member of the community in Bendigo and also a social worker.

"It's so sad that they are educated people who are taken in by this.

"And they are the people who will be taking their children along to these retreats hoping for a miracle cure."



Linton Thomas said people who paid for the retreats were hoping for a miracle cure. (ABC Central Victoria: Beth Gibson)

Last month, the Bishop of Calgary cancelled Father Valanmanal's permission to lead a retreat in Canada after community members raised concerns, before apologising and promising a review of the diocese's internal processes.

The campaign against the priest's visit to Australia drew support from the Rationalist Society and the autism advocacy organisation Amaze, both of which wrote to the Archbishop of Melbourne, Peter Comensoli, to raise concerns.

Amaze chief executive Fiona Sharkie told the ABC she was pleased the visit has been cancelled, calling the priest's views "stigmatising, highly offensive and entirely inaccurate".

"Our principal concern is the toll on autistic people, their families and carers, his claims will create if he is provided a public platform," Ms Sharkie said.

The leader of the Australian Syro-Malabar church — a branch of the Catholic church — Bishop Bosco Puthur, told the ABC Father Valanmanal's views were "not the position of the Catholic church".

"That is my position also," Bishop Puthur said.