

ST CHAVARA AND THE MYSTIC ST EUPHRASIA

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Abstract: The author gives an overview of the lives of the twin Carmelite saints Chavara and Euphrasia and their mysticism. After a short life sketch of Euphrasia in the backdrop of the church in shambles, the author moves on to sketch the life of Euphrasia in the convent. She is presented both as a devotee and a disciple of Chavara. Although he did not directly give any instruction for the spiritual formation of Euphrasia, yet, she was transformed in the school of Chavara, in which she rose to the heights of mystical experiences including diabolic experiences and intense temptations. The author then slides into the story of Chavara and his relationship with Leopold, the influence St Teresa of Avila had on Chavara. The many mystical experiences of Euphrasia had its roots in Chavara who was influenced by Teresa of Avila. The author claims that contemplation was a common goal of both the saints. However, as both of them followed two different lifestyles, so they are seen as models of two Carmelite spiritual streams – contemplation and action and contemplation and silence. While Chavara is a paradigm of the stream of contemplation and action, Euphrasia naturally is a representative of those who follow the path of contemplation and silence.

Keywords: Carmelites, Church, Kerala, society, Bishops, vicariates, history, disciple, devotee, mysticism, prayer, contemplation, temptation, diabolic, convent, bride.

1. Historical Background

Child Rose (later Sr Euphrasia CMC) was born on 17 October 1877 seven years after the death of Chavara (3 January 1871) at Kattoor, a village in the Vicariate of Varapuzha as the eldest daughter of Eluvathingal Anthony-Kunjjetty of a financially well to do Syrian Christian family. Anthony-Kunjjetty couple had nine children. Four of them died at the very birth and the offspring survived in the order of seniority were Rose, Kakku, Kochuthresia, Kochausep and Kochulonappan.

Eleven years prior to the birth of Rose, the first indigenous Carmelite convent was established at Koonammavu in 1866. Thanks to the Carmelite religious community, the life style of religious sisters was known in the Syrian Christian community. Within two years, a boarding for girls (*Educumdash*) also was established to give training in elementary education and in various useful crafts. Anthony had plans to give the eldest daughter Rose in marriage into a rich Christian family and had agreed to allow Kochuthresia, the younger daughter to become a nun. Rose found Kochuthresia more worthy to become a religious than herself and in her holy innocence prayed for the death of Kochuthresia and it happened as a contagious fever spread in their village. In a letter she wrote on 23 March 1902 to Bishop John Menacherry she expressed her painful and disturbing feelings whether her younger sister had died on account of her prayer.

The account of the two apparitions Rose had at the age of 9 and 12 revealed the spiritual world in which she had nestled her nest with her heavenly bridegroom. Her mother Kunjetty told her the story of Rosa de Lima from South America and in imitation of her patron saint, she offered herself as a bride to Jesus the bridegroom. A causal inquiry made by Rose from her mother about the Queen of Angles led her to the knowledge of the nine leagues of angels praising and adoring God together with Mother Mary. This knowledge had gone deep into the mind of the young girl and she had the vision of Mother Mary and the angles singing, parsing and adoring God. These early spiritual visions were the rock-foundation on which she had her spiritual castle built.

Rose's father Anthony was a man of stubborn nature and he was determined to give Rose in marriage at the tender age of 12. Rose prayed intensely and she had a vision of Mother Mary and she was given assurance that her father would accede to her wish. Anthony being grieved and disheartened at the death of Kochuthresia let Rose go according to her wish.

The boarding house at Koonammavu started in 1868, attached to the Carmelite convent established by Chavara and Leopold Beccaro OCD was the only place where the girls who desired the religious life could go. At the age of twelve, Rose was received into the boarding house on 3 July 1888. However, she had to return home for short intervals on account of her ill health until finally got settled in the boarding house on 4 July 1889. On 17 September of the same year, she had the vision of the Holy Family through which she received a miraculous cure from all her sicknesses.

2. Life Sketch of St Euphrasia in the Congregation

The following outline of the memorable dates and events in the life of Euphrasia would serve as a necessary guideline in understanding her spiritual growth during her 63 years of life in the Carmelite congregation. In addition to the personal events in the life of Euphrasia, the crucial dates and events within the Carmelite Congregation and the developments in the Syro-Malabar Church also are to be taken into account.

3. The Church in Shambles

The administrative set up of the Church of St Thomas Christians at the time of the birth of Euphrasia was not at all conducive for a peaceful and God-oriented life because of the opposing interests of the Carmelite missionary prelates and the priests and the lay leaders in the Church in union with Rome. Apostolic Vicars Bernardine Baccinelli (1853-1868) and Leonard Mellano (1868-1893) of Verapoly Latin Archdiocese also had jurisdiction over the St Thomas Catholic Christians. The latter resented this ecclesiastical arrangement very much from the very beginning. While Bishop Baccinelli was very kind and helpful in the foundation of the two religious congregations for men (CMI) and women (CMC), Bishop Leonard Mellano was emphatically opposed to the Syrians as a whole and maintained a very preferential concern and love for the Latins. It was in this ecclesiastical climate that Sr Euphrasia led a secluded life under the bishop John Menacherry who guided her in the true Carmelite spiritual tradition.

A brief account of the situation leading to the appointment of John Menacherry, the Vicar Apostolic, would be of some help to project the splendour of the life of a rural nun who buried herself in prayer for the whole Church while her mother Church was throbbing in utter confusion over the foreign domination over her. The three Apostolic delegates, namely bishops Antony Aliardi (23 August 1884), Andrea Aiuti (31 March 1887) and Ladislao Michele Zaleski (January 1892) were totally opposed to giving separate native bishops to Syrians although Bishop Leo Meurin S.J. (May 1876 - September 1877), the Apostolic Visitor strongly recommended separation of the Syrian Catholics from the Latin Vicariate of Varapuzha and appointing native bishops for the Syrians.

As an interim solution, Pope Pius IX appointed Marceline Berardi OCD (1877-1887), one among the seven Carmelites available at Verapoly as co-adjutor to Leonard Mellano with the right to

succession. He was consecrated on 21 October 1877. The appointment of another European Carmelite with separate charge of the St Thomas Catholic Christians did not satisfy the native Christian community. After almost ten years of negotiations, Propaganda Fide Congregation decided to constitute two Vicariates for the St Thomas Christians with two Latin Vicars apostolic, preferably Carmelites. The Papal delegate Andrea Aiuti personally intervened in the matter and annulled the decision of the Congregation. On 23 August 1887, Pope Leo XIII decided to appoint Fr Charles Lavigne, a French Jesuit, Apostolic Vicar of Kottayam and Fr Adolf Medlycott, born in Bengal of European parents, Vicar Apostolic of Trichur. This structural arrangement of the administration of the Church of St Thomas Christians also was not satisfying to the faithful in the Church. Hence, finally the Propaganda Fide decided to divide the territory of the Vicariate of Kottayam into two Apostolic Vicariates, creating the vicariate of Ernakulam and to appoint three native priests, John Menacherry for Trichur, Mathew Makkil for Changanacherry and Aloysius Pazheparambil for Ernakulam as Vicars Apostolic. By the apostolic brief *Quae rei sacrae* of 28 July 1896 Pope Leo XIII made this decision public. The boldness with which the Pope had made this decision must be evaluated in the light of the fact that at that time all Latin Bishops in India were Europeans.

After the separation of the Syrian Christians from the jurisdiction of the Vicariate of Verapoly, there arose a number of disputes with regard to some personal belongings as well as landed properties and institutions. The most important among them were the claim over the mortal remains of Fr Chavara and the transfer of ownership of the monastery where the TOCD members had their residence at Koonammavu and the ownership of the convent of TOCD sisters which Fr Chavara had taken initiative to build. Immediately after the death of Fr Chavara on 3 January 1871, Archbishop Mellano shifted his residence from Verapoly, close to Koonammavu, to Manjummel where Archbishop Baccinelli had built a monastery for Latin Tertiaries.

When in 1887, the Syrians were separated from the Vicariate of Verapoly, the Holy See decided that the Apostolic delegate to India to be the Prior General of the Syrian Carmelites. Thus Andrea Aiuti became the Prior General of the Congregation from 1887 to 1891. On 2 February 1889, he ordered the Syrian members of the Koonammavu monastery to evacuate it and hand it over to the Vicar Apostolic Mellano. After much dispute over the ownership of the convent at Koonammavu, as requested by Apostolic Delegate Andrea Aiuti,

Bishop Mellano and Medlycott came to an agreement regarding the transfer of the Carmelite sisters who belonged to the Latin Church. As per the decision of the Holy See, Medlycott through his Vicar General took over the convent on 11 September 1896, from Mellano's representative Fr Boniface OCD. In September 16, Medlycott celebrated the mass in the convent chapel and on the following day the Latin sisters, seven in number, left for Varapuzha.

When the three Vicariates were created in 1896 the convent at Koonammavu came within the boundary of the vicariate of Ernakulam. Hence, the sisters belonging to the Trichur Vicariate were taken to a convent at Ambazhakad. At that time Rose in the boarding (19 years of age) was sick, but she was miraculously cured so that she could make her journey to Ambazhakad. Sr Anjes, the superior in the convent at Koonammavu wrote a letter to the bishop about Rose's miraculous cure and her fitness to be admitted for religious life. This letter was really instrumental for Bishop Menacherry to pay special attention to Rose and to be her spiritual guide in her consecrated life.

4. Euphrasia in the Carmel

At Ambazhakad, in 1897, Rose was given the veil and the name Euphrasia. She adopted the name 'of Sacred Heart of Jesus' on account of the special devotion she had towards the Sacred Heart. At the end of the novitiate, she received the religious habit of the congregation from Bishop John Menacherry in the year 1898. In 1900, on the occasion of the inauguration of a convent at Ollur, she made her perpetual profession and stayed in this convent for the rest of her life with a few short interruptions. She has left behind 79 letters written to Bishop John Menacherry at his command from 28 July 1900 to 19 December 1919.¹ These letters, written under obedience and with the repeated request that they should be destroyed, give a true cross section of the personality of Sr Euphrasia. She started writing these letters at the age of 23 and stopped writing at 43, a period in which sexual urges as well as craving for the fulfilment of a life of love are in their prime. The letters reveal the deep divine experiences she had received as well as the diabolic temptations. Since these letters were written with assurance given to her that a third party would not see them, they were written with the frankness of a penitent confessing her inner life prompts to her confessor. However, after a long

¹Cleopatra (translated and edited), *Mother Euphrasia: Letters*, Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2013, 384.

period of hibernation, they were made available to the concerned authorities to make use them for the spiritual benefit of the faithful in the Church. They reveal that Sr Euphrasia was a real mystic of a very high order in the Church.

She served the Church as the Novice mistress at Ollur in the years 1910 to 1913. A remarkable event during this period was that Bishop Menacherry sent Mariam Thresia to Sr Euphrasia to discern the vocation of Mariam Thresia. Mariam Thresia lived at Ollur Carmelite Convent from 26 November 1912 to 27 January 1913. When she left the convent, Sr Euphrasia wrote a short letter in which she was advised to have devotion to Holy Family, a devotion Chavara had inculcated in the Carmelite Congregation he founded. Together with the letter Sr Euphrasia gave copies of Psalm 129, 51 in Syriac written in Malayalam letters and four kinds of rosaries and a few other devotional prayers. Sr Euphrasia was thus guiding Mariam Theresa to discern her vocation for founding a new congregation for the renewal of Christian families. Besides being the novice mistress, Sr Euphrasia also held the office of the superior of the St Mary's Convent at Ollur.

The bishops of Trichur diocese during the life time of Sr Euphrasia were John Menacherry (1896-1919), Francis Vazhappilly (1921-1942) and George Alappatt (1944-1970). Bishop Francis did not maintain any active contact with Sr Euphrasia; nor did he bother about the letters she wrote to Bishop Menacherry. Bishop George Alappatt came across with the letters of Sr Euphrasia and he was convinced that she was actually a saintly nun and published for the first time the prayer for her canonization in 1968 and requested Fr Philip OCD to prepare a biography of Sr Euphrasia which he published in 1970 with the name *Kerala Karmala Kusumam*. When Bishop George Alappatt retired in 1970, he entrusted all the letters of Euphrasia to the Sister Provincial of CMC Trichur province for the promotion of the canonization process.

5. Devotee or Disciple

St Alphonsa was a devotee of St Chavara because of the advice given to her by her spiritual fathers to pray to Fr Chavara for the cure from her sickness. It is recorded in her biography that St Chavara appeared to her and cured her of her illness. We find no reference to the person of Chavara in the life and writings of Euphrasia. Except for the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mary queen of angels and the collection of angels, we do not find any special saints, not even her heavenly patron St Rosa (de Lima), playing any significant role in the spiritual life of Euphrasia. The angles who accompanied Mother Mary, the Queen of

angels included all the saints in heaven as we have the assurance from Jesus himself that "For at the resurrection men and women ... are like the angles in heaven" (Mt 22:30).

With regard to her knowledge of and devotion to Chavara we have scant references and evidences in her writings and sayings. However, she comes as a stalwart in the spiritual tradition initiated and developed by Chavara himself. With all certainty we affirm that St Euphrasia was a true disciple of St Chavara, the burden of proving this proposition is what is taken up in the remaining part of this essay.

6. Transformed in the School of Chavara

Chavara did not directly give any instruction for the spiritual formation of Euphrasia. She was the protégé of Sr. Clara (Eliswa, daughter of the Puthenangady Vaidyan from Vaikam) one of the four founding members of the CMC congregation and the only candidate Chavara chose from the Syrian community. The young Rose (Euphrasia) was under the care of Sr. Clara until she left for Ambazhakad in September 1896 with the recommendation letter to Bishop John Menacherry from Sr Anjes the superior. The time between 1888 and 1896 (9 years) was sufficiently a long period for the formation of the character of a youth. The spiritual formation Sr Clara gave her ward cannot be anything other than what Chavara had taught her. In several of the letters that Chavara sent to the sisters he requested the mother superior to read them to the community and the children of the boarding house. Thus the spirituality of Euphrasia was thoroughly formed along the spiritual vision of Chavara.

Portions of two letters of Chavara are sited here to show the kind of spiritual instruction Chavara was giving and how they shaped the spiritual vision of Euphrasia. Letter VII, 6 reads:

Above all, learn the art of loving Jesus Christ. Stay constantly in his presence. Walk along with him. Converse with Him continuously. When you feel inclined or attached to any other object, this loving Lord turns His gaze on you and asks you: "Look at me! Does this object give you greater pleasure than what I give you? Or does it cause you pain or affliction? If so why should you be worried? I shall make you happy. Is this not sufficient?" He is always with you, with the sole desire of pleasing you. He whispers to you: "You must love me. Everything is here. Whatever you desire, I have given you everything I have. There is nothing which I have not given you." Yes he has given himself to you. He is the creator of the whole universe. He asks you: "is this little object greater than

myself? May the Mother Superior read this letter to the community and the children at the boarding house.

In a similar vein, Letter VII, 8 reads:

Avoid wasting your time in useless conversation. The time you save after your proper work and recreation should be spent in spiritual reading. Some may like to read light materials such as news and stories; others may like reading about the holy passion and suffering of saints like Theresa and Rose etc... If you love reading, you will love solitude. When a soul delights in solitude, Jesus Christ will come to converse with it in solitude and begin communing with it. At first you will not understand the language. Then the Lord will lead you to the wine-cellar and pour out some wine for you - a little at first. In course of time you will begin to understand the language. When your spouse sees that you understand His speech, he will speak more and more directly and show you the magnitude of his love. Then the bride will love more and the bridegroom will rejoice over it and adorn her with ornaments. Thus commences the divine union. Then on there will be nothing to fear.

A number of instructions and aspirations that Chavara expressed often have found expression in the life of Euphrasia.² The ideal of being the bride of Jesus Christ (*manavattitham*), love for suffering, perfect practice of the virtues of humility and obedience, boldly resisting the temptations from the devil and above all becoming a saint which Chavara tirelessly exhorted his dear sisters, are found verified in the life of Euphrasia. All these point to the fact that Euphrasia was a disciple of Chavara rather than his devotee.

The primary aim of Chavara in establishing the convent was to give rise to saints so that the Syro-Malabar Church which was barren of saints. Similarly, the sole aim of young Rose was identical with that of Chavara. Sr Clara, the sister in charge of the boarding house had well imparted the vision of Chavara, her spiritual guide, to Rose in the teaching that offering one's virginity to God was the shortest and sure way to become a saintly person. At the age of 9 Rose offered her virgin life to God to grow in the love of God. Chavara had written to the sisters: "Above all, learn the art of loving God. Stay constantly in his presence. Walk along with him" (Letter VII, 6). In a letter (Letter 58)

²Sophy Rose, *Lokathe Unarthiyavar*, Aluva: Mount Carmel Generalate, 2015, 66-108.

that Euphrasia wrote to Bishop John Menacherry we find this ideal well expressed: "O! My Father, why is it that I live like this without loving my God. Tomorrow, to the Divine Babe Jesus, loving saviour who has shown such a mad love, in your tomorrow's holy Mass especially pray for this poor unworthy daughter to experience the love of God, humility, happy death, and prudence."³

The exhortation of Chavara that a consecrated person is a bride of Jesus Christ had gone deep in the soul of Euphrasia and in a letter she wrote to the Bishop (Letter 64, page 307) she reveals her innermost thoughts on the subject:

After a little while on a cloud with 3 steps amidst numerous angles and saints Jesus, Mary and Joseph full of rays of light came near this wretched worm... My loving Saviour! Lord of my life! Where were you until this time, I blurted out in great sorrow? Then with a smile, he replied: "I was with you. Have never gone away." He asked: "Is it not today that you have to renew your vows. Today to your heavenly Spouse Himself renew," he said. That moment, Holy Mother said: "daughter, say the prayer of the renewal of vows." The moment I finished reciting, my bride came close to my hands and said: "Today you have become worthy to receive the loving embrace of your heavenly Spouse. I abide in you. You are a bride of mine, you must be sure of that." Saying thus he held me close to his Sacred Heart and embracing with much love kissed my cheek. At the end he made me kiss my loving Spouse's five sacred wounds separately. How can I narrate the happiness and joy I experienced? I cannot.

These narrations of heavenly experiences were preceded by a long description of Sr Euphrasia's fight with devil that ill-treated her and tempted her against the vow of chastity.

In imitation of Chavara, Euphrasia calls God the Father and Jesus Christ 'father' (*ente nalla appan*) an unusual, yet justifiable, expression found only in the writings of Chavara. In Letter 52 we read the following: "... His will is enough for us. Is it not (their) own children that father and mother punish. Our Father, the Saviour's whole life was trails and sufferings. A share of that is given to us, I think, because of his love. As it is the sign of the great love, we partake in his Passion."⁴

³Cleopatra, *Mother Euphrasia*, 281-282.

⁴Cleopatra, *Mother Euphrasia*, 256.

Paul Kalluveetil has made a brief attempt to show that the basis and roots of the spirituality of Euphrasia is the spiritual vision of Chavara. He cites a passage from Chavara's letters to the sisters and comments on it to establish his claim on the foundations of the spirituality of Euphrasia. He writes:

Abide in the love of Christ; Always sit before His eyes; Walk close to Him; always converse with Him" (Letters VII, 6). Each of these four actions is authentically biblical, dynamic and celestial, the perfect paradigm of which is Christ. Euphrasia's letters and the testimonies of her contemporaries attest that her life could be summarized in the above-mentioned terms. She was abiding in the love of Christ, always sitting before Christ's eyes, walking close to him and always conversing with him.⁵

The providence has deigned to canonize both the spiritual guide and his disciple together and those of us who grew in the spiritual tradition they have created through their own lives have the sacred duty to study in depth the spirituality proposed and lived by them and see how it could be realized in our own lives.

7. Diabolic Experiences and Intense Temptations

One of the ascetical principles Euphrasia held was that those who love God or wish to be the chaste bride of the heavenly spouse had to suffer intensely and to fight against the diabolic attacks to keep the virginity they offered to Christ. Along this, the understanding is that one's love is proved through bearing suffering for the sake of the loved one. From the several available descriptions in her letters of the attack of the devil and the pain she suffered therefrom we shall cite two instances to have a feel of what was going on in the mind of the saint. In Letter 35, dated 1 February 1905, she writes:

Father, the hellish devils who are God's enemies, all, are causing severe temptations against chastity touching the body of this great sinner, which I am, as to an animal. I write this because of your command. Father, my hand is shivering. I am experiencing unbearable sorrow and anxiety with the memory of the various kinds of cruelties they did against me... If my Holy Mother and my heavenly Spouse, my divine Spouse had not helped, I would have been surely lost. How would I write and inform you all the sorrow

⁵*Footprints of Holiness: Souvenir of the Canonization of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara and St Euphrasia Eluvathingal*, 23 November 2014, Published by CMI and CMC Congregations, 2015, 119-123.

and pain I suffered in my heart at that time, never can I. Father, each moment I suffered such crushing pains and sorrow as if I was dying. Father, even now I am experiencing a share of that. I was able to suffer all these only by God's special grace and his fatherly boundless help.

A few months after the above incident it had a repeat. She wrote in her last letter (Letter 79A, 23 May 1905) to the Bishop:

When I remember the terrible acts of these days, my poor heart is crushed with grief and anxiety. I myself surrender. Father! How did I suffer all this - how escaped? How did I get my soul and body without getting spoiled? I don't think even wicked men will do like this to a wicked animal. So very terribly those hellish wolves acted with me in a fitting manner, wicked as I am. Father, if I had suffered this with my strength, definitely I would have become most unfortunate as my soul and body together would have died and become food of the worms and been in the terrible depths of hell and roaring there along with those hellish enemies. O! Definitely it is not I who suffered all these and won. My Heavenly Father, my loving Saviour and my Holy Mother being with me helping and emboldening me, only with His unlimited grace and strength I was able to suffer.

One thing to be specially noted about these letters is that all these descriptions of the torments and agony were countermanded with the beatific vision of what the holy soul earnestly looked for. Hence, they were not psychologically upsetting experiences, but were powerful psychic experiences leading to a spiritual wholeness.

The letters of Euphrasia could well be the earliest or the first written literature of a woman in Malayalam. They were written without any external compulsion or internal inhibitions that what she wrote would be the object of public scrutiny. They give us a true picture of how an adult female member of our society had been visualizing her nuptial experiences and that they have been now immortalized by putting them in the letters of our language. Hence it is not to be taken merely as a private spiritual jotting of a woman with elementary education but as a literary piece helping us to go deep into the early evolution of our Malayalam language itself.

8. Heights of Mystical Experience in the School of Chavara

The honorific title people gave to Euphrasia was 'praying mother.' In a letter (VII, 8), sent to the sisters, Chavara called Teresa of Avila 'Mother' (*amma*),⁶ an endearing term in our households.

8.1. Leopold and Chavara

Chavara had inherited the devotion to St Teresa from his spiritual guide Fr Leopold OCD (1860-1877) who was ordained priest in 1860, at the age of 23 by Msgr Bernardine Baccinelli. Chavara, when he accepted Fr Leopold as his confessor and spiritual guide, was at his mature age of 55. It came to pass at that time that the indigenous congregation which was started with the name Servants of Mary Immaculate (SMI) in 1855 was affiliated to the First Order of Carmelites Discalced as its third order in 1860 with the name Third Order of Carmelites Discalced (TOCD). Fr Leopold was made the first novice master of the new congregation. He studied the local language and translated the *Interior Castle* of St Teresa of Avila into Malayalam. This was very helpful for Fr Chavara to imbibe the Carmelite prayer style and the spirituality which was later inherited by Euphrasia.

8.2. Chavara and St Teresa of Avila

St Teresa was opposed to writing but she wrote in obedience at the request of her superiors. The readers for whom she wrote were the members of the community in the convent. She wrote the *Interior Castle* towards the end of her life, starting the book on 2 June 1577 and finishing it on 29 November of the same year. Although she was uneducated, the theology of her books was based on the catechism of the Church. Woven throughout her works were themes of the importance of self-knowledge, humility, detachment and suffering.

She described the subject of her writing in *Interior Castle* as follows. She envisions the soul as it were a castle made of a single diamond or of a very clear crystal in which there are many rooms just as in heaven there are many Mansions. The progress of a soul in perfection through prayer is explained in terms of advancing from the First Mansion to the Seventh, transforming a creature of sin to the bride of Christ. According to the Catholic theology the Mansions from the first to fourth lead a soul to acquired contemplation by human effort with the

⁶St Teresa of Avila is known today among Syrian Christians as *Amma* Teresa.

grace of God. The union-experience in the last three stages is regarded as infused contemplation. In the last stage, the person is lost in ecstasy.

The soul in the First Mansion of humility is in a state of grace, but still is intoxicated by the venomous creatures, namely sin and sinful tendencies. Through continuous practice of humility, it enters into the Second Mansion by listening to sermons and partaking in enriching conversions. The Third Mansion is of exemplary life. In this Mansion, there are souls who have attained a high standard of discipline and are charitable towards others. It is in the Fourth Mansion that the natural and the supernatural meet. The soul would be totally dependent on God. This is the Mansion of the prayer of the Quiet. Love came not from an aqueduct, but flowed from the true source of living water.

The life of a soul in the Fifth Mansion is described as a soul in the prayer of union (engagement). It makes a new magnitude of contemplation. The soul will prepare for the gift of God's presence. Psychological conditions were associated with this state, in which the faculties of soul are asleep. In the Sixth Mansion (similar to betrothal) the bride and the groom are able to see each other for a long period of time. At this stage the soul may receive afflictions such as bodily sickness, misrepresentation, backbiting, and persecution or undeserved praise to test and prove the genuineness of love of the soul for her heavenly Spouse. In the Seventh Mansion the soul would reach spiritual (mystical) marriage. Here the transformation of the soul is made complete and no higher stage of perfection could be reached. We may call it another heaven on earth: the two lighted candles join and become one; the falling rain becomes merged in the river.

In the light of the teaching of *Interior Castle* the meaning of the following advice of Chavara to sisters becomes crystal clear:

When your spouse sees that you understand His speech, he will speak more and more distinctly and show you the magnitude of his love. Then the bride will love more and the bridegroom will rejoice over it and adorn her with ornaments. Thus commences the divine union. Then on, there will be nothing to fear.

1. Reading, 2. Solitude, 3. Meditative prayer, 4. Meditation. It is enough for the time being to aspire to these four degrees in prayer. *Amma* attained the 7th stage. Some of her sisters reached up to fifth and sixth. We must reach at least the fourth.⁷

⁷Letters, VII/8.

8.3. Mystical Experience of Euphrasia

In a letter to Bishop John Menacherry, Euphrasia records the mystical experiences on three occasions. In the early part of the Letter 37, written on 1 June 1905 there is a description how she prepared a spiritual banquet on Hosanna Sunday and how she had the vision and experience of herself dining with Jesus.

He blessed the table and after drinking some water, He gave me saying, 'drink.' I drank. "Euphrasia," (He) asked, "have you understood how much joy the table of a bride brings to the bridegroom?" (I) replied, "I have not understood very much." With that (He) spoke some other words too, I don't remember. He reminded me, always to remember how much He had suffered these days for the salvation of the mankind for the reparation of the sins of men.

It is remarkable that the language herein comes very close the one cited earlier from the Letter VII, 8 of Chavara.

In the course of the narration of what happened on the Palm Sunday, before concluding it, Euphrasia referred to two other earlier occasions, namely (1) at the age of 12 while in the convent at Koonammavu, on the feast of Our Lady's Assumption, (2) on the occasion of her profession. She wrote:

He with many angels and religious sisters, Mother Mary and Jesus Christ came in their midst, saying, "I choose you today as my bride" and put a ring on my finger and disappeared. Then at my profession. I cannot see the ring on my finger. On the day of my profession (He) removed the ring and the most Rev. Bishop put it again on the finger with great affection. This Palm Sunday also, when He was about to leave, He called me, "the bride of my love." Immediately I knelt down, holding my poor hands. He showed me the ring and put it again tight. "I, the Spouse of your soul, have accepted your this invitation with the great joy of my heart. Behold, I am leaving. There will be pain and a mark on your hand for some days. Later it will disappear. Don't worry"⁸

Chrisologa CMC, in an article, writes: "We find the unmistakable marking of the mystical stages mentioned by St Teresa of Avila and St John of the Cross in the life of St Euphrasia, very clearly in connection with four events of mystical spousal ring and the experiences and the descriptions of mystical union with God. Letters No. 37, 55, 56, 72 are

⁸Letter 37, 198.

extremely significant and revelatory with regard to the various mystical stages."⁹ The article also makes an interesting and earnest attempt to identify the chronological age of the saint when she progressively attained the stages of spiritual growth recounted by St Teresa of Avila.

8.4. Contemplation a Common Goal the Saints

'Praying hands' and 'sounding silence' are the phrases that Chrisologa uses to depict Euphrasia who was popularly known as the 'walking tabernacle'. In her Letter 72, we read that she had the experience of deep union with Jesus every day after communion. In this letter on 1 April 1918, after an interruption of eight months, she wrote to the Bishop why she cried. As she narrates, an angel descended on her, on the thirteenth-day-feast, i.e., *Denaha* (Manifestation of Jesus), after the renewal of the vows together with the whole community. Let us follow her own narration:

During this forty-day adoration, my loving Saviour... let me, your handmaid, know, why I cried aloud that day..." The angel replied: "I shall let you know clearly what God told you on the thirteenth-day-feast." ... "Euphrasia, as usual after Holy Communion when you were in union with Him, as your divine spouse used to do on special occasions, (He) held you close to his holy wound and kissed you. With the abundance of love that filled you at that time, looking at your divine spouse you prayed: "O! My soul's spouse! The joy of my heart! How you console a wretched creature, I understand".

The prayer continued. And the angel told her that in that state she had a vision of the severe passion the Sacred Heart of Jesus suffered and then she fainted and fell down with a loud cry. This incident gives the background scenario in which Euphrasia made the following general statement that she enjoyed the deep union with the divine master in the presence of the Eucharist on a daily basis. She was indeed a walking tabernacle. "This is a fortunate union I am enjoying, usually on all days, by the great grace of God."¹⁰

Chavara also was a man of contemplation. While Euphrasia withdrew into deep silence after the contemplative union with Christ Jesus, Chavara, after long hours of prayer (contemplation) entered into hectic activities for the physical and spiritual building up of the

⁹*Footprints of Holiness*, 112-113.

¹⁰*Cleopatra, Mother Euphrasia*, 325.

kingdom of God. In these two saints together we find a comprehensive realizing of all the dimensions of Carmelite spirituality.

In this connection a short note on the need of contemplation would enable us to appreciate deeply what Chavara and Euphrasia were cherishing most in their lives. In Christian spiritual literature, the term meditation is used usually for mental or methodical prayer distinct from vocal prayer, based on discursive reflection on various considerations. In contemplative prayer this activity is curtailed. Contemplation has been described as a gaze of faith, awareness of a divine presence or a silent love experience. Vocal prayer and meditation is compared to work and contemplation as enjoying the fruit of the work. Teresa of Avila considers it a close sharing between friends. It means taking time frequently to be alone with him who, we know, loves us. For a Christian it is faith in Christ Jesus, and in God the Father.

Work and enjoyment of fruit are equally important in our life. In the literature on spiritual life we often examine our attitude towards two important factors which influence our lives - work and leisure. Thomas Ponnupadam argues that 'forced leisure' has to be sought to make life fruitful, creative and enjoyable. In the field of spiritual life, contemplation may be compared to 'forced leisure.' Ponnupadam notes that "the inner journey engendered by the joyful acceptance of inactivity and inner silence, brings home to us many surprises from our hidden world... One could speak of a possible 'Mary Syndrome,' (Lk 10:42), of one yearning to be 'distracted with serving, longing to share the fruits of contemplation with others. To them too the message of Jesus rings true. The better part never loses its supreme value, for that is the goal of all activity. One serves no less sitting at the feet of the Lord. Genuine service of one's neighbours is not to be identified only with visible activity." Forced leisure for contemplation is not a waste of time. John Milton declares an immortal truth when he wrote, 'They also serve who only stand and wait.'¹¹

9. Models of Two Carmelite Spiritual Streams

Assiduous prayer is the prime characteristic of Carmel. In a letter to the sisters in the convent at Koonammavu Chavara wrote: "Above all, learn the art of loving Jesus Christ. Stay continuously in his presence. Walk along with him. Converse with him continuously."¹² Prayer for

¹¹T. Ponnupadam, VJTR 79, 8 (August 2015), 54, 55.

¹²Letters VII, 6.

him is like a conversation between two deep friends. Hence, in order to grow in the habit of praying he gave his sisters the following instruction: "Avoid wasting your time in useless conversation. The time you save after your proper work and recreation should be spent in spiritual reading... If you love reading, you will love solitude. When a soul delights in solitude Jesus Christ will come to converse with it in solitude and begin communicating with it."¹³ The two streams in the prayer tradition of Carmel are *contemplation and action* and *contemplation and silence*. While Chavara is a specimen of the stream of contemplation and action, Euphrasia naturally is a representative of those who follow the path of contemplation and silence. After halting the writing to the bishop John Menacherry at the age of 43, Euphrasia was silently keeping vigil for the rest of her 32 years before the Blessed Sacrament gaining the endearing appellation, 'praying mother'.

Pope Francis in his address before the thanksgiving mass after the canonization of Chavara and Euphrasia at St Peter's Basilica, on Monday 24 November 2015, referred to this Carmelite prayer-tradition found in their lives. He said:

Chavara and Sister Euphrasia Eluvathingal, who was a member of the religious institute founded by him, remind each of us that God's love is the source, the support and the goal of all holiness, while love of neighbour is the clearest manifestation of love of God. Fr Kuriakose Elias was a religious, both active and contemplative, who generously gave his life for the Syro-Malabar Church, putting into action the maxim "sanctification of oneself and the salvation of others". For her part, Sr Euphrasia lived in profound union with God so much so that her life of holiness was an example and an encouragement to the people who called her "Praying Mother." There are many consecrated religious here today especially consecrated women. May you also be known as 'Praying Sisters'.

In his homily, Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, Prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, also referred to the contemplation-action-silence tradition of the Carmelite spirituality at the Vespers on the eve of the canonization of Chavara and Euphrasia in Basilica of Maria Maggiore, Rome, on 22 November 2014. He said:

Additionally, Blessed Kuriakose and Blessed Euphrasia arrived at sanctity following the path marked out by Carmelite tradition. It is,

¹³Letters VII, 8.

firstly, a path of prayer: a persevering and determined search to see God. As the Prophet Elias encountered the living God, so also Carmelites seek His face, most especially by contemplating the incarnate Word. Both saints were frequently immersed in loving conversation with God, especially before the Blessed Sacrament. Blessed Kuriakose stood out for his recollection when celebrating the Sacred Liturgy, and similarly Euphrasia was called by some a "Walking Tabernacle." As union with God was their supreme desire, a desire not to be fully satisfied in this life, they lived according to the description of St Paul "you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. (Col 3:3).

Another characteristic of Carmelite spirituality shines in Blessed Kuriakose and Euphrasia - their zeal. Zeal is the form that love of God takes when it encounters challenges, obstacles or indifference. We think of the confrontation of Prophet Elijah with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. Both saints that we contemplate tonight rose to the challenges of making a total and irrevocable gift of their lives to God when still very young. Euphrasia was set upon her vocation at the age of nine, while Kuriakose was already in the minor seminary by thirteen. As a young priest, he was preaching extensively while already putting in motion the founding of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate and in rapid succession, the corresponding women's institute dedicated to the Mother of Carmel. It is not hard to imagine the many difficulties involved in founding these two congregations. Blessed Euphrasia is given special crosses of her own, notably in the form of sustained and extraordinary preternatural attacks."¹⁴

May the complementarities we find in the newly canonized saints be an inspiring message to all those who strive for self-sanctification and a life of an all-out service for the neighbour, especially those who deserve our love and compassion.

¹⁴*Footprints of Holiness*, 13.