

**Theological Studies on Saint Chavara 4**

**A PILLAR AND GUIDING LIGHT**  
**Kuriakose Elias Chavara,**  
**a Theologian of the Church**

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**Sophy Rose CMC**

2020

**Chavara Central Secretariat**

Kochi 680 030 Kerala, India

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***A Pillar and Guiding Light:  
Kuriakose Elias Chavara,  
a Theologian of the Church***

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AG	<i>Ad Gentes</i> (Decree on Mission)
CCEO	<i>Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium</i>
CD	<i>Christus Dominus</i> (Decree on Bishops)
CIC	<i>Codex Iuris Canonici</i>
CKC	Chronicle of Koonanmmavu Convent
CMC	Congregation of the Mother of Carmel
CMI	Carmelites of Mary Immaculate
CTC	Congregation of Teresian Carmelites
CWC	Complete Works of Chavara
DV	<i>Dei Verbum</i> (Constitution on Divine Revelation)
LG	<i>Lumen Gentium</i> (Constitution on the Church)
OE	<i>Orientalium Ecclesiarum</i> (Decree on Catholic Eastern Churches)
PO	<i>Presbyterorum Ordinis</i> (Decree on Priests)
SC	<i>Sacrosanctum Concilium</i> (Constitution on Sacred Liturgy)
UR	<i>Unitatis Redintegratio</i> (Decree on Ecumenism)

## MILESTONES IN THE LIFE OF SAINT CHAVARA

10 February 1805	Birth at Kainakary
29 November 1829	Ordination at Arthunkal
11 May 1831	Foundation of CMI at Mannanam
16 November 1844	Appointed as Malpan
08 December 1855	Canonical Profession of Vows
08 June 1861	Appointed the Vicar General of Syrians
13 February 1866	Foundation of Women TOCD (CMC-CTC)
03 January 1871	Death at Koonammavu
24 May 1889	Mortal remains transferred to Mannanam
08 February 1986	Beatification by Pope John Paul II
23 November 2014	Canonization in Rome by Pope Francis

## THEOLOGICAL STUDIES ON SAINT CHAVARA

Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara (1805-1871) – a Carmelite religious priest and a professor of theology (*Malpan*) in the Syro-Malabar Church, who pioneered consecrated life in the Indian Church by founding the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI; in collaboration with Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara, in 1831), the first indigenous religious congregation for men and the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel (CMC; in collaboration with Leopold Beccaro OCD, in 1866) – is widely recognized for his pioneering efforts to reform the Church in Kerala and the society of the nineteenth century. His credible Christian witness along with the leadership he offered to the Church of Saint Thomas Christians, at a time when it was passing through multiple jurisdictional crises, scripted a spiritual and disciplined growth in the Kerala Church.

Canonized on 23 November 2014, Saint Chavara's personal sanctity and Christian wisdom are identified to be unique. While the secular society admires his contributions in pioneering a set of revolutionary changes in uplifting people on the margins and those who were socially ostracised through educational and social initiatives, the fundamental core of all his achievements is solidly established in his filial discipleship of Jesus Christ, whom he addressed '*ente nalla appa*' (my beloved father).

Saint Chavara had a firm foundation in Christian faith, which is clearly visible throughout his life and it is testified by those who knew him. He articulated his views and perspectives primarily based on his personal encounter with Jesus and also based on his readings and theological reflections. They are available to us through his extant writings, which are published in four volumes in the *Complete Works of Kuriakose*

*Elias Chavara*. Some of these works, recognized as pioneering efforts in Indian literary genre, offer us a mine of rich and sound theological insights. Although his access to scientific Christian literature was minimal (if not completely absent), his writings draw from the biblical as well as other Christian traditions, which he had faithfully and creatively interpreted for the enhancement of the faith life of the Christian community that he had catered to throughout his life.

*Theological Studies on Saint Chavara* – a joint effort of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI) and Congregation of the Mother of Carmel (CMC) – attempts to promote and publish fruits of scientific investigation into the unique and varied theological insights of Saint Chavara in the form of monographs. These theological investigations will be instrumental in appreciating and popularising the sound and solid theological contributions he made to enhance Catholic faith in the nineteenth century, which, in turn, indicate that he deserves titles like ‘Father of the Syro-Malabar Church’ and ‘Doctor of the Church’. As the publication of this series is undertaken with the blessings of the Synod of the Syro-Malabar Archiepiscopal Church, which also had benefitted from the eminent theological acumen, pastoral insights, and ecclesiastical leadership of Saint Chavara, these studies would bring to light the multifarious theological heritage that he had bequeathed to the Church and the subsequent generations of faithful in India.

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*Foreword*

**CHAVARA, A THEOLOGIAN**

**Bishop Joseph Kallarangatt**

*Diocese of Palai*

In this theological work *Pillar and Guiding Light: Kuriakose Elias Chavara, a Theologian of the Church*, the author Sr. Sophy brings out the multifarious dimensions of Saint Chavara's theological and pastoral orientations. Her investigation on this subject spreads out in five chapters. There is a close interlinking and intertwining between all the five chapters. Among these, the third chapter, "Chavara a Theologian" stands out in its richness of theological insights. The teachings of Chavara are yet to make its way to people's heart. A community which forgets the fundamentals of its doctrines cannot live long. Father Chavara was a versatile genius who gave remarkable leadership in the fields of religious life, education, theology, printing, and language studies and literature, and women empowerment.

Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara, a genius of the Syrian Christian tradition of India, developed a mosaic of theological and spiritual ideas. He was at once a malpan and a secular intellectual. As an able administrator and a spiritual leader, he got ample chances to disseminate his inspiring thoughts. Many ideas that guided the Second Vatican Council were anticipated in the writings and preaching of Chavara. Sr. Sophy Rose, already familiar with the writings of Chavara, has successfully presented a comprehensive view on Chavara. The famous words of Saint Augustine are particularly noteworthy here: *voce ecclesiae loquor*, that is, "I speak in the voice of the Church."

As an ecclesiologist, Sr. Sophy also speaks here in the voice of the Church. In this work, the author combines the ecclesiological, Christological, and pastoral voices of Saint Chavara. Actually, the author offers an ecclesiological interpretation of all the writings of Chavara, and the book proves that Chavara is an ecclesial theologian.

Saint Chavara was a religious who was transformed by the divine love and, in turn, transformed the society in which he lived with his firm conviction of the gospel values. The book authored by Sr. Sophy takes us back to the sources of theology and liturgy. What we actually need is a resourced ecclesiology and liturgy, not a reduced ecclesiology and liturgy. The message that Chavara gives us is that we need more familiarity with the sources of theology and spirituality. Catholic theology is not mere sociology and philanthropy. Correcting such deviations, the author brings out the intellectual and mystical aspects of theology here. Devotions, pious practices, etc., are to be rooted in an authentic ecclesiology.

There is a kind of ecclesiological introvertedness everywhere. This book tries to overcome it. Sr. Sophy presents Chavara as an ecclesial reality not as an exclusive club. The writings, preachings, and teachings of Chavara are ecclesial properties. Every believer should own it and ponder over it. Virgin Mary did that. This book is also a pondering over what is kept in the author's heart about Saint Chavara.

Chavara was a champion of domestic church. He visualised houses with prayer rooms, study rooms, and dining rooms. His spiritual exhortations to Christian families are published under the title *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul* (Testament of a Loving Father). All the doctrines of the Church are taught in their simple forms in the families.

Christianity is a religion of families. It is a religion of histories, stories, and traditions. Actually, the stories never die; they are being handed over. When a community stops telling stories, it slowly but steadily dies. Sr. Sophy has succeeded in telling the stories of Chavara and in presenting it in a scientific way. That is very clear in her presentation of Chavara as a fundamental theologian. Church teachings develop over time. In that sense, it is very commendable that the author is re-visiting the intellectual contributions of Chavara. A living tradition never goes back. It always goes forward. Chavara himself was a tradition that carries the past, present, and future. In this book, the Chavara tradition makes a step forward. He was a strong devotee of the Blessed Sacrament and Blessed Virgin Mary. It was he who started the forty hour adoration and one hour adoration in the Malabar Church.

Chavara was a theologian who lived a life of discipline and discipleship. Discipline should be the true mentor and defender. Chavara is a solid theological foundation upon which contemporary theological studies can be rooted in. What we need today is a theological discipline. Many have forgotten the fundamentals of theology. The Benedictine rule is very inspiring: *servaordinum, ordoservavitte*, which means "keep the rule then the rule will keep you." As a disciplined theologian, the author has succeeded substantially in applying her theological categories throughout the five chapters of this book.

One of the patristic adages is "*finis omnium ecclesia*." That means the Church is the end of everything. Journeying through the Chavara writings, Sr. Sophy also gives the same message to all of us. As a great philosopher and theologian Jean Guilton says, liturgy is *numen et lumen*, that is, liturgy is mystery and light. The title of this book, *A Pillar and Guiding*

*Light*, resembles to this great theological axiom. The words of the great Orthodox theologian Paul Evdokimov are very inspiring: "The doors of the churches must be kept open so that the incenses, the echoes of the liturgical chant, the invocations should also penetrate the squares and homes where people weep and laugh, hope and despair, work and study, love and hate, blaspheme and sin." May the flavour of this wonderful piece of theological work reach out similarly! Let its portals be wide open for all!

*Presentation*

**CHAVARA, A TRAILBLAZING THEOLOGIAN  
IN THE SYRO-MALABAR CHURCH**

**Saju Chackalackal CMI**

*General Editor, Theological Studies on Saint Chavara*

Although I am positively inclined to hold that every Christian is a theologian by virtue of subscribing to the living faith, as it involves a personal interpretation of the faith, theologizing *per se* is a formal activity of systematically clarifying, interpreting, and deepening the foundational faith of a person or a community in Jesus Christ. Just as constituting a local church requires not only the local faithful but also the local clergy and an indigenous hierarchy, I strongly believe that theologizing by the natives, in communion with the universal Church, is an essential ingredient to constitute a local church; the emergence of an indigenous theologizing would be a dynamic testimony of the maturation of the faith of the local church. From the very inception of the Church itself, we see that the leaders of the faithful, such as Saint Peter and Saint Paul, attempted to interpret the richness and depth of their faith in Jesus Christ by attempting to make these teachings relevant to the ecclesial communion and the society at large from divergent angles; this gave rise to the first generation theologizing available to us in the New Testament and in the writings of some of the Fathers of the Church. These trailblazing attempts at theologizing in the early Church not only created an identity for the community, but also helped it to anchor itself and to flourish in the given existential context. This spiritual embarkment and progress of the community were mainly the result of theologians' ability to interpret the

socio-cultural reality of their times in the light of the Gospel message while simultaneously attempting to relate the Gospel message contextually, and to incarnate it in the idioms, phrases, and cultural expressions of the local people.

The Syro-Malabar Church, having its celebrated apostolic origin dating back to the first century AD, based on the preaching of the Gospel on the Indian soil by Apostle Thomas, and, subsequently, the initiation of Christian communities in different parts of the land. Saint Thomas Christians can legitimately be proud of the fact that it has gracefully survived two millennia and has also truthfully carried forward the faith in Jesus Christ bequeathed to it by the first century ancestors. This community of the faithful – which does not have any extant sources to testify to its development and maturation in faith other than the existence of the community itself, as far as the available historical documents go, at least from the seventh century onwards – has been animated in its spiritual growth and temporal administration, first, by the East Syrian Church and, later, by the Latin Church. While the former succeeded in literally sharing its East Syrian liturgical patrimony with the faithful of the Saint Thomas Christians in India through its exclusive and longer association, the latter was known to have made unsuccessful attempts to break the community away from its age-old indigenous Christian traditions, because they were different from the traditions followed by the European church (and, hence, assumed to be erroneous). Although the first group did not involve itself directly in the temporal administration of the community (as the archdeacon was entrusted with such duties), the latter, with its overarching powers, ably buttressed by the colonial political powers, succeeded in wielding all-encompassing administrative powers over the Saint Thomas Christians in India.

Although the efforts of both these ecclesial traditions were supposed to have animated and empowered the Saint Thomas Christians, both of them, in fact, seem to have failed to facilitate and sustain a self-reliant and autonomous local church of Saint Thomas Christians. It is strange to see that during the reign of both these churches in enlivening the faith of the Saint Thomas Christians, the local church never gained full-fledged growth in terms of facilitating a local hierarchy; both the churches did not take any substantial steps to support the local church develop its own hierarchy. This is obvious from the fact that a church existing from the first century onwards received its first native bishop (according to recorded history) only in the last decade of the nineteenth century. The lack of a native ecclesial leadership had, therefore, stifled the growth of this church and almost all areas of Christian life for a long time.

Many writers give an impression that most of the problems faced by the Syro-Malabar community from the sixteenth century onwards are due to its invasion by the Latin hierarchy; though there is a certain truth in this regard, it does not seem to constitute the whole truth. Although the problems of autonomy were accentuated in the sixteenth century after the arrival of the Portuguese missionaries and the establishment of a Latin hierarchy with exclusive ecclesiastical jurisdiction over the Oriental Catholics, many of the issues that surfaced during that period had their root in the earlier history of the Church in Malabar. Just as the liturgical language of the Saint Thomas Christians was foreign, namely, Syriac, for all practical purposes, even bishops who came from Bagdad (or Babylon) to Malabar were foreigners. As a result, not only wasn't there any native bishop, who comprehended the nuances of the culture and mindset of the natives, but there were also no efforts made by the then

responsible ecclesial leadership to identify or foster a single bishop from the local church to episcopacy for the purpose of strengthening that church with an indigenous leadership. If we are to cast aspersions at Rome or the See of Peter for its failure to provide the local church with bishops of native origin, we should not bypass the fact that all bishops from Babylon who came legitimately or illegitimately till the period under discussion were only foreigners. Indeed, even the Patriarch, who was the head of the Chaldean Church, which treated the Saint Thomas Christians as its filial church, never took steps to facilitate native ecclesial leadership. Had he taken the necessary steps to address the quest of the native faithful in Malabar at the right time, the issue of stagnation of and unwarranted divisions within the Saint Thomas Christians - before and during the period of leadership offered by the Latin Church - would not have occurred. Hence, the accusation that local leadership was not created for the Syro-Malabar Church should be judiciously attributed to the Chaldean Church than to the Latin Church, if we approach the history with a critical perspective. We, in all likelihood, can observe the lack of missionary dynamism and natural ecclesial evolution within the Syro-Malabar Church, especially in integrating the native cultural practices as well as thought patterns, and almost a non-existent indigenous theology and a stagnant East Syriac liturgy almost without any scope for local adaptation among the Syro-Malabar Christians to the lack of native ecclesial leadership, on the one hand, and the administrative policies of the Chaldean Church (till the sixteenth century) and the Latin Church (from sixteenth to twentieth century), on the other.

Moreover, the clergy of that era seemed to be more in line with cultic priesthood, as they were primarily trained and ordained to celebrate the sacraments, particularly the

Eucharistic Liturgy, which was restricted to Sundays and the days of obligation; as the liturgical language was Syriac, a foreign language, a major part of their clerical training practically consisted of learning the language and familiarizing the priestly candidates with the liturgical texts and rubrics. Such a state of affairs did not leave much to aspire for any theological acumen or to lead to any substantial theological contributions; as the language of the Chaldean liturgy and the language of ordinary communication were different, there seemed to have been no incentive for the ecclesiastical leadership to promote any local efforts to theologize in the local language. Most of the clergy remained complacent about their minimal understanding of liturgical texts, and those who were inclined to seek theological sources were content with the available texts in Syriac, mostly from the Fathers of the Church; hence, there was no incentive for indigenous theologizing. Moreover, we do not have any recorded evidence to indicate any significant attempt on the part of the native members of Saint Thomas Christians to theologize either in their own local language or in their liturgical language.

It is unbelievable that a vibrant community that was living and transmitting its faith in Jesus Christ – with its own and borrowed traditions of celebrating the faith – did not make its own attempts to theologize in its native tongue. While there exists evidence for the conscious but deplorable efforts made by the Latin hierarchy to burn all local sources soon after the Synod of Diamper (1599), it is not clear from the historical sources about what had gone wrong with preserving and perpetuating the writings, if any, and other sources from the first few centuries of the life of Saint Thomas Christians in Malabar. Were there any covert efforts on the part of the leadership in eliminating traces of attempts made by the local

community of Saint Thomas Christians? Unfortunately, we have no source at hand to argue in either direction. Thus, going by the extant sources, it can be inferred that till the second half of the nineteenth century, there has hardly been any evidence available to indicate that any significant theologizing effort or theological work was made by any of the sons and daughters of the church, except to have bequeathed the liturgical and theological sources to the natives that were made available to her by the East Syrian Church in her association of more than a millennium. The conspicuous absence of indigenously developed worship forms among the Saint Thomas Christians (which is applicable to all churches in India claiming their origin to Apostle Thomas) was also due to the fact that no effort was made with regard to indigenous theologizing. There was also the absence of a local hierarchy to guide and animate the faithful and the clergy towards their own self-identity and its perpetuation and evolution. So, the absence of indigenous theologizing, or its suppression for long, resulted in the adoption of foreign forms of worship, which, in the absence of any other alternative, over a period of time, became familiar and acceptable to the native community of Saint Thomas Christians, with some finding it impossible to even conceive of a native form of theology and worship. Even in this latter instance, I am inclined to believe that the bishops from the East Syrian Church, who animated the local community of faithful in their liturgical life for long, did not encourage native Christians to develop their own indigenous forms of worship, which is evident from the fact that most of the extant liturgical texts are, for all practical purposes, exact copies of the liturgical texts that were in vogue in the Chaldean Church. This gives rise to speculation and certain questions: Was it an oversight on the part of the then ecclesial

leadership offered by the Chaldean Church? Did it result from the lack of sufficient indigenous leadership? Or, was it the result of a bigger plot or grand plan on the part of a sister church that offered its spiritual and liturgical leadership to an indigenous church in India, to keep the latter dependent and subservient and, thus, to force it to adapt to the familiar ways of the former forever? Although it would be extremely difficult to understand the historical processes objectively, we are even at an utter loss when we see that, along with the spiritual leadership of an East Syrian bishop, there was a native archdeacon to administer the temporal affairs of the Saint Thomas Christians who could have animated the natives into processes of theologizing to deepen their faith expressions; however, the historical records do not give us much to think that even such a key office was productive in this regard. Although it is difficult to arrive at any conclusive answers, as they were not left with any other known alternative, it is only fair to acknowledge that the adoption of the Chaldean liturgical practices (despite the adoption of a foreign form of worship as well as a foreign tongue as its liturgical language) has contributed to maintaining and enlivening the faith of the Saint Thomas Christians.

It is against this backdrop that we see the pioneering, but exceptional and unparalleled efforts of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara (1805-1871), a celebrated faithful from among the Saint Thomas Christians, who was ordained in 1829 and (along with others) founded the first indigenous consecrated communities in India, namely, Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI, 1831) and Congregation of Mother of Carmel (CMC, 1866). Having acquired mastery over the prevalent East Syrian liturgical traditions and local Christian practices during his formative years, under the able guidance of Malpan Thomas Palackal, and having been involved in the

establishment of the first indigenous communities of consecrated life for men and women, Saint Chavara emerged a spontaneous leader of the Saint Thomas Christians during the nineteenth century. While he remained faithful to the then existing legitimate ecclesiastical jurisdiction (namely, of the Latin hierarchy) and fought tooth and nail in sustaining the unity of the Church, he had the Spirit-led aspiration to motivate the community of Saint Thomas Christians to a deeper understanding of faith, its clearer articulation and a sound interpretation, to ensure that his brethren were assisted in their efforts to profess and practise the faith.

Although we do not come across any precursors of theologizing among the Saint Thomas Christians, it is a matter of curiosity to know how Saint Chavara emerged a theologian in the Syro-Malabar Church. Malpan Thomas Palackal, his formator and mentor, was known to collect all available books, even in Tamil, which were naturally accessible to Saint Chavara as a seminarian and, later, as the assistant of the Malpan. This may have facilitated better opportunities for reading and reflection on the part of Chavara, which could have indirectly played a preliminary but significant role in his grooming as a theologian. It is also believed that during the seminary days Saint Chavara, on the instruction of Malpan Thomas, started to gather together the East Syrian Liturgy of the Hours, which had not yet been codified as one unit (it was later prepared for publication by Chavara himself, though its formal approval from Rome came only after his demise); this clearly indicates that he not only had mastery over the foreign language and the intellectual acumen to carry out the task at hand, but also had the confidence of his own master, who was at that time recognized to be one of the best formators of priestly candidates in the Syro-Malabar Church. Moreover, with his

high intellectual calibre exhibited even when he was a young boy, we can visualize Saint Chavara receiving special training in various languages during his seminary days with Malpan Thomas Palackal, on the one hand, and with the establishment of the first indigenous religious congregation for men at Mannanam and the consequent leadership he offered as the Prior of Mannanam Monastery to his religious confreres and to the ecclesial life of the Syro-Malabar community, on the other. He was bestowed opportunities and responsibilities that required of him a deeper understanding of the Christian faith and its systematic articulation in order to animate the communities entrusted to his care. In addition, I am also inclined to think that his closer association with the European missionaries of the Vicariate of Verapoly, who were involved both in the administration of the religious community as well as that of the Vicariate, gave opportunities to Chavara to familiarize himself with the various ways in which Christian doctrines were inculcated among the faithful in the Latin tradition; his familiarity with them and their extensive missionary operations may have influenced Chavara to adopt some of their best practices for the common good of the faithful in his own church. Further, it is also reasonable to consider his continuous involvement in the formation of priestly and religious candidates at the Mannanam Monastery as another source of his theological acumen, which required of him (along with his confreres) a better and deeper understanding of the Sacred Scripture, and mastery over the Christian doctrine based on the available, but restricted sources; the transformation that the priests, who were trained at these monasteries, had impacted among the faithful testifies to the fact that they went far beyond the traditional role of cultic priests, and enhanced their faith as well as that of the natives with a deeper understanding of

biblical and ecclesial sources. When we put all these factors together, we understand that it was the consequence of a spontaneous development that Saint Chavara emerged as a pioneering theologian among the Saint Thomas Christians.

It must also be admitted that, though Saint Chavara had been formally appointed to train and examine candidates for priesthood in the Syro-Malabar Church by the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly (thus he was bestowed the title 'Malpan', meaning professor and examiner), he did not write or publish any scientific theological treatises or expositions on theological themes. Although he did instruct the candidates to priesthood as well as consecrated life, in his capacity as Malpan and Prior at Pallipuram, Mannanam, and Koonammavu, we are not in possession of any notes from his discourses or instructions. However, his extensive writings, necessitated by pastoral exigencies and religious decorum, such as exhortations, chronicles, poetries, circulars and letters, literary and spiritual writings, etc., do contain sound and significant theological content where we witness his reflections on and interpretations about the Christian faith content, with particular reference to the person of Jesus Christ whom he had encountered personally in the pages of the Gospel, in his own personal contemplative prayer, and in his extensive encounter with the people of various social strata in his capacity as consecrated pastor. It seems plausible that Saint Chavara's attempt to theologize was more a by-product of his commitment to the person of Christ and his pastoral involvement in the Church than an intentional goal in itself.

Theology, consequently, for Saint Chavara was not an academic pursuit or systematic affair, but an attempt to affirm his deeper experience of the person of Jesus Christ, who readily embraced everyone, particularly the poor and the needy, and endeavoured to establish the kingdom of God

that aimed at cultivating an integral and inclusive outlook in the whole society. Equally, his theological orientations, devoid of discriminating boundaries, were fine-tuned by his pastoral concerns: he took it upon himself to lead his flock to better pastures by way of animating them spiritually and socially, to uplift them by enhancing their socio-cultural status, particularly by focusing on the poor and the marginalized, to offer them opportunities of education with the hope that he could nurture future generations with values and culture, prepare them for a better social and religious outlook, and ready them to take up their familial and social responsibilities with the aim of furthering the common good of the whole society. In these pioneering efforts that Saint Chavara immersed himself in, he was motivated primarily by his profound faith in Jesus Christ and his selfless commitment to the people of God; hence, along with his social interventions, he had a clear perception of his anchoring in Jesus and was also bent on making efforts to articulate this faith content so that others could understand and cherish it in the best way possible.

As the theology of Saint Chavara evolved from his existential contexts and pastoral exigencies, we see certain necessary strands merging together in its spontaneous development. The first strand is identified from the fact that for Chavara Jesus was indeed a person whom he encountered in his everyday life, a person with whom he had a personal relationship. This faith was nurtured through his life of prayer, liturgy, and other spiritual exercises. Chavara had developed a habit of intense prayer from his early years as a religious priest, when he spent hours on his knees before the Blessed Sacrament; his confreres attested to the fact that he was deeply immersed in contemplation both during his community prayers and during the long hours of his personal

prayer; he aspired to be locked up within the tabernacle: he cherished an intimate and mystical union with Jesus; even when he was involved in hectic activities for the uplift of the people around, by being prayerful throughout the day, he could maintain an unbroken relationship with Jesus, whom he endearingly addressed "*ente appa*" (my beloved father). Hence, theological reflections emerged primarily from his intense and close proximity with the person of Jesus Christ and his earnest efforts to articulate this dynamic relationship for the sake of others so that they could also, in turn, be animated to develop a similar personal relationship with Jesus.

The second strand of Saint Chavara's theology emerged from his pastoral commitment to the faithful whom he reached out to, and cared for, throughout his ministry as a pastor and religious. The Church of his time was more inclined to focus on the liturgical needs of the people than to initiate efforts for their holistic welfare. Such a state of affairs led to few expectations by the people from the church and from the cultic leadership. Chavara, along with his confreres, however, brought extensive changes on the pastoral scene, cultivating an integral outlook and conceiving of their pastoral involvement going far beyond the cultic needs of the faithful. Accordingly, the integral and inclusive outlook that he cultivated necessitated him to animate people in their needs be it social, cultural, structural, or religious. Being the leader of the pioneering religious community, he was bent on realizing the founding charisma of the CMI, namely, to realize "*kannu kattapetta nanmakaloke,*" meaning "all that has been shown to be good [by the Spirit]." This urged him to proactively respond to the needs of the people, which got him involved in setting up the first centralized seminary at Mannanam, opening a Sanskrit school, starting a printing

press, visiting churches to preach retreats, establishing catechumenates to empower new converts, etc.: in all, as a consecrated pastor, he considered it necessary to respond to the needs of the community and to get involved in a myriad of things with the only intention of furthering the common good of the society, ensuring that the benefits of his actions reached everyone, cutting across all sections of the society. Thus, the theological perspectives that he had developed rose from his close proximity with the people as a pastor, who involved himself in their concerns, and who was inspired by the Gospel teachings as well as the spiritual stirrings emanating from his incessant relationship with Jesus.

A third strand of Saint Chavara’s theological inspiration came from his attempts to explain and formulate the faith content of Christianity, which he cherished as the core of his being. As the head of the first indigenous consecrated community and as a pastor placed at the helm of the affairs of the Syro-Malabar Church, he experienced various instances that required him to articulate the core elements of the doctrine to offer clarity as well as to inspire his wards for a deeper faith experience. For example, in the letters or circulars he wrote to the members of the consecrated community, he instructed his confreres on the basic teachings on religious consecration with a view to animate and stabilize the members in their unique calling. As a pastor involved in nurturing the faith of the people, or in rebuilding the lost unity within the Church in connection with the presence of an unauthorized bishop from Bagdad, or in corresponding with higher ecclesiastical authorities, it was required of him to substantiate his instructions or requests with sufficient theological content; there were also instances of Chavara offering instructions to the candidates to consecrated life as well as to priesthood. These candidates were guided in the

seminaries attached to the monasteries. In all these instances, it was necessary for Saint Chavara to explicate the faith content with significant theological basis.

In all, these attitudes emerging from his existential Christian life, he, without any conscious effort, gave shape to a theological outlook, which can very well be deciphered from his numerous writings. His spiritual, pastoral, and doctrinal aptitudes merged together in shaping his theology, making it fundamentally Christian, pastorally grounded and practical. Moreover, a combination of the spiritual and the pastoral outlook made Saint Chavara's contributions more prophetic in nature: his involvement in any sphere of the life of the people challenged them in continuing with their unchristian ways and, in turn, aided them in initiating a truly Christian transformation. His prophetic engagements were positively welcomed by the faithful as well as the general society as they were convinced of his genuine intentions to serve them and to uplift everyone, especially the poor and the marginalized. Being spiritual and pastoral in his orientations, in his writings, Chavara was not primarily and exclusively motivated by any doctrinal concern; at the same time, it was also true that his writings in no instance had gone against the doctrinal positions of the Church. Indirectly, this also attested to the ecclesial authenticity of the theological contributions of Saint Chavara.

Some of the theological concerns that Saint Chavara addressed in his writings as well as pastoral engagement can be identified as follows: At the centre of Saint Chavara's theology we see his firm footing upon the Holy Trinity. The intense and intimate relationship among the three persons of the Holy Trinity was conceived by him in the form of a relationship among family members. He employed one of his favourite expressions to designate the Holy Trinity, namely,

*Trittoakudumbam*, meaning the Trinitarian family, which being associated with a familiar term *kudumbam* (family), better expressed its inner reality and dynamism, and the interpersonal relationship in a vibrant manner. Moreover, Saint Chavara maintained a more personal and intense relationship with the second person in the Trinity, namely, Jesus Christ the son, and addressed him as Father; there are many instances in his writings where we come across his usage of the most endearing address, *ente appa* (my beloved father) to address Jesus. Although it is unconventional in theological circles to address Jesus as Father, he had his inspiration in the New Testament theology of Saint John’s gospel, where Jesus affirmed to Philip that whoever has seen him has seen the father (Jn 14:9; Jn 12:45). The centrality that Saint Chavara accorded to the persons of Jesus Christ in his understanding of the Holy Trinity also indicated that, for him, the Trinity was not merely a distanced transcendent reality, but was personally represented in one person who had lived in this world as one among us. This made it possible for him to also establish and maintain a closer personal relationship with the Trinitarian Godhead. In this regard, it is also interesting to see that Chavara presented the *Trittoakudumbam* as the supreme model to be emulated both by biological families and consecrated communities.

Saint Chavara’s writings also offer us a rich understanding of Jesus Christ as the second person in the Holy Trinity. While his divinity and humanity are integrally perceived, his aspiration for a personal and intense relationship with Jesus Christ gave him an added reason to dwell more on his human character without in any way bracketing his divinity. Some of the poetic expressions of Chavara in his famous *Atmanuthapam* give us a grasp of his gospel-based understanding of Christology too. It is very clear in his

articulations that human beings are given easy access to the Trinitarian communion through the second person in the Holy Trinity, who was incarnated in human form, and lived amidst us (*Emmanuel*). Being the only perfect man and God in human history, Jesus, to Saint Chavara, offered us the best and easiest example of an ordinary human being, who, despite the trials and tribulations faced by him, continued to invest strong faith in the most Holy Trinity.

The pastor in Saint Chavara was genuinely concerned about the holistic care that he and his confreres could offer in grooming Christian families, as he not only conceived of the family as a miniature of the Church, but also as a replica of the Holy Trinity that embodies heavenly love and care. One of his ground-breaking insights on family is his statement in the *Testament of a Loving Father (Chavarul)*: “A good Christian family is the image of heaven.” According to his understanding, a family is oriented in its life and behaviour solely to the realization of eternal salvation; at the same time, being placed in a society, he also conceived of each Christian family having its immediate goal of peaceful coexistence with everyone else as well as contributing towards the common good. Having realized the good resulting from an orderly and secure life with his parents and as a seminarian under Malpan Thomas Palackal and, later, the head of the first indigenous consecrated community, Saint Chavara was convinced of the good resulting from a disciplined Christian life. Moreover, as a pastor closely accompanying families associated with the monastery, and from his extensive retreat preaching in parishes as well as his office as the Vicar General in the Vicariate of Verapoly, he had opportunities to understand how families broke up as a result of the wayward style of life of its members; hence, focusing on the importance of families in Christian living and keeping heaven as their

ideal, Chavara held that all families should insist on orderliness in general and in the grooming of children in particular. *The Testament of a Loving Father*, a letter addressed to the kith and kin in his native village Kainakary, offered them very crisp but pertinent practical instructions as to how to enhance and maintain orderliness in the whole family (first part) as well as on grooming children with proper Christian values and priorities (second part). More than a piece of practical advice, the *Chavarul* offers families a solid Christian foundation, anchoring itself on the Bible as well as on the teachings of the Fathers of the Church; hence, along with every piece of advice he offers, Chavara succeeded in this document to offer them a truly Christian perspective on family. It is, therefore, natural that he considered the *Trittvakudumbam* (Holy Trinity) and *Tirukudumbam* (Holy Family) to be the ultimate heavenly ideal and earthly model, respectively, for Christian families.

Having chosen to become a consecrated priest during the final stage of his seminary days, and having been associated with his own Malpan and other senior companions in founding the first indigenous community of consecrated life at Mannanam in 1831, the later grooming of which was his unique but God-given assignment, Saint Chavara also developed a solid theological position on consecrated life. As he began his public life as an ordained parish priest, his aspiration to be part of this consecrated fraternity led him to esteem community life to great extent and, in his later life he addressed his confreres as *koodappirapukal* (children of the same parents or co-borns). Hence, he conceived of consecrated life also as a family, after the dynamic unity of the Holy Trinity (*Trittvakudumbam*), with a close knit bonding among the members, whose internal life in the monastery and external life in the ministry were seen as ecclesial

expressions of their collective faith consciousness and commitment to the person of Jesus Christ. Further, their expertise in consecrated communion, resulting from a vowed life of all its members, was anchored on the three evangelical counsels, which, according to his expression, are *manavatitvam* (celibacy), *agatitvam* (poverty), and *cholvili* (obedience). These native expressions used by Saint Chavara to indicate the three vows clearly express the core meaning of consecration that each religious is called upon to live. The total self-surrender stemming from one's personal call to radically follow Jesus Christ in the Church is facilitated by these evangelical counsels lived out in the consecrated community with supernatural motives. He conceived of and lived out his consecrated life as a way of life in which relinquishing choices in the biological, economic, and autonomous realms of life he had to submit him to the community and its superiors for guidance and animation, motivated by supernatural aspirations that aim at the realization of "the salvation of all" and "one's own salvation."

Coming to his vision of the Church, Saint Chavara was not inclined to exclude anyone or any tradition from his pastoral purview, but cherished an integral and inclusive approach in his attitude as well as engagements. From many of such instances, we shall draw our attention to his synthetic approach towards the East Syrian and Latin traditions. As he was groomed in the East Syrian liturgical tradition, he had a natural preference for it; however, as a pastor, he was not ready to settle for it as the only and final form of his Christian worship. Although there were reasons for accentuating the antagonism between these two liturgical traditions, especially based on the socio-cultural differences between the communities and the differences of opinions emerging from

the ecclesiastical administrative arrangements, Saint Chavara encouraged unity among the faithful by way of sharing their resources for furthering the common good. While he made numerous efforts to perfect the East Syrian liturgical tradition, as it was being practised during his lifetime (like organizing the liturgical calendar, setting up the authentic text of the Eucharistic Liturgy and its orderly celebration, and compiling the Liturgy of the Hours which was available from various sources in bits and pieces), he also tried to enhance it by adapting the best from the Latin liturgical tradition, especially to fill the lacuna that he had identified within the East Syrian liturgical practices (for example, translating the service on Great Saturday and seeking approval for the same from Rome, adopting popular devotions such as rosary, forty hour adoration, etc.). In all these, it was not his exclusive favour for one liturgical rite over the other that mattered to him ultimately, but the vibrant faith practice of the faithful and their animation towards holiness; his concern was to enliven the faith of the people in the best way possible. Common good moved him to adopt an integral and inclusive approach wherein he was ready to synthesize the best practises from various sources into the liturgical practices of his community, as he believed that all good comes from the same Divine source; he was ready to integrate those elements which did not in any way conflict with the fundamental faith content of his ecclesial community. In fact, through these efforts, he was positively contributing towards the evolution of a new ecclesial identity for the Church of Saint Thomas Christians in India, which, being an apostolic church founded by Apostle Thomas himself, was not destined to be a mere replica of the East Syrian Church, but have its own identity.

Chavara’s preference for any one particular ritual church did not emerge from his blind adherence to one or the other,

but from his reasonable understanding of anyone creatively contributing to the enhancement of Christian living in the native community of Saint Thomas Christians, which seemed to have been unduly over-dominated by multiple foreign ecclesial bodies, none of which possessed a true Christian approach in furthering the autonomous and integral growth of his own native ecclesial community. At the administrative level of the Church, as the Syro-Malabar community was under the jurisdiction of the Vicariate of Verapoly, Chavara was more of a bridge-builder between the Latin hierarchy and the Syro-Malabar faithful; this is best attested in his much acclaimed efforts to fight against the division that emerged in the Church due to the unauthorized presence of Bishop Roccas in the churches belonging to the Syro-Malabar Church. Even when he vociferously fought against Roccas and made every effort to oust him from among the Saint Thomas Christian communities, he cherished an ideally Christian and merciful attitude towards his opponent and extended all possible support to him to settle the matter without in any way hurting him or publically humiliating him. All these clearly attest to the fact that the Christian perspectives of Saint Chavara were more integral and inclusive and it had no scope to exclude anyone from the all-embracing attitude of Jesus, his Supreme Master and Lord.

Moreover, although he displayed a preference for the East Syrian liturgical tradition, Chavara did not seem to have any preference for the ecclesial leadership of the Chaldean Church. While this would have been motivated by the ecclesial legitimacy of the leadership of the Vicariate of Verapoly, it would also have been due to the reason that the ecclesial leadership offered by the hierarchy of the East Syrian Church as such did not contribute much towards the spiritual and ecclesial growth of the Saint Thomas Christians in India.

As Chavara (along with his senior collaborators) was worried about the Saint Thomas Christians remaining *macci* or infertile in being and becoming a church (according to him, especially for not having produced any canonized saint in its history of eighteen hundred years), and as the ecclesiastical leadership offered by the hierarchy of East Syrian Church did not produce any tangible benefits for the Saint Thomas Christians, except to have a foreign bishop as a figurehead, he had reasons to believe that any further association with the East Syrian Church would neither help the native Saint Thomas Christians towards their spiritual development nor in the growth as a full-fledged autonomous local church of apostolic origin with its own spiritual, liturgical, and ecclesial frameworks. He had already surmised that once a native bishop was appointed as a response to the long-standing longing of the faithful of Malabar, the orientation of the Saint Thomas Christians towards Babylon would end. Moreover, as he was witness to the aspirations of his own people for a native bishop, on the one hand, and against the ecclesiastical jurisdiction offered by the Vicariate of Verapoly, also due to the discrepancy of liturgical rites and use of languages, on the other, he believed that in the long run, the most ideal solution would be to have an indigenous ecclesiastical leadership with independent jurisdiction for the Syro-Malabar Church and Latin Church. Accordingly, in one of his letters to the *Propaganda Fide*, he dared to directly communicate the same to Rome, clearly stating that the only solution would be “to have two bishops here: one for the Latin Church and other for the Syrian Church.”

His unique contributions such as establishing consecrated life for men and women with true ecclesial orientations and creating disciplined families and the grooming of the younger generations were aimed at strengthening the local

church of Saint Thomas Christians, which had lacked proper pastoral guidance in the past. As he felt that the community remained infertile (*macci*) due to the lack of indigenous leadership in the hierarchy (mainly due to an impoverished training of the clergy and total absence of native hierarchy), Saint Chavara made every effort to fill that lacuna by offering systematic seminary training attached to the monasteries and made all possible efforts to convince the authorities about the need for establishing a native hierarchy. The only concern for Saint Chavara in his involvement in the administration of the Church was its sole foundation in the person of Jesus Christ and prevalence of charity and unity among the faithful.

In all these developments, however, Saint Chavara's ecclesiology stood out as one that insisted on establishing indigenous ecclesial leadership while, at the same time, wilfully submitting himself to the legitimate authority instituted by the Church. His personal preference for native leadership did not dissuade him from his respect for the ecclesiastical leadership offered by the Vicariate of Verapoly. Despite the ritual differences, the Catholic Church, to Saint Chavara, was one under the sole leadership of the See of Peter. It was this conviction that inspired him to fight against those who thwarted the ecclesial unity for any reason, even if they were in favour of his preference for native leadership of the Saint Thomas Christians. It was the same spirit of the one and united Church that also inspired him to wilfully integrate best practices from the sister churches into the ecclesial life of the Saint Thomas Christians.

Interestingly, the theological contributions of Saint Chavara, solidly founded on the biblical sources as well as the teachings of the Fathers of the Church, had a conspicuously humanitarian face. His theologizing efforts were not conceptually or doctrinally oriented; rather, his

theological reflections made better sense when seen as efforts to make his faith practices more authentic as well as inspiring to his co-pilgrims. His concerns in Christian faith were spiritual and pastoral to the extent that they should, according to him, ultimately help everyone become better human beings, or humane individuals, who are ready to respond to a needy neighbour or a person who finds himself or herself on the margins of the society or the church. Instead of being satisfied with giving directions to others, Saint Chavara dared to lead from the front, immersing himself in the task of spiritual and social progress of the human beings around him, breaking new ground in Christian social uplift, spearheading the whole process with the sole weapon of his unshakable faith in the Divine Providence stemming from a life anchored in Jesus Christ within the ecclesial horizons of the Catholic Church.

Although Saint Chavara had made unparalleled contributions in shaping up a theology existentially suitable to the Saint Thomas Christians through his relentless and overarching efforts to animate and strengthen the community of faithful, it is regrettable that no significant effort has been made so far to unravel his theological contributions, though there were innumerable attempts from various corners to bring out a number of popular publications highlighting his spiritual as well as socio-cultural and administrative contributions. Despite the great appreciation for the socially and administratively significant contributions made by Saint Chavara, it seems that no body took the trouble to study his writings to unearth his theology. Many trained Catholic theologians, whose teachings and writings are solely inspired by the methodology of western theologians, have never taken it upon themselves to study this key figure in the ecclesial spectrum of a vibrant Indian Church; even many others who

take the native thinkers seriously seem to have bypassed Saint Chavara's contributions probably because he hailed from the southern-most state of India and belonged to the Syro-Malabar Church; the fact that most of his writings are in Malayalam also might have been a roadblock for some in exploring his pioneering efforts at theologizing for a native Christian community in India. It is strange and unfortunate that although he had treaded a path unparalleled in many respects, even after his canonization on 23 November 2014, neither the ecclesiastical authorities nor his own confreres took the trouble to bring out his indigenous and pioneering contributions towards theologizing among the Saint Thomas Christians. It is in this context that *A Pillar and Guiding Light*, a well-organized scientific study by Sophy Rose, a member of the Congregation of Mother of Carmel which was founded by Saint Chavara himself, clearly delineating the unique as well as pioneering theological contributions of Chavara, gains its prominence both on the ecclesial horizons and within the academia. The objective of this work, as the author puts it clearly in the introduction, is "to bring out and systematize his theological vision and insights in a systematic manner by making use of certain theological models and disciplines."

*A Pillar and Guiding Light*, a well-argued out survey on the theological contributions of Saint Chavara, has successfully brought to the public light those significant theological insights offered by Saint Chavara during his lifetime, though they went undetected due to the fact that they were spread across the width and breath of his manifold writings. With a masterstroke, Sophy Rose has managed to pool and string them together to present a convincing argument that Saint Chavara was indeed a theologian of great merit, who could be placed alongside the great Fathers of the Church as far as the Saint Thomas Christians are concerned. After an

extensive and focused analysis of the contributions of Saint Chavara, Sophy Rose takes a definitive position that “his writings contain the doctrines and dogmas of the Church in a vivid manner.” His uniqueness, according to Sophy, is that, in Saint Chavara, we find an integral synthesis of the teachings of the Fathers of the Church in the early centuries and the Second Vatican Council of the twentieth century.

True to his aspiration to be an agent of Christian synthesis, seen throughout his life, Saint Chavara’s theological contributions also bridged Catholic teachings from different epochs. Highlighting some of his key theological contributions, especially in the light of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, which came almost a century after his death, the author insightfully makes the following list about his achievements: “... he imbibed the centrality of liturgy for the renewal of the Church from within, the first and foremost duty of the pastors to preach the Word of God, the urgency of providing formation to the family, necessity of giving solid formation to the seminarians, the necessity of fostering religious life for the missionary endeavour of the Church, the need of giving catholic education to the children, offering all possible care to the poor and the needy, etc.” From an enlightened ecclesial administrative point of view, Saint Chavara is acclaimed to have “ascertained the need of protecting and promoting the apostolic heritage of the Church, acknowledged and asserted the apostolic succession and the ecclesiastical jurisdiction, demanded the shepherding of bishop for each Rite from their own Rite, defended the unity of the Church, promoted the communion with the Holy See, encouraged unity with diversity in the Church, and upheld the equality of churches.” In the light of the above, Sophy Rose minces no words to affirm that he was indeed “a

man with divine wisdom and pastoral prudence," qualities that are essential to constitute a genuinely Christian theology.

In *A Pillar and Guiding Light: Kuriakose Elias Chavara, a Theologian of the Church*, we have a mystic theologian, a pastoral theologian, and an ecclesial theologian merging together perfectly in the person and writings of Saint Chavara. Although his writings may not be classified as theological treatises in modern theological parlance, the rich theological content that we come across in them is so compelling to confirm that Saint Chavara was indeed a theologian of great merit. This is more appealing when we also realize that he had no precursors in theologizing in his own land or in his own Syro-Malabar Church: practically, he had to start from the scratches, based on the limited access he had to some rudimentary sources; this, however, made his theological contributions more existential, which had great practical import for the whole Church of Saint Thomas Christians, especially when her faithful had no sound but native ecclesial leadership to animate them in their life of faith. In this regard, it is also clear that the theological acumen of Saint Chavara was instrumental in transforming the life of the Saint Thomas Christians and in guiding them to affirm that theirs is an apostolic church that should be accorded its legitimate administrative autonomy to see its full-flowering in Christian faith and charity. Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara, a pioneering theologian of the Saint Thomas Christians, an ecclesial theologian of great merit, indeed continues to be a trailblazer, a 'pillar' and a 'guiding light' in effectively navigating the Church of Saint Thomas Christians towards her providential destiny.

## PREFACE

In the Catholic Church, the Syro-Malabar Church is a very unique one and is blessed with an abundance of graces. It is an apostolic Church which received the Christian faith in the first century itself directly from one of the apostles of Christ, Saint Thomas. It kept its faith intact and communion with the Holy See uninterrupted until this time. It is a very dynamic and vibrant Church. The Church has numerous God-fearing families, zealous laity, and plenty of priestly and religious vocations. Her missionaries serve the Church across the globe. Among her children there are many preachers and ministers who are involved directly in preaching the Gospel and the establishment of the Kingdom of God. However, the Church serves humanity from womb to tomb for their integral development through various organizations, social and charitable institutions. Above all, she is blessed with four canonized Saints, two Blessed, a few Venerables and more than a dozen of Servants of God. Nevertheless, she lacks an ecclesiastically approved official theologian as we see in the Latin or Greek Churches. Of course, in the Syriac tradition we have fathers and doctors of the Church like Saint Ephrem; but an ancient and apostolic Church, Syro-Malabar Church is not yet fortunate to have an officially declared 'Father' or 'Doctor' of the Church. Is it because that nobody in this Church is eligible for this title or so far the Church could not highlight someone for that? Ours is an attempt to deal with this challenging question focusing on the canonized saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara. Saint Chavara was an ecclesiastical luminary who bravely stood and fought for the unity of the Church by maintaining the communion with the See of Peter and the universal

Church in various turbulent situations that emerged in the Church.

In this venture, I owe primarily to God Almighty who inspired me to take up this theme and develop it in this manner. I thank Him wholeheartedly for the ineffable graces He has showered upon me throughout my undertaking.

I acknowledge with great indebtedness to Mar Joseph Kallarangatt, the Bishop of Palai and my dear professor, for gracing this work with his insightful Foreword. As an erudite scholar, writer, and theologian, Mar Kallarangatt is well known not only to the Syro-Malabar Church but also to the Indian as well as the universal Church.

I want to place on record my deep gratitude to my Superior General Mother Sibi CMC for her concern and encouragement, former and present Provincial Superiors, Sr. Suma Rose CMC and Sr. Presanna CMC and also my community members at Carmel Mount and Carmel Villa, Chethipuzha, for their support and valuable prayers.

With much gratitude I remember Fr. Paul Achandy CMI, Prior General, for his interest in the cause of Saint Chavara and the moral support he provided. My profound gratitude is directed to Fr. Saju Chackalackal CMI, the General Editor of the project of publishing the series, "Theological Studies on Saint Chavara," for his constant encouragement, timely interventions and valuable suggestions. In this endeavour, his commitment, hard work, and promptness are to be highly appreciated. I extend also my sincere thanks to all the Fathers, Sisters, and all those who have collaborated in the realization of this project.

It is my hope that this book will be an inspiration for many to know and to love Saint Chavara and to get inspired and enriched by his writings and theological visions. May the Holy Church, our *Mater et Magistra*, acknowledge and

declare Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara, who led and inspired the Syro-Malabar Church in the nineteenth century and continues to inspire its members in the twenty-first century also, be declared a 'Doctor of the Church', a *pillar and guiding light*, for the glory of God, honour of the Church, and the salvation of souls.

Feast of Saint Chavara  
3 January 2020

Sr. Sophy Rose CMC  
Changanacherry



## INTRODUCTION

In the Catholic Church, there are officially recognized and declared 'Fathers of the Church' and 'Doctors of the Church'. To belong to any one of these categories, the persons concerned should have certain officially approved characteristics such as antiquity, sanctity, orthodoxy, and ecclesiastical approval with regard to the 'Fathers of the Church' and sanctity, orthodoxy, and ecclesiastical approval regarding the 'Doctors of the Church'. Among these distinctive characteristics, sanctity and orthodoxy are the most important elements regarding the person concerned. In the Catholic Church, there are many canonically declared saints; but they are not necessarily theologians. There were many renowned theologians; but all of them are not declared saints. Hence, a saint who complements sanctity with eminent theology is eligible to be considered as a doctor of the Church. For that they should manifest their faith in Jesus Christ, who is the fullness of God's revelation, not only through their heroic virtuous life but also through their erudite and orthodox teaching and writing of the revealed and incarnated Word Jesus Christ and His Mystical Body, the Church. Moreover, their teachings should be authentic, edifying, and enriching to the faithful of all times and places as well as supportive to the *Magisterium*. In brief, they must be faithful and outstanding witnesses to the sources of faith: the Holy Scripture and the Holy Tradition through their life, writing, and teaching. Here arises a question: Is Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara, the first canonized male saint of the Syro-Malabar Church, such a theologian? As far as I know, nobody has raised and analysed this question seriously. Hence, in this work, a

preliminary investigation is undertaken to answer this question.

Before entering into the content, let me say, Saint Chavara was not a systematic writer of theology. He didn't intend to write theology. He was not a professional theologian or writer; but he wrote. His writings seem to have rich theological content. Hence, we make an attempt to bring out and systematize his theological vision and insights in a systematic manner by making use of certain theological models and disciplines.

This analysis is carried out in five chapters. The first two chapters serve as the backdrop to the main point of our discussion: Is Chavara a theologian? In the first chapter, in order to offer a focus to the research, we offer a general understanding of theology and theologian, the various models of theology and theologian. However, for a closer understanding of the person, we present the ecclesial and social contexts in which he lived and his own perception of God and man.

The second chapter offers a presentation on the person of Saint Chavara, which begins with a brief profile of his life and a summary sketch of his writings. His writings are heterogeneous; they contain historical narratives, sharing of his own spiritual experiences, reflections on the Christ event, letters and circulars to persons and communities, including the Holy Father, Prefect of the Propaganda Fide, bishops, priests, religious communities, parishes, to the church in general, etc. Some works are written in poetic form. They are the outpouring of his heart and soul. Some of the writings are didactic and some are apologetic. He wrote mainly as a pastor in view of the good of the Church and the salvation of souls.

The third chapter entitled “Saint Chavara a Theologian: A Historico-Theological Appraisal” is the main part of this work. In this chapter, we make a thorough investigation into the life, activities, and writings of Saint Chavara to assess whether he is a theologian belonging to any one of the three models or types or an integration of all the three models as we have presented in the first chapter. We make this assessment to some extent in the light of the Second Vatican Council’s aim and vision.

The last two chapters are the highlights of Chavara’s theological visions implied in his writings. In view of understanding the authenticity and relevance of the doctrines and theological visions implied in his writings, in the fourth chapter, we make an appraisal of the writings of Saint Chavara in the light of the theology of the Apostolic Fathers of the Church. As we understand from the early literature, the Apostolic Fathers who lived in the first and second centuries did not aim at a scientific exposition of the Christian faith; their writings contain occasional utterances rather than doctrinal definitions. This is all the more true with regard to Saint Chavara too. Just as in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, we see certain authentic theological insights and doctrines in the writings of Saint Chavara. Hence, we make an effort to highlight them under various titles.

The final chapter, “Ecclesiology of Saint Chavara in the Light of Vatican Council II,” is an attempt to prove that, although Saint Chavara lived and died in the nineteenth century, that is, almost one century before the Second Vatican Council, in his writings we have glimpses of Vatican II’s ecclesiology. This chapter, however, is not a comprehensive analysis of his ecclesiology; rather, it offers a critical appraisal of his ecclesial vision implied in a very

important letter that he sent to the *Propaganda Fide* in the light of three important documents, viz., *Lumen Gentium*, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, and *Unitatis Redintegratio*.

In brief, this work is only a preliminary attempt to enter into the life and writings of this great ecclesial luminary to ascertain whether he is a theologian or not. This is not a complete and comprehensive study. Hence, there is ample scope for more in-depth studies on various theological contributions made by Saint Chavara. To put forward such a challenge to the lovers of the Church is also an unspoken agenda of this endeavour.

## Chapter 1

### KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA A Prophetic Theologian Ahead of Time

There is an abundance of books dealing with theology. An attempt is made here not to write another treatise on theology but to make an enquiry into the life and writings of a nineteenth century religious priest of Kerala, India, of the Syro-Malabar Church, namely, Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara (1805-1871), from a theological perspective. Before entering into the details, as it was stated in the introduction, Saint Chavara was not a systematic writer of theology; he didn't intend to write theological treatises. Whatever he wrote was the outpouring of his own heart and his intention was to serve the needs of the Church. Behind a set of heterogeneous writings that he has left for posterity we see a mind imbued with theological vision and a clear and articulate sense of mission which has got rich theological underpinnings. In order to delve deep into his vision and to bring out his theology, first of all, we present in brief an explanation of theology and a general understanding of a theologian.

#### **1. Theology and Theologian: An Elementary Analysis**

##### **1.1. Theology: An Explanation**

There are many definitions regarding theology. Settling with any one of them sets a limitation. Yet, we shall begin with some basic understanding of theology. In general, one tends to think of theology as an academic enterprise, a subject matter for study, a systematic treatise, something we read in a book or examine in a classroom and so on. Theology is an academic enterprise, scholastic in the literal

sense of the word. One of the pioneers of Christian mysticism Evagrius Ponticus (ca. 345–399) had a quite different view. According to him, theology is “knowledge of God gained from first-hand experience. It comes not from books, but from prayer.”<sup>1</sup> Evagrius did not doubt the value of reading, of study, of reason; he did not doubt the profound value of dogma, liturgy, and ecclesiastical authority. But for him, theology in the strict sense is the “encounter of the praying mind with God.”<sup>2</sup> In his best-known maxim, he proclaimed: “If you are a theologian, you pray truly; if you pray truly, you are a theologian.”<sup>3</sup>

In his *Fides et Ratio*, Pope John Paul II presents theology as follows: “Theology is structured as an understanding of faith in the light of a twofold methodological principle: the *auditus fidei* and *intellectus fidei*. With the first, theology makes its own the content of Revelation as this has been gradually expounded in Sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture, and the Church’s living *Magisterium* (DV 10). With the second, theology seeks to respond through speculative enquiry to the specific demands of disciplined thought.”<sup>4</sup> Theology’s basis and centre is, therefore, the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and its particular objective is the critical understanding of the content of the faith so that the lives of the believers may be made fully significant.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>W. Harmless and R. R. Fitzgerald, “The Sapphire Light of the Mind: The *Skemmata* of Evagrius Ponticus,” *Theological Studies* 62 (2001), 498.

<sup>2</sup>Harmless and Fitzgerald, “The Sapphire Light of the Mind,” 498.

<sup>3</sup>*De Oratōne* 60 (PG 79.1180).

<sup>4</sup>Pope John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* (Vatican: 1998), §65.

<sup>5</sup>Rino Fisichella, “Theology” in Rene Latourelle and Rino Fisichella, eds., *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, New York: Crossroad

Etymologically speaking, the word 'theology' comes from the Greek words *theos* (meaning 'God') and *logos* (meaning 'word'). So, at the essence, it is the study of God's Word. But the phrase "God's Word" means much more than just Sacred Scripture. It also means God's Word made flesh, Our Lord, Our God, and Our Saviour Jesus Christ. Theology, then, is studying and learning, praying to and, then, teaching about the person of Jesus Christ whom we love, and who loves us.<sup>1</sup> A very similar flow of thought we find in the words of J. Powathil, a renowned theologian of the Syro-Malabar Church. According to him, "theology is about knowing God and His salvific plan. This in turn should lead to greater love for God who revealed Himself as the fullness of love. If a theologian cannot love God better and follow Jesus more closely he is not to be considered a theologian at all. The study of theology leads one to the love for God, for Jesus, and His Church."<sup>2</sup>

## 1.2. General Understanding of a Theologian

If theology is the study of God's Word Incarnate, our Lord, our God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ, a theologian must be a person of faith. Since the subject and object of theology are constituted in God, a mere exercise of intellect and reason is not sufficient for theologizing. In other words, theologian must be a believer whose faith must be in the incarnated

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Publishing Company, 1994, 1060.

<sup>1</sup>John P. Cush, "There Are Three Types of Theologian," *National Catholic Register BLOGS*: <http://www.nregister.com/blog/fathercush/there-are-3-types-of-theologian>, accessed on 29 January 2018.

<sup>2</sup>J. Powathil, "Message," *Convocation Souvenir 2001*, Marthoma Vidyanikethan, Changanacherry.

word, Christ. A theologian must believe in what she studies and teaches. He must worship the 'subject' of his study and that subject is Jesus Christ. Here, the words of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) seem to be very relevant. He states: "Since the object of theology is the Truth which is the living God and His plan for salvation is revealed in Jesus Christ, the theologian is called to deepen his own life of faith and continuously unite his scientific research with prayer."<sup>1</sup> This is in tune with the best-known maxim of Evagrius Ponticus as we mentioned earlier: "If you are a theologian, you pray truly; if you pray truly, you are a theologian."<sup>2</sup> Hence, the absolute necessity of being a genuine theologian is being a person of faith and of having a personal and ecclesial adherence to the person of Jesus Christ.

### **1.3. Church: The Milieu of Theologizing**

Since the subject and object of theology constitute the matter of faith, theology must be done in the Church with, through, and in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the climax of God's revelation and faith is the response to this revelation. Revelation is handed down to us through two channels: Holy Tradition and the Holy Scripture (DV 9). Hence, they are the sources of faith and the Church is the custodian of both. Consequently, theology must be done in the Church based on both Holy Tradition and the Holy Scripture.<sup>3</sup> If it is not, it is only religious studies and not theology.

Again, theology must be done in the Church, as the Church is also the Mystical Body of Christ and the Bride of

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<sup>1</sup>Cited in Cush, "There Are Three Types of Theologian" [online].

<sup>2</sup>*De Orat*ion 60 (PG 79.1180).

<sup>3</sup>DV 9.

Christ, who is safe in the loving and protective embrace of her Bridegroom, Jesus Christ. However, she is guided and under the protection of the Holy Spirit, the other Paraclete. When we have the Holy Spirit and are influenced and guided by the same Spirit, we are not only theologians but are also ambassadors of Christ to the world. Nevertheless, all are subject to the teaching authority (*magisterium*) of the Church. Keeping this in mind, let us attempt a deeper and detailed understanding of who is a theologian.

## **2. Theologian: Various Types or Models<sup>1</sup>**

According to Gerald O'Collins, there are three types of theologians, or three 'models' of theology. They are: Theology at the Desk, Theology in the Streets, and Theology on the Knees. These models are all interlocked and all dependent on each other. An authentic theologian must integrate all three models in his/her life of faith.

### **2.1. Theology at the Desk (Academic Theologian)**

The first type of theologian is the *academic theologian*, the theologian in the classroom. Let us call this type the "theologian at the desk." This is the professor, the one who systematically investigates the mysteries of faith and exemplifies the adage that theology is *fides quaerens intellectum* or "faith seeking understanding," as stated by Saint Anselm of Canterbury.

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<sup>1</sup>In developing the argument in this section, I am mostly indebted to the article of Cush, "There Are Three Types of Theologian" [online].

## **2.2. Theology in the Streets (Pastoral Theologian)**

The second type of theologian is the *pastoral theologian*, the “theologian in the streets.” This is someone who takes his study of theology and uses it to actively engage the People of God in an attempt to make the faith accessible. This is one who, having studied the mysteries of faith, tries to bring that faith to the world and exemplifies the old saying typically attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi, “preach the Gospel always; use words when necessary.” It is worth to recall that most of the Fathers of the Church were not academic theologians, teaching in a classroom, but pastors, preaching and responding to the needs and concerns of their people.

## **2.3. Theology on the Knees (Praying Theologian)**

The third type of theologian is the *praying theologian*, the “theologian on his knees.” This is someone who takes his study of theology and uses it to deepen his relationship with Christ. This is the one who, having studied the mysteries of the faith, tries to bring the theology to dialogue with the beloved, Jesus. It is what we mean by the phrase, *lex orandi, lex credendi* (“the law of prayer is the law of belief”). A typical example of this third type of theology we find in Evagrius Ponticus. According to him, as we said earlier, “theology is knowledge of God gained from first-hand experience. It comes not from books, but from prayer.”<sup>1</sup> Evagrius did not doubt, as mentioned above, the value of reading, study, reason, etc.; nor did he doubt the profound value of dogma, liturgy, or ecclesiastical authority. But for

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<sup>1</sup>Harmless and Fitzgerald, “The Sapphire Light of the Mind,” 498.

him, theology in the strict sense is the encounter of a praying mind with God.<sup>1</sup>

In the light of the aforesaid understanding of theology and theologian, we make a thorough investigation into the life, writings, and activities of Saint Chavara to find out whether he is a theologian belonging to any one of the aforementioned categories or an integration of all the three. To carry this out, we shall make an attempt to understand the backdrop of Saint Chavara who lived ahead of time.

### 3. Backdrop of Saint Chavara: An Overview

Pope Francis, in his Apostolic Letter *Witnesses of Joy*, published in connection with the *Year of Consecrated Life*, makes a very striking statement: "I am counting on you 'to wake up the world,' since the distinctive sign of consecrated life is prophecy."<sup>2</sup> Saint Chavara, the first canonically professed consecrated person of India, is such a prophet: a prophet who awakened the world - Kerala Church and society - in which he lived. Although a man of the nineteenth century, he had awakened not only that epoch, but also the twentieth century, and still continues to enliven the twenty-first century."<sup>3</sup> Hence, he is also called "Light of the Kerala Church."<sup>4</sup> However, he was a faithful son and servant of the

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<sup>1</sup>Harmless and Fitzgerald, "The Sapphire Light of the Mind," 498.

<sup>2</sup>Pope Francis, *Witnesses of Joy* (Vatican: 2014), II/2.

<sup>3</sup>Sukumar Azhikode, *Footprints of Holiness* (Souvenir of Canonization of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara and Saint Euphrasia Eluvathingal, 23 November 2014, Published by CMI & CMC Congregations, 2015), 126.

<sup>4</sup>*Chronicle of Koonammavu Convent*, vol. II, 23. In this context, it is worth referring to the words of P. Ramachandran, former Governor of Kerala about Saint Chavara: "Chavara is the pride not only of Kerala, but also of entire mankind. It is rare indeed

Church, who, from the time he began his seminary studies at the age of 13 till he was called for his heavenly reward at the age of 65, prayed and worked extensively for the Church, suffered and laboured day and night very zealously for the spiritual and temporal welfare of the Church and the society. The life of this saintly man, who was ordained on 29 November 1829 and started his pastoral ministry as an ordinary parish priest, was the prelude of his extraordinary dynamic activities. His life was amazingly dedicated for the formation of the priests, the faith formation of the people of God, fostering of religious life, and the enlightenment and empowerment of the society at large. As the first lawful monk abiding by the rules from among the parish priests of the Catholic Church in India, and the first religious superior from among the religious priests, he was a prominent sage who was able to awaken and inspire the entire people of God, and in a very special way priests and religious. In these pages we make an attempt to delve deep into the personality of Saint Chavara to understand whether he is a theologian who led a spiritual awakening and renewal of

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where so many sterling virtues have blended so perfectly in one individual. Chavara was born a mortal, but the good he did over a span of six and half decades cast him in the mould of immortal of humanity. Yesterday, today and forever to the last syllable of recorded time this God-realized soul will remain among mankind's most cherished possessions... He was a man of deep vision who thought and acted far ahead of his times. His life is an inspiring and edifying saga. From the day he was ordained priest the father dedicated himself wholly to God and worked piously for the social, cultural and educational uplift of the fellow men." P. Ramachandran, "A Man of Deep Vision" in Kalluveetil and Kochappilly, eds., *The Lord of Heaven and Earth*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2004, 90.

the Church through his exemplarily virtuous life, literary works, and altruistic activities. Before we attempt this, we shall attempt a brief understanding of the ecclesio-social background of his life and his vision and experience of God.

### 3.1. Ecclesial Background

In order to enquire the greatness and significance of the ecclesiastical and theological contributions of Saint Chavara, we have to explore the situation of the Church and the society of his time. We shall make use of his own articulations in order to comprehend his perception on the then ecclesial situation: "The land of Malayalam [Kerala] which had received true faith from Saint Thomas, remains barren, not having produced a single saint even after nineteen centuries."<sup>1</sup> "The people had heard of men and women who practised religious virtues, but they did not have living examples of religious virginity as there existed no monasteries or convents and, hence, the omission of immense good."<sup>2</sup> "They faced the sad plight of spiritual blindness and lack of committed personnel to impart education by means of sowing the seed and nurturing the saplings of virtue through the glow of education."<sup>3</sup> "The obligation of 'priests to teach the faithful and of the parents to teach their children' was not adequately fulfilled,"<sup>4</sup> due to the lack of facility or circumstance or competent people or financial resources.

In addition to all these, the unfortunate status of the local church being deprived of even a single bishop of their own

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, vol. I: *Chronicles*, 146.

<sup>2</sup>CWC, vol. I: *Chronicles*, 1 & 230.

<sup>3</sup>CWC, vol. IV: *Letters*, IX/2.

<sup>4</sup>CWC, vol. IV: *Letters*, IX/2.

Rite or nationality to lead the priests and the people of God in accordance with their own apostolic faith and tradition was so crucial and detrimental. Therefore, the tragic situation of the Church consisting of the scattered sheep blindly following the 'hired' shepherds and being subjugated by thieves and bandits entering the sheepfold from the back door was so vulnerable as to live in absolute insecurity and spiritual insolvency. Apparently, this aggravated conflict, dispute, and separation caused the decline of faith, lack of unity and communion, tension between the hierarchy and the faithful, destruction of souls, etc. In short, the Church had reached a "barren state," as Saint Chavara himself said.

### **3.2. Social Situation of Kerala**

To understand the real value of his contribution we have to look also into the social situation of his period. Besides the above mentioned factors, there existed a civil society enslaved by the caste system, which was totally blind to accept human beings as they are. The high castes enjoyed all privileges and a high social status. There prevailed the evil customs and practices attached to the same, disregard for and breaking of fundamental rights, torturing of the downtrodden, economic discrepancy, and backwardness in social, cultural, and educational fields that prevented the low castes from entering the main stream of the society. The dignity of low caste people was not considered. They were not even permitted to enter the temples for worship and were not allowed to gather together or to come near to the high caste people. Untouchability was in its peak. Government jobs were reserved for high castes. The low

castes were not given admission in government schools.<sup>1</sup> Values such as equality, freedom, and brotherhood were no concern for them. Ultimately, it caused the life of the low castes miserable. Saint Chavara, who experienced deep sorrow in his heart observing all these inequalities, did not seek solace for all the woe from people, but from the true Son of God. He spent long hours immersed in contemplation before the Eucharistic Lord and the gracious Lord Himself opened His ways to him. God revealed to him the plans essential for the integral renewal and development of the people of God.

### 3.3. God-Man Vision

Like Jesus Christ the Son of God, Saint Chavara had a unique vision that prompted him to see God as his own Father, himself as the Father's son, the fellow beings as God's children and his siblings. Saint Chavara, who acclaimed with a gentle heart, "My heart, however, tells me to call you by no other name than *ente appa* (my Father),"<sup>2</sup> was filled with such God-experience that made him listen to the cries of his Father's children and his siblings, to see their sufferings and understand their hardships. He imbibed as his own the same attitude of the Son of God, as stated in the Gospel, "when Jesus saw the crowds, He had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Mt 9:36). Moreover, he had the strong conviction that none of the souls redeemed by his Father (he addresses Jesus as his 'Father')<sup>3</sup> through His

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<sup>1</sup>Thenamkalayil, "The Nineteenth Century Kerala Church and the Leadership of Blessed Chavara," *Herald of the East* 6 (2004), 111.

<sup>2</sup>CWC, vol. III: *Colloquies with the Father*, 5 (17-18 Malayalam).

<sup>3</sup>CWC, vol. III: *Colloquies with the Father*, 6 (20-21 Malayalam).

suffering and shedding of his precious blood be doomed, and that he had to be committed to save all the souls and entrust them to his Father.

Brimming with the love of God and the zeal for the salvation of souls, he ventured into the integral liberation of the people of God through various spiritual and intellectual enlivening activities and charitable services. That was an amazing step: an incredible endeavour for the reawakening of the society and the church. He made the reawakening and the empowerment of the Church and the society in five levels: spiritual, the state of life, ecclesiastical, intellectual, and the work of mercy level. We critically evaluate these contributions of Saint Chavara within the framework of the three models of theology and see whether he was a theologian in terms of these three models or made an integration of the three models.

## Chapter 2

### RISE OF A THEOLOGIAN An Exploration of Saint Chavara's Life and Writings

Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara, the first canonically declared male saint of the Syro-Malabar Church and the Church in India, is generally acknowledged as a spiritual and social reformer of the Church and the society. He was a great visionary who pioneered many ventures both in the ecclesiastical and social realms. As Sreedharamenon, one of the renowned historians of Kerala, has testified, "Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara was a holy light that was farsighted and gifted by the nineteenth century. The message, life and achievements of Father Chavara were not exclusively of the Catholic community. They are relevant for all communities and all ages. Father Chavara was undoubtedly a great man who lived ahead of his time."<sup>1</sup> In the following chapters, we make a search through the life and writings of this great man who lived ahead of his time in order to see whether he is a theologian or not. If a theologian, what kind of a theologian he is? As a backdrop to this process, we shall have a brief analysis of his life and writings. It will offer us a better basis to understand his theological vision and contributions.

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<sup>1</sup>Sreedharamenon, "A Renaissance Leader Who Walked Ahead of His Time" in T. Panthaplackal, *A Pearl Truly Indian*, Ernakulam: 2005, 81. This is an English translation of the Malayalam article from *Chavarayachan*, Kottayam: Deepika Publication, 2004, 16-20.

### **1. A Profile of Saint Chavara**

Saint Kuriakose Chavara was born on 10 February 1805 in the Chavara family at Kainakary, Kerala. At the age of 13 he joined the Seminary at Pallipuram. During his seminary life he lost his parents and also the only brother. Thus, he became the sole inheritor of his family ancestry. He was compelled to leave the seminary and take up the care of the family. Yet, he persisted in his call and conviction, pursued his priestly studies in the seminary. He was ordained priest by Bishop Aurelius Stabilini at Arthunkal on 29 November 1829. Along with Fr. Thomas Palackal and Fr. Thomas Porukara, Fr. Kuriakose Chavara was very much involved in the establishment of the religious community at Mannanam on 11 May 1831. Fr. Chavara was appointed Malpan<sup>1</sup> in 1844 along with Fr. Thomas Porukara by Francis Xavier Pescetto, the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly.

After the death of Malpan Thomas Palackal, and Malpan Thomas Porukara in 1841 and 1846 respectively, Malpan Kuriakose Chavara was the only survivor responsible for the canonical erection of the religious community at Mannanam as a full-fledged religious congregation which took place on 8 December 1855. The life and activities of the community at Mannanam under the able guidance of Fr. Kuriakose Chavara was very effective in the Church and Society in Malabar. Seven more monasteries were started (1857-1870) during the lifetime of Fr. Chavara in different parts of Malabar as requested by the parish priests and people.

The arrival of Bishop Thomas Roccas from Bagdad in 1861, without the permission of the Holy Father, created

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<sup>1</sup>The Syriac word *Malpan* means doctor or official teacher of the seminarians.

much confusion and difficulties in the Kerala Church, especially among the Syro-Malabar Christians. To tackle this situation, on 8 June 1861, the then Vicar Apostolic Msgr. Bernardine Baccinelli appointed Fr. Kuriakose Chavara as the Vicar General of the Syrians. When he was appointed the Vicar General, he worked hard to keep up the unity of the Church within, with the bishop of Verapoly, and with the Holy See.

The foundation of the first indigenous religious congregation for women by Saint Kuriakose Chavara at Koonammavu in 1866, with the help of an Italian missionary Fr. Leopold Beccaro OCD, was another milestone in the life of the Kerala Church, especially the Syro-Malabar Church. Moreover, for the integral renewal and development of the Church and the society, Fr. Kuriakose Chavara initiated many programmes and projects: he established monasteries, seminaries, first Catholic printing press in Kerala, the charity home in his native parish Kainakary as the first one ever in the history of the Church in India, and the Fraternity of Saint Joseph for the Dying; he renewed the liturgical life, popularized Sunday homilies and parish retreats; started schools and gave free mid-day meal for all students, defended the unity of the Church from the schism, etc. On 3 January 1871, this holy man of God, after a dynamic and fruitful life of 65 years, was called back to God for his eternal reward. Light of his life started shining even after his repose in the Lord.

Highlighting the multifaceted life of Saint Kuriakose Chavara, in 1959, the then Archbishop of Changanacherry, the Servant of God Mar Mathew Kavukatt wrote:

Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara was a great Christian, a very holy monk and a successful founder and builder of many institutions. While he most scrupulously lived the

life of a religious, dedicated to the love and service of God, the same divine love in him inspired him to devote himself, as much as he could, to the love and service of men. It is a long and most praiseworthy record of his varied enterprises and activities for the religious, social, cultural and educational advancement of his fellowmen. All his activities were the outcome of the holy aspirations of a heart that was ever pure and full of divine love and it is no wonder, therefore, that they were blessed by God and crowned with success. The life of Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara, a monk of extraordinary sanctity, a man of dynamic personality with broad vision and powerful push and unabating pluck, ever remains an inexhaustible source of inspiration to all those who care to look at it.<sup>1</sup>

On 23 November 2014 the universal Church approved and declared solemnly his sanctity through the canonization of this man of God. It is worth-quoting from a well known orator and literary critic of Kerala: "If a person who lived in the nineteenth century is remembered with reverence even in the twentieth century, then that person had created the twentieth and the twenty-first century while still living in the nineteenth century. Such great souls are called 'history makers'."<sup>2</sup> With this life background let us enter into his literary contributions.

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<sup>1</sup>Foreword to the book of K. C. Chacko, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara* (3<sup>rd</sup> Impression) (Mannanam: 1986), i-ii. This statement was originally written on 1 April 1959.

<sup>2</sup>These are the words of a Hindu, Malayalam critic Sukumar Azhikode as cited in Thenamkalayil, "The Nineteenth Century Kerala Church and the Leadership of Blessed Chavara," *Herald of the East* 6 (2004), 109.

## **2. Saint Kuriakose Chavara: A Writer**

It is quite surprising that Saint Chavara, who was occupied with external activities his whole life after priestly ordination, could find time and leisure to write so much. He was indeed a versatile linguist; he could write with ease both prose and verse, in his mother tongue Malayalam; he learned Tamil and Sanskrit during his pre-seminary education; he had a working knowledge of Latin, Italian, and Portuguese; he was well-versed in his liturgical language Syriac. His writings extended over a period of forty years, from 1829 when he was ordained to 1869 when he became weak and sick at Koonammavu. The last ten years constituted his most creative period.<sup>1</sup>

It would be very revealing to ask why Chavara wrote at all. Was it for his pleasure or for fame? Definitely no; since, the history reveals that he published almost nothing by himself, though he could have very well done so as he had a printing press at Mannanam from 1846. Saint Kuriakose Chavara seems to have written from an inner, spiritual urge to build up the Malabar Church in general and his spiritual children in particular, since primarily he was a pastor and a 'father'. Though Kuriakose did have an inborn talent for writing, he wrote not according to a plan worked out in advance as a professional writer would do, but wrote spontaneously as opportunities sprang up, or as the spirit prompted him.<sup>2</sup>

## **3. Writings of Saint Kuriakose Chavara**

Saint Chavara was a literary luminary, a prolific writer who wrote in local vernacular as did some of the Fathers of the

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<sup>1</sup>Poonolly, "Writings of Chavara," 115.

<sup>2</sup>Poonolly, "Writings of Chavara," 115-116.

Church in their time. In general, his writings are heterogeneous. His writings, which are available to us, can be divided into various categories such as historical notes, administrative writings, spiritual books, etc.<sup>1</sup> It consists of chronicles, letters, poems, hymns, dramas (*ecologues*), colloquies, prayers, and advices. His works are compiled and published in four volumes under the title *Complete Works of Chavara*.<sup>2</sup> They are: volume 1: *The Chronicles* (Historical Writings); volume 2: *Literary Writings: Compunction of the Soul, Dirge, Anastasia's Martyrdom*; volume 3: *Spiritual Writings: Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*; and volume 4: *The Letters*. Apart from these, we have his *Ecologues* and Liturgical Writings.

### **3.1. Historical Writings**

Saint Chavara really understood the importance of preserving historical documents. The chronicles he wrote from 1829-1870 are important documents in the history of the Church as well as the society. As the famous Kerala historian A. Sreedharamenon comments, "It is when we remember that in both ancient India and Kerala there was no interest in history and historical documents and that history consisted of fabricated stories and legends, we

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<sup>1</sup>Attukadavil, "Chavara: A Man of All Seasons," *Herald of the East* 1, 1 (2006), 72.

<sup>2</sup>*Chavarayachente Sampoorana Kruthikal*, an edited collection of the writings of Saint Chavara, was published in 1985 from CMI Prior General's House, Ernakulam. Its English translation, in four volumes, was published in 1990 by The Committee for the Cause of the Blessed Chavara, Mannanam.

understand that the interest Fr. Chavara had in historical documents, was beyond his age.”<sup>1</sup>

Saint Kuriakose Chavara was not a trained historian, but he had a very keen sense of history and ability to store them in his sharp memory and to narrate them or write them down with great accuracy. The *Chronicles* and *Letters* of Saint Chavara illustrate the history itself of the church of that time. These writings testify to Saint Chavara’s historical consciousness, farsightedness, honesty, and sense of justice. They throw light on the comprehensive description of his contacts and interventions with the people of various strata of the Church and society, including the Holy Father; in addition, they portray his status and influence on them as well. They are the mirrors of the socio-political life of the native land Kerala and the Church. They depict the history of the contemporary Church as well.

### 3.1.1. Chronicles

Saint Chavara had a very developed sense of history. He regularly wrote a diary in his own handwriting for over a period of forty-one years from 1829 to 1870, a total 399 pages in Malayalam. These pages are a treasure and a sourcebook for historians of Kerala, both secular and ecclesiastical. It is an authoritative historical record of the events that unfolded in the Church in Malabar, in which he played a pivotal role. The Chronicles of Chavara are comparable in scope and style to the Foundations of Saint Teresa of Avila.<sup>2</sup> They were written in the great tradition set up by Fr. Thomas Paremackal’s *Varthamanapusthakam* (a travelogue to

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<sup>1</sup>Sreedharamenon, “A Renaissance Leader Who Walked Ahead of His Time,” 81.

<sup>2</sup>Poonolly, “Writings of Chavara,” 118.

Lisbon and Rome). The *Chronicles* consists of five parts: (1) Establishment of a Monastery (*Darsana Veedu*) at Mannanam; (2) Part two of the Chronicle of the Mannanam Monastery (1855-1870); (3) Some Episodes of the Past; (4) Foundation of the Monastery at Ambazhakad; and (5) Foundation of the Convent at Koonammavu.

Chavara was convinced of the fact that the tradition of recording *Chronicles* would serve as great source for future generations to know about life in the past.<sup>1</sup> He is a man of memories; he himself is a memory. He left behind him memories and he put before us those cherished memories. He recorded events in order to be the source of memories. A man of great vision and hope can preserve memories enthusiastically. Saint Kuriakose was such a man. He may be inspired by the Holy Scripture that is the record of the interventions of God in the life of humanity for their salvation. So, it is the memory of the salvation history. The reading of the Scriptures gives memories; memories stimulate the mind of human beings and create the feelings of gratitude, love, repentance, commitment, etc. It is a source of man's meaningful life and renewal. In one of his informal letters to the sisters at Koonammavu Convent, he instructs them as follows: "Persuade Sr. Anna to write down all the matters. If you write down even the silly details without stopping due to idleness, after sometimes you yourself will feel so happy."<sup>2</sup>

The Chronicle of Saint Chavara records the activities of the Carmelite community under his leadership, which is a window to an era and the life of the Church of the time, in

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<sup>1</sup>Valavananickal, "The Apostolic Zeal of Chavara: A Reflection on His Writings," *Herald of the East* 12, 1 (2016), 26.

<sup>2</sup>CWC, vol. IV: Letters, VII/1.

which he held the sway.<sup>1</sup> It includes also historical events of the nineteenth century pertaining to the Church and society of Kerala. They provide much information about Mannanam monastery, other monasteries and various historical events, especially the troubled times resulting from the entry of Bishop Roccas.<sup>2</sup> He gives facts and figures accurately. In about ten places, he leaves space for noting later the day and year of an event, which remained unfilled. The documentary value of these Chronicles is enhanced by the important ecclesiastical decrees and circulars and state orders he copied verbatim. Chronicle of Chavara describes several of his personal experiences also.

Chavara does not merely give us a sketchy account of facts and figures, but, as a keen observer of men and matters, gives interesting details. For example, while mentioning the priestly ordinations that the Chaldean Bishop Roccas conducted, he gives a detailed description of the Chaldean ordination ceremonies, which were new in Kerala.<sup>3</sup>

*The Chronicles* reveal the very personality of Saint Chavara, namely, his transparency, thoroughness, openness, honesty, accuracy, love for enemies, prudence in acts, love for the Church, respect towards other religions and persons, hard work, humility, and simplicity. The deep sensitivity with which he introduces Fr. Antony Kudakkachira, the great supporter of the schismatic Bishop Roccas, best illustrates Chavara's qualities as a chronicler: "But here my heart and this hand that holds the quill tremble. For, though I shall be writing only what I have heard and seen, it will

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<sup>1</sup>Valavananickal, "The Apostolic Zeal of Chavara," 26.

<sup>2</sup>Attukadavil, "Chavara: A Man of All Seasons," 72.

<sup>3</sup>Poonolly, "Writings of Chavara," 118.

affect his reputation. Some people will read into my words more than what I intended and begin to think the less of him. Yet, I feel obliged to write about him, because he has been causing much spiritual destruction and is likely to cause more. A few words about him may prevent further spiritual disaster by acting as a warning to my brethren against being snatched away from our blessed and beloved Mother, the Church of Rome. So, I pray to my Guardian Angel to keep me from slipping away to the left or right out of human weakness and make myself guilty.”<sup>1</sup>

The Chronicles also bear witness to those several occasions on which Chavara showed generosity and won the hearts of people. The way he treated the excommunicated bishop in the latter’s utter helplessness is a typical example.

The Chronicles also shed light to his trust in the providence of God, his attitude of gratitude, his sense to feel with the Church, his obedience and faithfulness to the legitimate authority and teachings of the Church.

In short, the eye of a historian, the tongue of a true person, the pen of a classical writer, the vision of a seer, the faith of a true son of the Church, and the heart of a loving father illuminate the entire Chronicle of Chavara.<sup>2</sup> Chavara by his Chronicles not only set a model for the monasteries and convents that he founded, but also inspired his contemporaries and succeeding generations to record the events of importance and preserve them for posterity.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, vol. III: *Chronicles* (Eng.), 154-155; original Malayalam, vol. III, 16-17; Poonolly, “Writings of Chavara,” 118-119.

<sup>2</sup>Valavananickal, “The Apostolic Zeal of Chavara,” 34.

<sup>3</sup>Poonolly, “Writings of Chavara,” 119.

### 3.1.2. Letters

Letters are powerful and effective means to share one's own thoughts and experiences. The total number of Saint Chavara's writings exceeds more than 100, out of which 64 are letters. It can be presumed that Chavara wrote many more letters which have been irrevocably lost. Saint Chavara wrote letters as the pastor of many, Prior and Founder of two religious congregations and the Vicar General of the Syro-Malabar Church. Hence, among the Letters, some are official, some are personal, and a few are pastoral. They reveal his commitment and dedication to the development of a Christian community in Kerala. The 64 pieces which Chavara wrote under the category of Letters and Circulars, may be grouped under the following heads:<sup>1</sup> (1) Letters to Pope Pius IX: 2; (2) Letters to the Prefect of the Congregation for the Propaganda Fide: 5; (3) Letters to Bishops: 10; (4) Letters to the Superiors of OCD: 2; (5) Letters to the CMI members: 17; (6) Circulars to the CMI Congregation: 3; (7) Letters to the Sisters at Koonammavu Convent: 11; (8) Letters to Diocesan Priests: 4; (9) Circulars to the People/Priests: 7; and (10) Letters Related to Legal Matters: 3.

All of these letters reflect Chavara's personal qualities of warmth, humanity, simplicity, loyalty to the Holy See, inner freedom, ardent love and zeal for the Church, zeal for the salvation of souls, eagerness to know and to make known the truth, sincerity and concern for the wellbeing of others. All these were in one way or other expressions of his pastoral leadership. These letters were written to help the growth of the Syro-Malabar Church, give wholesome advice to the people of God, or spiritual guidance to the religious of

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, vol. IV: *Letters* (Mannanam: 1990).

the Congregations he had founded as a whole and to his spiritual children personally.<sup>1</sup>

Among his letters, the *Letters to the Pope* and a few *Letters to the Prefect of the Propaganda Fide* are very crucial and had much impact in the subsequent history of the Church. It also shows that he had genuine love for the Church and was always at the disposal of the Church.

The legacy of Saint Chavara is very well manifested in the two Testaments that he left for the future generations of the religious Congregation as well as the Christian faithful of his home parish. Written in August 1870, a few months before his death, the *Testament to the Congregation* exhorts the members to lead a life faithful to their vocation, obeying the authorities of the Church and serving the Church.<sup>2</sup>

The *Testament of the Families* is generally known as *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul* (the Testament of a Good Father). This title shows that he was a father to all and was loved and respected among the people. It is actually a letter of Saint Chavara to his parishioners as a token of his love and gratitude towards his kith and kin of the native parish. It is a set of spiritual commandments, moral exhortations, and family directives. It covers all aspects of life in the family from birth to death, and indicates the possible dangers when fear of God, affection, peace, charity, and order are not maintained in families.<sup>3</sup> It is a very important document that had and even continues to have much impact in the life of the Kerala families. It can be used as a manual for all sorts of people irrespective of caste and creed. It can also be considered as a pioneer document that is issued by a

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<sup>1</sup>Poonolly, "Writings of Chavara," 123-124.

<sup>2</sup>Attukadavil, "Chavara: A Man of All Seasons," 74.

<sup>3</sup>Valavananickal, "The Apostolic Zeal of Chavara," 37.

Churchman even around one century before the Vatican Council II. It is a document that offers family catechesis as well as practical interpretation of the Ten Commandments. It consists of 40 numbers. Among them the first 24 speak about the rules for a family and the next 16 about the upbringing of children. It contains a vivid theology of the 'domestic Church'. The similarities in ideas and concepts that we come across in this *Testament* that was written in 1868 with that of the contemporary teachings of Pope John Paul II's *Familiaris Consortio* (1981), *Letter to the Families* (1989), *Dies Domini* (1998) and Pope Francis' *Amoris Laetitia* (2016) indicate its prophetic character and farsightedness.

One of his letters instructing his home parishioners to begin a Charity Home with the collaboration and financial assistance of the parishioners is very challenging and inspirational; it not only proposed to begin an institution for the poor, elderly, and marginalized, but, for the first time in the documented history of the Indian Church, also conceived of initiating such an institution with the participation and collaboration of the laity. It can be considered as the means for the application of his own saying in the *Chavarul*, "The day in which you give no help to others will not be included in the account of the days of your life."<sup>1</sup> The ultimate intention of the Charity Home is depicted in one of his letters written to one of the Fathers of the religious community. There he wrote that "it is vitally important to prepare the dying for a happy death."<sup>2</sup> Beginning a Charity Home, according to Saint Chavara, is to provide material as well as spiritual help to the poor and needy.

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<sup>1</sup>Chavara, *Chavarul*, "Precepts for Families," 14.

<sup>2</sup>CWC, vol. IV: *Letters*, V/11.

Most of his letters to the sisters are spiritual exhortations. For example, in one of his letters to the sisters, he wrote: “Dwell in the love of Jesus Christ; rest before His eyes; walk besides Him; with Him converse always. When you have attachment or desire or pleasure for anything, this beloved Lord turns to you and tells you: “Look at Me. Will this make you happy more than that I...?”<sup>1</sup> In short, through his letters and circulars, he laid a strong foundation to an authentic family life, ecclesial life, and monastic or religious life and spirituality.

### **3.2. Spiritual and Literary Writings**

#### **3.2.1. *Aatmanutapam* (Compunction of the Soul)**

The best of Chavara as a poet is found in the mystic strains of the *Aatmanutapam*. When a soul witnesses the ineffable love and mercy of God throughout his life, his heart reverberates with the awesome feeling of gratitude. In order to heed the call to devotion, love, and gratitude pent up in his heart, and to praise God’s mercy, overwhelmed by the sentiments of admiration for various small and big events of life, he composed the poetic work entitled *Aatmanutapam* or ‘Compunction of the Soul’. It is the biggest poetic work of Saint Chavara. It is written around 1869 and contains 4,024 verses in twelve chapters (cantos) intermingled with meditations, aspirations for great devotion, related to events that took place in the life of Lord Jesus Christ and His Mother, as well as the poet’s own life.<sup>2</sup>

It discloses some sort of his early life and the life of Christ, Church, and Blessed Virgin Mary. The poem begins with profound humility he feels for the great blessing of his

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, vol. IV: *Letters*, VII/6.

<sup>2</sup>Poonolly, “Writings of Chavara,” 120.

life. Slowly it comes to the experience of his babyhood and teenage life. He clearly sees God's intervention in his life and its importance in enabling him to be with him, though he remained unworthy in the valley of darkness. He could find refuge only in Jesus and his teachings. However, simultaneously, the poem deals with the life of Jesus and the beginning and the growth of the primitive Church in the background of his own life and experience. His deep faith, devotion, and readiness to offer himself to God are seen in its depth and within the work. He makes ample use of biblical contexts in explaining his stand. The life of the Blessed Mother also is narrated parallel to the main story. Consequently, it is filled with many Christological, Marian, and ecclesiological ideas.<sup>1</sup>

*Aatmanuthapam* outpours his sense of gratitude and witnesses the ineffable love and mercy of God. It is overwhelmed by the sentiments of admiration for all small and big events of his life. At the same time, this work narrates the compunction that Kuriakose Chavara experienced for his ingratitude to God in spite of the numerous blessings in his life. He laments over his own shortcomings and offences with the pangs of a son for not responding to God, his Father who loved him so dearly and cared for him so much, and for not loving his Father and wasting the grace showered upon him. The very life of this great Saint poses an interrogatory sign before the modern world that has lost its consciousness of sin.

### **3.2.2. Martyrdom of Anastasia**

*Anastasia's Martyrdom* is the first Malayalam spiritual lyric (*khandakavyam*) and is a minor epic of 182 lines. It is a

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<sup>1</sup>Attukadavil, "Chavara: A Man of All Seasons," 72-73.

beautiful poetry. The poem describes the martyrdom of a beautiful and holy virgin by name Anastasia, in Rome, under the persecution of Emperor Valerian in the third century for worshipping the Christian God.<sup>1</sup> Though the emperor compelled her to renounce her Christian faith and her virginity, she stood firm in her decision to be the Bride of Christ. The instruction and inspiration of the Superior Sophia helped her to resist the compulsion of denying the faith and her decision to live as a virgin. The poet narrates how this bold virgin bravely faced the indescribable suffering and death for safeguarding her faith and embraced heroic and glorious martyrdom.<sup>2</sup> The execution of the young man Cyrilos, who gave a few drops of water to Anastasia during her terrible persecution, is also narrated in the poem. Saint Chavara presented the martyrdom of Anastasia as a model for Christians to lead a committed life in the path of the Lord and in defense of their faith.<sup>3</sup> The poem elucidates the victory of good over evil, the power of faith in and love for Jesus Christ, and also the greatness of charity through the example of Cyrilos. While composing this poem, against the backdrop of the Roccas episode, it had the sublime motive of encouraging his people to uphold loyalty to the one holy Catholic Church even at the cost of one's life. The church community was influenced and enthused to remain firm in faith despite any sort of crisis and, thus, to bear witness to Jesus Christ.

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<sup>1</sup>Poonolly, "Writings of Chavara," 120.

<sup>2</sup>Kalappura, "Spiritual Compositions of Chavara Poetry Powered with Hope," *Herald of the East* 12, 1 (2016), 54.

<sup>3</sup>Attukadavil, "Chavara: A Man of All Seasons," 73.

### 3.2.3. *Maranaveettil Padumnathinulla Pana (Dirge or Song of Mourning)*

Saint Chavara, our esteemed mystic sage, realized that the birth and life of a human being will attain lasting fulfilment and merit only when he or she lives aiming at eternity beyond this mortal world. So, he composed a Canto for Singing at a Dead Person's Home, namely, *Maranaveetil Paduwanulla Pana*.

It is a poem of 1,162 lines written in a popular chanting style called 'parvam' or 'pana', to be sung while keeping vigil over a corpse before funeral.<sup>1</sup> This poem is not divided into chapters. The book mainly deals with issues such as how should a Christian approach death, how a soul gets salvation and what all things are to be done for it, etc.<sup>2</sup> It depicts the importance of a Christian call and the need of living a life focusing on heavenly life, without yielding to the fleeting illusions of this world. The style of presentation and the language used leads the singer and the listener alike to meditate on the gift of life. The confrontation with the occasion of the death of another and the effects that it produces in the life of those who care for the dead affect deeply the spiritual life of each individual. It poses a personal thought of responsibility and an occasion for accountability.<sup>3</sup> It is a compilation of anecdotal teachings to live in this world, as if not of this world, and giving inspiration and encouragement to aim at heavenly bliss.

This poem presents the Christian meaning of death in a practical form that can be understood by the common

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<sup>1</sup>Poonolly, "Writings of Chavara," 119.

<sup>2</sup>Attukadavil, "Chavara: A Man of All Seasons," 73.

<sup>3</sup>Kalappura, "Spiritual Compositions of Chavara Poetry Powered with Hope," 47.

faithful. The central idea of the poem is that in death one becomes helpless and is left to the mercy of God and the prayers of others. He imparts that neither the world nor relations nor one's abilities can stand up to the hour of death, rather, only one's virtues and good works accompany one to eternal glory. Virtues are the only reliable realities that linger with man once he meets with his death.<sup>1</sup>

This poem also speaks about the souls in purgatory and their intense suffering. However, it exhorts all the faithful about the necessity of helping the souls in purgatory by way of prayers and charity.<sup>2</sup> The poem is catechetical in nature and also offers a persuasive invitation to conversion and renewal of life.

### **3.2.4. *Dhyanasalapangal* (Colloquies with the Heavenly Father)**

*Dhyanasallapangal* is considered to be the most expressive of the author's God-experience and contemplative dimension. It is a sort of spiritual diary that he wrote between 1866 and 1868. In this work, we see the spontaneous overflow of the emotions of a mystic who, like Jesus our divine Lord, approaches God as his beloved Father and converses with him lovingly with the tenderness of his heart in prayerful reflection. At the same time, he unfolds the merciful love of the Father with the conviction of a prodigal son who rejected his father's love and abandoned him. *Dhyanasallapangal* offers a sort of comfort and confidence to any repentant sinner enslaved by the allurements of sin.

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<sup>1</sup>Kalappura, "Spiritual Compositions of Chavara Poetry Powered with Hope," 47.

<sup>2</sup>Attukadavil, "Chavara: A Man of All Seasons," 74.

Through these colloquies Chavara expresses the deepest feelings in spiritual life: gratitude to a loving God for the abundant blessings showered upon him and sorrow for the smallest lapses in his personal life. His most intimate feelings reveal his childlike innocence. This meagre collection, though lacking in completeness as a spiritual classic, gives an idea of Saint Chavara's height of mystical union with God.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, in the *DhayanaSallapangal* we notice his ardent desire to see the face of God the Father. He addresses Jesus as *Appa* (Father), or *ente appa* (my Father) – as Jesus himself addressed the heavenly Father, *Abba*, meaning Father – and himself as His son, an unworthy but redeemed son. It is a very profound insight and experience. Here we find the very core of divine revelation and the redemptive act of Christ. In this respect, his writings, especially *Atmanuthapam* and *DhayanaSallapangal* are very insightful, biblical, mystical and doctrinal in its content.

### **3.2.5. Meditation on Divine Vocation (*Deiva Viliyinmel Dhyanam*)**

This is a collection of five meditations on priestly and religious vocation. The importance of God's call to priestly and religious life and how could one become truly a dedicated religious and priest are clearly expressed in these meditations. Moreover, in these meditations, Saint Kuriakose Chavara reflects upon the value of religious vows and their redeeming power.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Poonolly, "Writings of Chavara," 122-123.

<sup>2</sup>Attukadavil, "Chavara: A Man of All Seasons," 74.

### 3.3. Eclogues<sup>1</sup>

The literary authors qualify Saint Chavara's pastoral plays (Eclogues) as the first plays in the Indian literature itself. These pastoral plays depicting the Paschal Mystery, especially the birth of Jesus in art form, were adequate creative art to deepen spirituality and Gospel message in young priests and religious. This was staged in the formation communities mainly during the Christmas season. Actually, these plays were a meagre form of a noble religious vision of the saint, that is, to effect evangelization through art and media.

### 3.4. Liturgical Writings

In addition to personal compositions, Saint Chavara had translated liturgical and spiritual books from Syriac, Latin, and Tamil and made them available to priests, religious, and the people of God in general. There are six books among his liturgical writings: (1) Little Office of Blessed Virgin Mary; (2) Service for Holy Saturday, translated from Latin; (3) Lectionary of the Syro-Malabar *Qurbana* (Holy Mass); (4) Liturgical Calendar of the Syro-Malabar Church; (5) Ritual of *Qurbana* (*Tukasa*); and (6) Ritual of 40 Hours Adoration.

Saint Chavara wrote and translated these books not as a learned liturgist, but as a pastor concerned with the orderly and devotional celebration of liturgical services.<sup>2</sup> The intention behind was, primarily, the spiritual nourishment of his faithful and the Church as a whole. Secondly, through these,

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<sup>1</sup>In 2014, the Kerala Sahitya Academy published the Eclogues in a book form along with the critical evaluation and comments of the critics in Malayalam literature. Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Idayanadakangal*, John Paul ed., Thrissur: Kerala Sahitya Academy, 2014.

<sup>2</sup>Poonnoly, "Writings of Chavara," 125.

he also aimed at the unity of the Church; for, gathering together of the liturgical assembly under the leadership of the ordained minister for the celebration of the Eucharist manifests the Church. Liturgy is the 'epiphany' of the Church. So, oneness in intention, physical and mental dispositions, order of celebration, uniformity in rituals and recitation of prayers, etc., contribute towards the unity of the Church.

The writings of Saint Kuriakose Chavara are heterogeneous. As stated earlier, they consist of historical notes (Chronicles), Letters, Poems, Hymns, Dramas (Eclogues), Colloquies, Prayers, and Advices. One of his writings, namely, *Aatmanuthapam* has autobiographical flavour; some are his spiritual sharing (i.e., *Colloquies* and a few Letters). Each piece of writing has its own unique nature and intention. Certain writings are didactic (*Anastasia's Martyrdom*, *Pana* or *Dirge*). They contain eternal truths. Whatever may be the nature of the writing, one can notice biblical, historical, and mystical flavours in their content. Although, most of his writings are occasional and have different literary styles, they contain the very personal and spiritual experiences, theological visions, and insights of the author. They comprised of a variety of topics and insights from the Scripture, contemporary history of the Church and society, life and writings of the saints, his own experiences and insights, etc. They are morally upright, salvation-oriented, Trinitarian, Christological, ecclesiological, soteriological, pastoral, ecumenical, Marian, and eschatological. What gives a special character and unity to all his writings is the pastoral and mystical dimensions and insights. Above all, he was a man of the Spirit, a harp of the Spirit, like Saint Ephrem.

Although his writings are rich in content and offer many theological insights, no serious attempt has been made to bring out their theology in a systematic manner. However, even a few years after his canonization by Pope Francis on 23 November 2014, none of them gave him the designation 'theologian'. Hence, in the following pages we make an exploration into his writings in order to bring to light the theological visions and insights of Saint Chavara. We do this, first, in the light of the theological highlights of the Apostolic Fathers who lived during and immediately after the time of the Apostles and certain theological notions of Vatican Council II. Secondly, although a watertight compartmentalization of the academic, pastoral, and contemplative dimensions of Saint Chavara's life and articulations through words and deeds are impossible, we consider his literary and altruistic contributions in the framework of the aforementioned three types or models of theology.

## Chapter 3

### **SAINT CHAVARA, A THEOLOGIAN: A HISTORICO-THEOLOGICAL APPRAISAL**

In this chapter, we make a thorough investigation into the life and activities of Saint Chavara to find out whether, as a theologian, he belongs to any one of the aforementioned categories or an integration of all the three. As it is evident from the previous chapters, Saint Chavara led his life and served the Church as a religious priest, a formator and teacher in the seminary, the founder of two religious congregations, as the first canonical religious and Prior and the Vicar General of the Syro-Malabar Church. Though he served the Church in all these capacities, basically and primarily he was a pastor. This pastoral mind is inherent even in his academic and literary activities and writings. Keeping this in mind and admitting this as a reality, we make further investigation into the life, writings, and activities of Saint Chavara to find out whether or how he is a theologian belonging to the aforementioned types or models of theologian and how far he could integrate these models in his life. With the intention of ensuring clarity, we try to focus on each type or model of theologian separately.

#### **1. Saint Chavara, an Academic Theologian**

History attests that Saint Chavara didn't study in a well established seminary or university. He didn't write any systematic or dogmatic theological treatises. He never taught in an academic institution. Nevertheless, he was

recognized and appointed as the official *Malpan*<sup>1</sup> of the Syro-Malabar Church by the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly. In fact, he was accepted as a renowned *Malpan* by the native Christians as well as the foreign missionaries of the Latin rite. Then, the question is: what made him an official *Malpan*? Or, how has he become an *eminent* and distinguished *Malpan*?

## **1.1. Process of the Emergence of a Malpan**

### **1.1.1. A Man of Learning**

Although the brilliance of Saint Chavara was the gift of God, the providence of God allowed him to enlighten and empower it during his seminary formation under the guidance of a very distinguished Malpan Father Thomas Palackal at Pallippuram, just as Saint Paul at the feet of Gamaliel. Father Palackal was also the consultor as well as the secretary of the then Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly and the Titular Bishop of Suria Monsignor Raymond Roviglia. His intellectual pursuit for learning was famous. With his hard work he became well-versed in many languages and was very eager to study and translate theological books from other languages, especially Tamil, into Malayalam. He was a man of wisdom and knowledge. The priestly formation that young Kuriakose received from this Malpan, the special attention of the Malpan towards young Kuriakose and, above all, the example of the Malpan stimulated and helped

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<sup>1</sup>Malpan is a Syriac word which means professor, teacher, doctor (not medical). It is an honorific title conferred upon learned priests known for their learning and sanctity of life by the bishop in the Syro-Malabar Church. The one who is ecclesiastically approved as the "Doctor of the Church" is also called Malpan in the Syriac tradition. For example, the Syriac Doctor of the Church Saint Ephrem is known as Aprem Malpan.

him to study different languages like Tamil, Syriac, Latin, Portuguese, etc., in addition to his vernacular Malayalam and to be well-versed in Scripture and other theological disciplines. As the one who inherited the spirit and mission of his teacher Malpan Palackal, Kuriakose also showed much interest in studying and imparting knowledge. Later, the spiritual father and first biographer of Saint Kuriakose Chavara, Father Leopold Beccaro OCD testified in the first biography ever written as follows: "... our young cleric realized that an uneducated priest was not only inefficient to do anything worthwhile in his pastoral work, but may be even detrimental to the salvation of souls. Therefore, after receiving the *Tonsure*, he devoted himself all the more earnestly to his studies so that he might become a knowledgeable minister of God."<sup>1</sup> His vision behind the art of learning is very clear from those words. In this regard, most probably he might have been inspired by the Word of God, "the lips of a priest should guard knowledge and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord" (Mal 2:7).

His acquaintance with the missionaries also inspired him more in this realm. In one of the letters, we see very explicitly his appreciation towards the western missionaries

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<sup>1</sup>Leopold Beccaro, *Biography of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 6. This biography, though brief, is an important document as it is the first biography of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara written in 1871 in Malayalam immediately after his death by Fr. Leopold Beccaro OCD, an Italian missionary. The author was the co-operator and spiritual director of Saint Kuriakose Chavara of whom the author writes "whom I loved even as myself." Translated into English from Malayalam and re-printed by the Postulation of the Cause of Chavara, Saint Joseph Monastery, Mannanam in 2003 by the postulator Fr. Lucas Vithuvattical.

who are well-versed in theology and have many theological books to their credit. He wrote: "... we see that the Greeks and the Latins have excellent theological books and good treatises... (They) have their own bishops and missionaries who are well-versed in sacred studies and that they have produced in the course of years, good literary works and theological treatises."<sup>1</sup>

### **1.1.2. Malpan of the Syro-Malabar Church**

After the ordination of Kuriakose Chavara, Malpan Father Thomas Palackal initiated young Father Kuriakose to teach in the Malpanate at Pallippuram and, later, in the Seminary they started in 1833 at Mannanam. Recognizing his qualities, especially erudite learning and teaching talent, the then Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly Monsignor Francis Xavier in the

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, vol. IV: *Letters*, V/17. In the same letter, he asks why the Syrians have not produced so far good books or treatises and how this situation can be improved. The answer he proposes is that all nations and people and not only the monasteries, have their own bishops and missionaries who are well-versed in sacred studies and that they have produced in the course of years good literary works and theological treatises. But in Malabar, priests know only the Syriac language which they use for liturgical purposes, but their bishops and missionaries use a different language and follow a different liturgical rite. This situation stands in the way of unity. The mutual understanding that should exist between the Father and his spiritual children is entirely missing here." By writing this, he conveyed a great vision: that is, for the growth of a Church's theological learning and contributions, monasteries and native bishops of one's own rite and language are inevitable. During his lifetime he tried his best to rectify these scarcities. He started seven monasteries and one convent and wrote to Rome for native bishops, namely, of one's own rite and language.

year 1844 appointed Kuriakose Chavara as the official Malpan of the Syro-Malabar Church and the seminary. In the appointment order, which was originally written in Portuguese language, dated 16 November 1844, the Vicar Apostolic wrote as follows:

In the light of the information we have about Your Reverence's integrity of character and competency, I have the good pleasure to appoint, by this patent letter, your Reverence as *Master of all ecclesiastical sciences and Examiner of all the clergy of the Syrian Rite* in the whole of our Apostolic Vicariate ... I order all concerned to give Your Reverence due honour and submission in your above mentioned capacity and *position as master and examiner* of the said Rite.<sup>1</sup>

It was an official recognition of his erudite life of learning and wisdom.

### 1.1.3. A Man Interested to Teach

Saint Chavara's interest to teach is very explicit when we read his letters to the sisters. First of all he taught them how to write the chronicle. It was unheard of in Kerala to write chronicle and keep the history in record. As a man of farsightedness and a sense of history, he did this. He taught Sister Anna, the youngest among the first members of the convent, how to write the chronicle. Then, he reminded them through the first letter he wrote to the sisters: "Persuade Sister Anna to write down all the matters. If you write down even the silly details without stopping due to idleness, after sometime you yourself will feel so happy."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>*Positio*, 92f., cited in Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2008, 97-98.

<sup>2</sup>CWC, vol. IV: *Letters*, VII/1.

In another letter, he wrote: "there is no possibility of teaching you Latin as I had planned. Therefore, study Tamil. There are many spiritual books in this language. You can expect many more in future."<sup>1</sup> Along with his earnestness to teach the sisters, he also cared for the boarders who were with the sisters in the convent. In one of his letters, he noted as follows: "I regret I was not able to come to give instruction to the children of the boarding house."<sup>2</sup>

When we go through the available sources of his writings there are many instances that we find out his earnestness to learn and also to teach others different languages, spiritual and temporal matters through books, instructions, and the sharing of practical experiences. When we ask the question what was the vision of Saint Chavara regarding the learning or acquiring knowledge or teaching, we come across a profound answer in his own words. In one of his circulars addressed to the parish churches, he wrote: "Saint Ephrem, a Doctor of the Church, teaches that the second source of enlightenment is learning (knowledge). Just as without eyes one cannot see the material things of the world, so also without knowledge it will be impossible for us to see or understand the reality of the world that is above and the Lord that dwells therein. As those who have no eyes are called 'blind', so too those who have no learning should be called 'spiritually blind'. Although we the Nazarenes claim to be Christians of ancient origin, we do not have the vitality nor the wisdom of the sages because of this spiritual blindness. Our Lord himself has taught that if the blind leads the blind both will fall into the pit. Hence, the responsibility of priests to teach the faithful and of parents

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, vol. IV: *Letters*, VII/6.

<sup>2</sup>CWC, vol. IV: *Letters*, VII/8.

to teach their children..."<sup>1</sup> This is a profound vision that explicates the meaning of his efforts to impart knowledge intellectually as well as spiritually through schools, printing press, etc. This is the philosophy and theology behind all his literary and pastoral initiatives and contributions, learning and teaching.

#### **1.1.4. A Theologian with a Prognostic Vision**

When we look at Saint Chavara's life and literary contributions in the light of Vatican Council II, we can make out his prophetic and theological visions for the renewal, empowerment, and enlightenment of the Church and the salvation of souls. This is obvious with regard to his initiative in the liturgical renewal and the preaching of the Word of God. The Vatican Council II, which aimed the renewal of the Church, made use of "return to the sources" as its methodology. The sources of the faith of the Church are the Sacred Scripture and the Sacred Tradition. However, as the most important element or the part of the Sacred Tradition of the Church, the council gave priority to the Liturgy for a meaningful and experiential renewal of the Church. Thus, the Council put forward the renewal with a firm basis on the Word of God and the Liturgy. More than a century before the Council, Saint Chavara, filled with and constantly led by the power of the Holy Spirit, gave witness to the same spirit of renewal through his life and activities.

The Council, which gave priority to the renewal of the Church, promulgated the document on Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* as the first and foremost contribution, since the Council rediscovered that the Liturgy, especially the Holy Eucharist, is the source and summit of Church's

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, vol. IV: *Letters*, IX/2.

life.<sup>1</sup> By re-establishing the central position to this ineffable mystery in the life of the Church through *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Council Fathers initiated the renewal of the Church from within. Apart from this inner dynamism, no renewal should be persistent. Along with that the Council Fathers also re-established the importance of the Divine Praises (Divine Office or Canonical Prayers), liturgical year centred on the Christ Event and the proper place of popular devotions. Saint Chavara, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, anticipated this kind of a liturgical renewal for the spiritual enlightenment and empowerment of the Church as well as the salvation of souls.

## **1.2. Literature Related to Liturgy**

### **1.2.1. Formulation and Implementation of *Tukasa***

Saint Chavara longed and strove hard to have a life centered on the Holy Eucharist not only for himself but also for all the clergy and to the people of God and, thus, to foster a fervent and zealous spiritual life in the Kerala Catholic Church. In this regard, he initiated many practical steps. Imbibing the spirit of the liturgy, which is the manifestation of the redemptive mystery of Christ and the central act of the Church, Chavara, with great theological vision, brought the revival of liturgical practices in the Church. As part of that, he implemented uniformity in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist in the Syro-Malabar Church. One of the important literary and hardheaded steps for this was the formulation of the *Tukasa*, which means the 'Order of the Mass' or the Holy *Qurbana*. The *Tukasa* that Saint Chavara prepared consisted of nine chapters.

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<sup>1</sup>SC 10.

*Tukasa* was a remarkable input serving almost for a century as the only means to bring about not only uniformity in the rubrics of the liturgical celebration but also the only means to impart the meaning and vision of the rubrics and gestures, and thus to make liturgical celebrations enriching and meaningful. It fixed the order of prayer to ensure and to facilitate the celebration of the Eucharist with devotion, attention, and order, and elucidated how to celebrate the Divine Liturgy with symbols and gestures meaningfully. He wrote in detail the rubrics of the *Qurbana* from the time when the priest enters the sacristy for the Eucharistic celebration till he returns to the sacristy after the Holy *Qurbana*. It manifests his enthusiasm and attention on divine liturgical service. The ultimate aim of adopting and following the *Tukasa* was to promote unity in the Church and among the liturgical assemblies of the various parish churches and priests. Thus, by the formulation and implementation of *Tukasa*, he anticipated the teaching of the Vatican Council II, in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 11, regarding the active participation in the liturgical celebration.

The Bishop of Verapoly, Monsignor Bernadine Baccinelli, who realized the richness and significance of *Tukasa* and the spiritual benefit emerged on account of it, appreciated it and ordered the priests in August 1866 to follow strictly the rubrics offered in it.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, an Order was issued on 10 September 1926 by Mar Augustine Kandathil, the Bishop of Ernakulam, to follow the *Tukasa* prepared by Father Kuriakose Chavara in his Diocese.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Valerian, *Malankara Sabhamathavinte Oru Veera Santhanam* (Malayalam), Mannanam: 1939, 21.

<sup>2</sup>*Thukasa*, iv; Valerian, *Malankara Sabhamathavinte*, 21.

### **1.2.2. Rituals for Forty Hour Adoration**

Saint Chavara's love for liturgy was not exclusively restricted to rubrics and rituals. In fact, his interest in regularizing rubrics and rituals emerged from his personal love and profound faith in the Eucharistic presence of our Lord Jesus Christ. One of his contemporaries Father Jacob Palakunnel once commented: "It is a very beautiful scene when the Prior stands before the Holy Eucharist. It seems that he is an angel than a man."<sup>1</sup> When Saint Chavara exhorted the sisters as to how to prepare themselves for the forthcoming forty hour adoration, he wrote: "My children, these days you should meditate deeply on the love of Jesus Christ... On these days, recalling the Lord's love, you must receive the Holy Communion."<sup>2</sup> He aspired intently that all should know the merciful love of Jesus present in the Holy Eucharist and that all should love him. For this, as a great devotee and an apostle of the Holy Eucharist, he started the devotion of Forty Hour Adoration. The solemnity and devotional ambience, with which it was conducted to evoke remorse and reparation for the derision and dishonour done to the Holy Eucharist and to lead the people of God to a radical conversion of heart, impelled them to generate the awareness of sin and true repentance so as to savour the ineffable love of God. This devotion was inaugurated at Koonammavu in 1866 and, then, spread to the monasteries of Mannanam, Vazhakulam, and Elthuruth during his lifetime itself. Soon it became very popular in Kerala as it was found to be a powerful source of inspiration for the people at large, which is continued even today. He

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<sup>1</sup>Njallampuzha, *Azhakulla Aatmaavu* (Malayalam), Kottayam: Deepika Book House, 2014, 40.

<sup>2</sup>CWC, vol. III: *Letters*, VII/6.

translated the services for this from Latin to Malayalam.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, this was conducted with the permission of the bishop for three days in a very devout and attractive manner. It paved the way for the reception of sacraments, especially the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Holy Eucharist. This distinctive devotion added momentum for the spiritual revival of the Kerala Church.<sup>2</sup> In course of time, following this devotion, Thirteen Hour Adoration, Perpetual Adoration, Holy Hour, etc., have become a common practice in the Kerala Church. The celebration of the feast of the Holy Eucharist and the Eucharistic procession that followed on the sacred occasion are considered even today to be very efficacious for the spiritual enkindling in the hearts of the people.

### 1.2.3. Exhortation Regarding the Participation in Sacraments

Saint Chavara's exhortation regarding the participation in the Eucharist comes from his pastoral mind than from his intellectual quest. He dealt with it mainly in the *Chavarul* to the families and it has a didactic thrust. It demands to give central place to the Holy Eucharist in the life of Christians. In the *Chavarul*, he writes as follows: "Participate in the daily Mass, if possible, every day. If not, participate in the holy Mass on Monday for the holy souls in purgatory; on Fridays in devotion to the passion of our Lord and on Saturdays in honour of Our Lady of Sorrows. If all the members of a family cannot go everyday for holy Mass, let one or two persons go in turn every day."<sup>3</sup> He added that

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, vol. III, 78-83.

<sup>2</sup>*Positio*, 28:2.

<sup>3</sup>Chavara, *Chavarul*, Precepts for Families, 18.

the evil practice of not going to Church on Sundays and other days of obligation is condemned both by God and the Church.<sup>1</sup>

He insisted to the faithful not only to participate in the Holy Eucharist but also to approach the Sacrament of Reconciliation at least once a month,<sup>2</sup> which is the fruit of the sacrificial death of Jesus on the Cross. This is an evidence to show how much he valued the sacraments and how he accelerated the reception of it in a practical manner. The outstanding example from his own life reveals that these guidelines are effective ways to live without losing the sanctifying grace received at baptism.

#### **1.2.4. Compiling the Divine Office for Priests**

Another impactful service of Saint Chavara was his compilation of the Divine Office of the Syro-Malabar Church. The Divine Office recited by the priests was from four books: *Hudra*, *Kaskol*, *Gaza*, and *Qala*. Therefore, it was not easy to recite the Divine Office in an orderly and uniform manner. Due to the complexity, priests were inclined almost to ignore its recital. Saint Chavara took up the challenge of preparing a handy book of Divine Office. By collecting and consulting various manuscripts of the Syrian Breviary, which was quite long and cumbersome, he prepared an abridged text of the Breviary. This was a task into which he was already initiated by his Malpan Palakal during his seminary days in Pallipuram. Saint Chavara worked assiduously to write it in his own hand and practised it with the rubrics. Later, when he became the Vicar General he abbreviated it with necessary

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<sup>1</sup>Chavara, *Chavarul*, Precepts for Families, 3.

<sup>2</sup>Chavara, *Chavarul*, Precepts for Families, 18.

modifications, sent it to Rome for approval, printed it, and made available for the use of the priests. Words are inadequate to place on record his dedication and incessant efforts to compile the prayers scattered in ancient Syrian books, prepare a book of Divine Office in his own hand, bringing uniformity and right order, and to print it for use. While writing to Rome for approval, he stated: "The elderly members of the Congregation, in particular, are anxiously waiting to see the approved book of the Divine Office."<sup>1</sup> He wrote this letter in union with the parish priests, the TOCD religious priests, and the seminarians of the Syro-Malabar Church and sent it to the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation with the introductory note of Archbishop Bernardine.<sup>2</sup> The circular letter he wrote to the priests and seminarians on 15 February 1869 regarding the printing of the Breviary is preserved even today. The spiritual father of Saint Chavara, Father Leopold Beccaro OCD records it in the biography as follows: "... Father Prior did a very useful thing for the whole clergy. Among the Syrians the different Churches used different books for the divine office. Father Prior invited malpans from the different areas to Koonammavu to discuss the matter to eliminate the differences and to bring about uniformity and order. He wrote out in his own hand the whole book of the Divine Office neatly and systematically with the intention of printing it. The various endeavours he had undertaken during his life give evidence to his deep interest and zeal in the proper conducting of the Divine Service."<sup>3</sup> With regard to this Divine Office compiled by Saint Chavara, the *Mystagogical Catechesis* of the Syro-

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, vol. IV: *Letters*, II/3.

<sup>2</sup>CWC, vol. IV: *Letters*, II/4.

<sup>3</sup>Beccaro, *Biography of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 11.

Malabar Church, viz., *Aaradhanakrama vishwasaparisheelanam*, states as follows: “These books (of Saint Chavara) held in reserve the liturgical patrimony of the East Syrian Church.”<sup>1</sup> In 1939, the Congregation for the Oriental Churches published from Rome three volumes of the Divine Office in Syriac, edited by Bedjan, for the Syro-Malabar Church and the Chaldean Church. Until when the churches received this Breviary, the Divine Office compiled by Saint Chavara was in use in these churches. It was in 1962 that the Liturgy in Syro-Malabar Church was introduced in the vernacular language. After that several attempts were made to renew the Divine Office in the Church. Yet, it remains imperfect and, therefore, it is assumed that the Divine Office constituted by Saint Chavara has left behind a lasting impression in the liturgical life of the Church even today.

### **1.2.5. Divine Office for Sisters**

Saint Chavara was enthusiastic to make Divine Office not only for priests but also for sisters. It is stated in the *Chronicle of Koonanmmavu Convent (CKC)* that he wrote it in his own hand, marked with different colours of ink to make them understand the order and gave them practice for how to pray the Divine Office accordingly.<sup>2</sup> The saintly father instructed them how to say the canonical prayer and with whatever remembrance, thoughts, attitudes, fervour, and intention. The CKC testifies to it as follows: “Your canonical prayer is more fruitful than all other prayers. When you get ready to say your canonical prayers, first you must imagine that all the angels and saints of heaven, all the holy souls on

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<sup>1</sup> *Syro-Malabar Sabhayude Aaradhanakrama Vishwasaparisheelanam*, Kakkannad: 2014, 169.

<sup>2</sup> *Chronicle of Koonanmmavu Convent*, vol. I, 31.

earth and the guardian angels of all our sisters present are praising God and that you are joining them in their praises saying your prayer. Just before entering the prayer room, you must sign yourself with the holy water and pray that you may be purified from all the small sins that are in you, by water. When the prayer begins, you must utter the words meditatively and with understanding. At each hour you must recall that hour's Passion of Christ and offer your prayers in union with the merits of the Passion of Christ."<sup>1</sup>

It is obvious that Saint Chavara had an extraordinarily farsighted vision and insight to instruct in such an impressive way the members of the first convent at Kerala. He might have envisioned that the initial formation given to the beginners of the convent might benefit not only the said sisters but also thousands in posterity through their training; and ultimately it would enhance the spiritual advancement of the Church as a whole.

Saint Chavara had a great vision behind the compilation of the Divine Office; he asked his spiritual daughters and the priests to recite it orderly, diligently, and devotedly. Because, he had the awareness that the one who prays the Divine Office offers praises to the heavenly Father for the sanctification of one's own self, the Church, the humanity at large, and the world as a whole by remaining in the heart of the Church, the Bride, and united to Jesus Christ, the Bridegroom. Therefore, he devoted diligently his quality time in the midst of his busy schedule and responsibilities and even a paramount part of his lifespan for the compilation of the canonical prayers. The persistent exertion of his eyes resulted in untimely blindness. But, his memory resonates forever, when we acknowledge with gratitude

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<sup>1</sup>*Chronicle of Koonanmmavu Convent*, vol. I, 71.

that, for more than one and a half a century before, the canonical prayer books prepared by this holy man encouraged priests and religious of the Malabar Church to sing the hymns of praises to God with the Church and in the name of the Church and also to entreat blessings and grace upon the whole world. One can witness even in this winsome attempt his awe-inspiring love for God, sincere wish for the sanctification of the church, and intense desire for the salvation of souls. Today in most of the Syro-Malabar dioceses in Kerala and even outside, there is a practice of reciting the Divine Office, especially Ramsa (Evening Prayer) and Sapra (Morning Prayer) by the laity. Is it not the foresight and spiritual endowment of this great saint who promoted this practice a century and a half ago that ultimately favoured the nurturing and growth of the awareness about the importance of the Divine Office at the Church level? Isn't it the prognostic vision of the Vatican Council II?

### **1.2.6. Holy Saturday Service**

Another gift of Saint Chavara in reforming the liturgical life of the Syro-Malabar Church is the translation of the Holy Saturday Service of the Latin Church into Syriac and the implementation of it with the approval of Rome.<sup>1</sup> What prompted him to do so is his genuine concern for souls. There was no special liturgical service for Holy Saturday in the Syrian rite. Hence, there existed a situation where the Syrian churches remaining closed on that day. In this regard he wrote to Rome, to the head of the Propaganda Congregation Cardinal Simeon as follows: "Our churches

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<sup>1</sup>T. Mampra, *Chavara Retreat*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2018, 67-68.

remain closed that day [Holy Saturday] like the Jewish Synagogues. So, I request you to approve it for us and send it back as early as possible, and we pray that these requests may be granted as early as possible *to promote our spiritual progress.*"<sup>1</sup> These words indicate the goal of Saint Chavara behind all his strenuous efforts.

Again, we see another letter written by him on 31 May 1869 to the head of the Propaganda Congregation Cardinal Alexander Bernaba seeking permission for Holy Saturday service, exemption from the use of incense except for solemn Mass and recital of the canonical prayers throughout the year. It is an admirable fact to acknowledge that even if an action is done for the spiritual progress of the people of God, he performed everything submitting to the lawful authority and with proper permission. In him was always manifested allegiance to the superiors. It is inevitable for the growth of spiritual life to ally with the Church, lawful authority, and superiors. This was a unique quality that was always radiant in Saint Chavara. He was a perfect disciple in following the glorious example of Jesus Christ who redeemed the world through obedience. Moreover, this was indeed a reflection of his remarkable faith in and obedience to God and the Church authorities and their representatives. In the biography written by his spiritual master Father Leopold, it is stated: "It was because of his extraordinary faith that he showed great veneration, love, and obedience towards the Papal legate who was the representative of the Holy Father, and towards the missionaries who were the messengers of the Holy Church."<sup>2</sup> To submit oneself and whatever one writes or does for the people of God to the

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, vol. II: *Letters*, II/3.

<sup>2</sup>Beccaro, *Biography of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 13.

highest authority of the Church is a legitimate act and that is a guarantee of one's orthodoxy (right faith). Saint Chavara's willingness to surrender and to be judged by the discernment of the mother Church itself is an indication that he is a true and exemplary theologian of the Catholic Church.

### **1.2.7. Liturgical Calendar**

Saint Chavara also prepared a liturgical calendar for the Syro-Malabar Church depending on the ancient sources which gradually unfolds the salvation history centred on the redemptive act of Christ. The first printed liturgical calendar that was ever used in the Malabar Church was prepared by Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara in 1865. We have different sources that inform us of the work of Saint Chavara in the preparation and printing of the Calendar. Father Kuriakose Porukara, in his *Biography of Saint Kuriakose Chavara*, says that Saint Chavara prepared the *Tukasa* and the liturgical calendar.<sup>1</sup> The *Chronicle of Mannanam Monastery* refers to the preparation and printing of the Liturgical Calendar for the year 1866 by Saint Chavara and how he was requested by the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly to go to Koonammavu on the 23 December 1865 before the feast of the Nativity of the Lord that year. Father Lucas Vithuvattical tells us in the *Positio* that since 1866 till the year of his death it was Saint Chavara who had prepared and printed the Calendar. But the earliest copy of the calendar that we could trace out was that of 1871, the year in which he died. He had completed its preparation as early as August 1870. This was the last Calendar that Saint Chavara had prepared and he died on 3

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<sup>1</sup>Porukara, *Sthapakapithakkanmar*, Mannanam: 1905 (Reprint, Ernakulam: 1989), 37.

January 1871. In one of his letters, dated 1 September 1870, Saint Chavara wrote to Father Chandy (Alexander) Kattakayam: "I am sending you the Calendar for the year 1871. I thought that this time I could print it here. But I find that it is not possible at present. Hence you should take the trouble to do this work there this year too."<sup>1</sup> Besides the Calendar of 1871, we could trace still another edition. It is dated 1876. This edition is a reproduction with required changes for the year. These calendars are important for the fact that they give us glimpses into the ancient Liturgical Year as it was known and practised in the Malabar Church.<sup>2</sup>

### **1.2.8. Devotional Practices for Spiritual Revival**

The foundation of Christian spirituality is Liturgy. Devotional practices cannot replace it. However, devotional practices are means to promote Christian spirituality that derives from the Liturgy. Vatican Council II exhorts that "popular devotions of the Christian people are to be highly recommended."<sup>3</sup> The Church promulgates that devotional practices should derive from the Liturgy and lead the people to the Liturgy. Spiritual life is radically fostered when the devotional practices are drawn up to accord with the Sacred Liturgy "in conformity to the laws and norms of the Church."<sup>4</sup> They, in fact, harmonize and vitalize the spiritual life. Saint Chavara's life was an exceptional witness to this fact that he had the same awareness throughout his life.

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, vol. IV, *Letters*, V/13.

<sup>2</sup>Antony Vallavanthara, "Basics of the Theology of the East Syrian Liturgical Year," A Paper Presented at Mount Saint Thomas, Kakkanad, 25-27 June 2002, in a Seminar on *The Spirit of the Liturgical Calendar*.

<sup>3</sup>SC 13.

<sup>4</sup>SC 13.

Popular devotions played a dominant role for the spiritual revival and progress of the Kerala Church. It was widely known that Saint Chavara was the one who spread popular devotions largely from the Latin tradition to the Syrian Churches. But it is obvious from history that the main devotions that he had promoted are only devotions to Our Lord Jesus, His Mother Blessed Virgin Mary and his foster father Saint Joseph. Such devotions were based on the Sacred Scriptures. If Jesus Christ is the centre of our redemption, the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph had assumed a decisive role in his redemptive life here on earth. In the life of Saint Chavara who had a spectacular devotion to the Holy Family, it was quite viable for him to feel love for Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, to pray to them and exalt them with praises. The Way of the Cross, Eucharistic adoration, devotions to Rosary and to Carmelite Scapular, and devotion to Blessed Virgin Mary (month of May) and Saint Joseph (month of March) are a few devotions that he had promoted. But he never propagated devotions to saints for the sake of receiving favours only as it is susceptible today.

Marian devotion was quite common among the Saint Thomas Christians even before the arrival of the missionaries. Saint Chavara, who became a faithful son of Our Lady of Mount Carmel through his religious profession, had only ventured to intensify Marian devotion. Monthly devotions to the Sacred Heart of Jesus (month of June), Blessed Virgin Mary (month of May), Saint Joseph (month of March), prayer to the departed souls (month of November), etc., are well known, especially the first three devotions, even today among many families in Kerala. He nurtured the devotion to Saint Teresa of Avila, Doctor of the Church and the apostle of prayer among the religious. When there existed no Liturgy or Sacred Scriptures in

vernacular, popular devotions reaffirmed the simple faith of ordinary people. Consequently, these devotions became the primary source for the Catholic families in Kerala to be persistent in faith and fear of God. If the family prayers tremendously endorsed the steadfastness of the Catholic families in Kerala, we are largely indebted to this great Saint for the same.

In the *Testament of a Loving Father (Chavarul)* addressed to families, Saint Chavara instructs: "As soon as children are old enough to understand things, teach them to repeat with devotion the names of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. Show them their pictures or statues and make them kiss them and respect and love those three." Moreover, his instructions such as "When they begin to speak, teach them to recite the prayers 'Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory be...', the Angelus and other prayers. How profitable it would be if they are given their spiritual food along with the material food,"<sup>1</sup> are the most relevant and appealing statements beyond time, place, culture, today and forever. It is high time for us to ponder whether it was not on account of laxity in these matters that faith deteriorated in contemporary Catholic families. As he wrote in 'The Testament for Families', the only boost for a family of God-fearing people is participation in daily mass (if possible, every day or at least one or two persons in turn daily), confession once a month, and devotions to Our Lady and Saint Joseph.<sup>2</sup> In short, Saint Chavara makes it clear that devotional practices are quintessential for spiritual augmentation along with sacramental life.

History testifies that *Annida* for the departed souls and the Office in honor of Our Lady are also the contributions of

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<sup>1</sup>Chavara, *Chavarul*, Upbringing of Children, 2.

<sup>2</sup>Chavara, *Chavarul*, Precepts for Families, 19.

Saint Chavara. Chavara prepared also an Office for the Dead - a long one and a short one. Besides, he made the office for the funeral, different for the adult lay persons, for the children and for the priests. This, too was not printed while Chavara was alive.<sup>1</sup>

His spiritual master Father Leopold confers on Saint Chavara, the two exquisite qualities that had been brilliantly shining in his entire life as "his devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and to the Blessed Virgin Mother."<sup>2</sup>

In short, Saint Chavara was a malpan, who taught academically, preached pastorally, and wrote practically. He did not write simply as an academician but as a pastor. He did implement many things for the spiritual wellbeing of the Church and in view of the salvation of souls. There was a vision and theology behind all the initiatives he undertook and the endeavours he has implemented. He was not an armchair theologian but a pastoral visionary with a sense of mission, a vision imbibed from "the Teacher" Jesus and the mission entrusted by the one who sent by the Father to save the humankind. Hence, his theology was 'soteriological', that is, salvation oriented theology, just as that of Jesus Christ who came to proclaim the Kingdom of God by revealing the Father. In short, he was a theologian of *lex orandi lex vivendi*, that is, what he prayed (and also preached) that he lived. His very life itself was his theology.

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<sup>1</sup>Porukara, *Sthapakapithakkanmar*, 37; also see Joseph Kanjiramattathil, *The Pastoral Vision of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1986, 49.

<sup>2</sup>Beccaro, *Biography of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 13.

## **2. Saint Chavara, a Pastoral Theologian**

Saint Kuriakose Chavara was also a very good pastor who, as Pope Francis insists, had the 'smell of the sheep'. All through his life as a priest, malpan, religious, Prior, and the Vicar General, he served the Church as a pastor. His main concern was the renewal of the Church and the salvation of the souls. As a pastor he initiated the preaching of the Word of God in the Church, homilies on Sundays, retreat in the parishes, forty-hour adoration and some other pious practices like Way of the Cross, devotions to Mother Mary and Saint Joseph, etc., in view of the salvation of souls. He promoted all these in order to inculcate a sense of sin and repentance among the faithful so that they may convert and be redeemed. If we evaluate the initiatives he had taken more than one and a half centuries ago in the light of the documents of Vatican Council II we see his emphatic prophetic as well as theological vision.

### **2.1. Preaching of the Word of God: Basic Duty of a Pastor**

In addition to the liturgy, the Vatican Council II puts forward another important means for the building up of and the renewal of the Church, that is, the preaching of the Word of God. It highlighted the importance of the Word of God in the life of the Church in general and in the life of the believers in particular. Moreover, it emphasized the prime duty and unavoidable responsibility of the pastors to preach and teach the Word of God to believers, especially on Sundays and days of obligation.

When we go through the Scripture, especially the *Acts of the Apostles*, we see that the fundamental mission of the apostles and their successors was the proclamation of the Word of God. In order to do this mission unfailingly, Saint Peter, the head of the Church, with divine inspiration said:

“It is not right that we should neglect the Word of God in order to wait on tables” (Acts 6:2). So, he proposed to find out a few Spirit-filled persons to be appointed as deacons to serve the people. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, testifies: “Among the principal duties of bishops, the preaching of the Gospel occupies an eminent place.”<sup>1</sup> Regarding the obligation of priests, this is the first thing that Vatican II’s *Decree on Priests* proposes: “It is the Word of the living God that primarily unites the people of God... Therefore, the primary duty of the priests as collaborators of bishops is to proclaim the Gospel of God to all.”<sup>2</sup>

## **2.2. Saint Chavara: An Eminent Preacher of the Word of God**

It is admirable to acknowledge that Saint Chavara, who was a man empowered with the Holy Spirit had already assimilated this teaching of the Church about one and a half centuries ago and realized it by giving the first and foremost importance to the proclamation of the Word in his priestly ministry. Here below we see a network of actions initiated or promoted by Saint Chavara to preach and to witness the Word of God. It echoes the words of the Psalmist in his life: “The Word of God is a lamp to his feet and a light to his path” (Ps 118:105) and that is invariably the uniqueness of Saint Chavara.

Saint Chavara lived at a time when the proclamation of the Word was not a common practice. However, he was an outstanding orator and preacher of the Holy Gospel. As a great visionary, he had understood the importance of the Word of God for the spiritual renewal and growth;

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<sup>1</sup>LG 25.

<sup>2</sup>PO 4.

therefore, the first accomplishment that he had undertaken immediately after his ordination was to share with the people of God the Word of God which is “living and active, sharper than any two edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb 4:12). He intensified the practice of sharing the Word of God every Sunday in the churches, initially started by Father Thomas Porukara. He organized retreats in parishes. Soon it was known far and wide, especially about the impact of the retreat directed by Saint Chavara in the church at Pulincunoo shortly after his ordination. His Malpan, Father Palackal, used to comment about Chavara, then a seminarian: “... when he is aloft the pulpit (flower), he is like a lion.”<sup>1</sup> In fulfilment of these words, there happened to be a long line of conversion. Knowing about this, some other parishes also invited him to preach retreats in their churches. By making parish retreats a common feature in Kerala, there ceased to be many family disputes and quarrels, fights with neighbours, and there emerged conversion and renewal of life.

Cherishing the magnificent contribution of Saint Chavara in the field of proclamation of the Word, his successor and biographer, Father Kuriakose Elias Porukara inscribes as follows: “Being present on Sundays and feast days and in other places, through preaching of retreat and unceasing advises, shaking these places and dispelling the darkness of facts, he has brought the light of God.”<sup>2</sup> Once Father Kuriakose Porukara spoke about the preaching of Saint Chavara on the occasion of the feast of All Saints: “It was

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<sup>1</sup>Njallampuzha, *Azhakulla Aatmavu*, 31.

<sup>2</sup>Porukara, *Sthapakapithakkanmar*, 34.

most striking and piercing the heart of the listeners.”<sup>1</sup> Father Marcelinos OCD, who was the delegate of the Bishop to receive the profession of Saint Chavara and who knew him personally acclaimed: “When we acknowledge the immense grace bestowed on the state of Malayalam and the favours granted to the souls through his pleasant and edifying preaching, the fruit that might be incurred through many priests, was accomplished by this one priest.”<sup>2</sup> The testimony written by his spiritual father Father Leopold in 1871, thus, states: “After his first Mass also he continued to be under the spiritual direction of Father Thomas Palackal Malpan, his master at Pallipuram seminary, preached at many churches, that was quite uncommon those days and engaged in different kinds of activities with extraordinary zeal for the salvation of souls. It was at this juncture, that he preached a retreat at Pulincunoo at the request of the parishioners. Those who remember about this retreat testify even now that all those who attended the retreat experienced great fervour.”<sup>3</sup> Father Kuriakose Porukara certifies, thus, about the retreat: “The apostles casting their net at the bidding of the Lord had so huge a catch of fish that they could not lift their net by themselves so they sought the help of friends (Lk 5:4). Similarly, these brothers, at the order of the archbishops, preached spiritual retreats and homilies in different parishes with 1000, 2000, and even 5000 or more faithful, taught catechism and heard confessions. Thus, they rooted out the reign of the devil and led people to eternal life. The glory of God and salvation of souls realized in this way gave joy to the archbishop, parish

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<sup>1</sup>Porukara, *Sthapakapithakkanmar*, 34.

<sup>2</sup>Njallampuzha, *Azhakulla Aatmavu*, 31-32.

<sup>3</sup>Beccaro, *Biography of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 6.

priest, and the laity, for which they thanked God. In order to spread this work he [Chavara] visited many places and after due consultation and permission from ecclesiastical authorities, founded monasteries."<sup>1</sup>

Saint Chavara was also appointed by Vicar Apostolic to lead those who were ex-communicated from the Church in the path of reconciliation and to re-unite them with the Church. This exemplifies the trust that they had in him and the influence that he had in the midst of the people.<sup>2</sup> Retreats were held at Mannanam not only for the people of the parish but also for the priests to inculcate enlightenment and renewal among them. In certain particular situations, bishops used to send priests to stay in the monastery to make their retreats.

The preaching of the Word of God and conducting of retreats were followed with great intensity after the disturbances created by Roccas and, as a result, many parishes returned to the unity of the Church. It is said that about thirty retreats were conducted every year in different parishes by a group of four to five priests. At the end of each retreat, the Vicar apostolic made his visitation of the parish.<sup>3</sup>

Besides organizing retreats for the common people, Saint Chavara was zealous in arranging annual retreats for priests at Mannanam, usually towards the end of the month of May. The notes that he had prepared for such retreat were under five headings, namely, meditation on (1) *Vocation*, (2) *Divine Grace*, (3) *Mortal Sin*, (4) *The Worth of Two Priests*, (5)

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<sup>1</sup>Porukara, *Sthapakapithakkanmar*, 36.

<sup>2</sup>Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 240.

<sup>3</sup>Parappuram Varkey, *Diary*, 1111; see Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 242.

*Death of an Impious Priest*, deserve much attention.<sup>1</sup> Priests who were accused by the bishop or those who were wavering in their vocation and those who needed special guidance used to come and attend the retreat conducted at Mannanam and get reconciled and renewed.

Impressed by the inspiring proclamation of the Word of God preached by Saint Chavara and his confreres, and seeing the fruit that they bore, Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly Ludovic Martini (1844-1852) appointed the religious at Mannanam the formal proclaimers of the Word in his Vicariate. He promulgated this order of appointment addressing both Latin and Syrian Christians on 8 January 1849. He had insisted: "When any of the priests at Mannanam comes, the vicar of the church must take care that an eight-day retreat is organized in a convenient church, either separately for each parish community, or collectively for a few of them. The necessary expenses for this may be provided from the common income of the church."<sup>2</sup> It is certainly a marvelous miracle of God's providence that today in Kerala Church, Gospel proclamation has transformed into a fiery globe that ignites and inflames the entire world through thousands of grace-filled and anointed preachers of the Word of God.

### **2.3. Establishment of Catechumenates**

The command to preach the Gospel and to be a witness to Christ is found in all the gospels; nevertheless, the instruction to give baptism and to make disciples of nations we find only in the Gospel of Mathew (Mt 28:19). To become

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<sup>1</sup>Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 243.

<sup>2</sup>*Positio*, 93f.

a member of the Church through baptism is a clear-cut sign of or the fruit of evangelization.

According to A. M. Mundadan, a renowned church historian, it seems that no school for the training of catechumens existed in the Vicariate except one attached to the headquarters at Varapuzha.<sup>1</sup> But it was not easy for the poor people to come to Varapuzha for instruction of faith. Apart from certain individual initiatives in the early 1860s, the Catholic community did not seem to have paid much attention to the evangelization of marginalized groups of people like Izhavas and Pulayas. It was in 1864 that Saint Chavara directed Mannanam Monastery to start a Catechumenate. For its inauguration on 9 October 1864, he himself and a few missionaries were present. Regarding its functioning we read in the *Chronicle of Mannanam Monastery*: "On Sundays and feast days many boys came to study catechism and remained till 5 pm. Some came from distant places, and some were poor. In order to promote more efficiently so wholesome and fruitful a work, they thought it necessary to feed the boys *kanji* (rice gruel) at noon. They were given clothes and pious articles like rosaries and scapulars. To meet expenses for this as well as the conversion work among *Pulayas* and for conducting the catechetical school, the means decided was the collection of *pidiyari* every Sunday."<sup>2</sup>

According to the information we get from the centenary souvenir, *Carmelite Congregation of Malabar 1831-1931*, "the Prior that year soon after opened yet another Catechumenate in Edathua and gradually all the

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<sup>1</sup>Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 250.

<sup>2</sup>*The Chronicle of Mannanam Monastery III (1864-71)*, Malayalam Manuscript in ASJM, 30.

monasteries followed the example of the mother house." Even now also we have parishes attached to such monasteries for the newly converted. It reads: "Almost all the monasteries of the congregation imitated the mother house in opening Catechumenates attached to them... Many adults and infants were cared for, instructed and baptised in these, every year."<sup>1</sup>

In short, by all means, especially by the preaching and teaching of the Word of God, conducting retreats, and opening Chatecumenates he illumined the minds of the faithful, strengthened their faith, converted them from their evil ways and made them zealous in practising virtues. Thus, he laboured for the salvation of souls and, through his endeavours, many souls followed Christ. Taking into account all the good results evolved through the ministry of Saint Chavara and his colleagues, Father Leopold, his spiritual director, confessor, and provincial delegate wrote to the OCD Prior General in 1870 that "their work had changed the very face of the Vicariate."<sup>2</sup>

## **2.4. A Good Pastor Who Trained People for Various States of Life**

### **2.4.1. Pastoral Mind behind Priestly Training**

It was the earnest longing of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara that there should be very learned, prudent, and virtuous priests for the growth of his mother church which is also the apostolic church that had received faith from Saint Thomas, the apostle. The state of affairs in the Syrian Church those

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<sup>1</sup>*The Carmelite Congregation of Malabar 1831-1931*, Trichinopoly, 1932, 56.

<sup>2</sup>See General Archives of the Carmelite Discalced Order, 440/r/1, cited in Kanjiramattathil, *The Pastoral Vision*, 43.

days had been to undergo training for priestly formation under the *malpans*, and it was in 1833 that the formal seminary studies had begun. Father Palackal and Father Porukara were the trail blazers of the seminary formation started at Mannanam. Saint Chavara, who entered this field as their assistant and collaborator, stood in good stead gradually as the main formator of priests. In 1841, when Father Palackal Thomas Malpan died, the then Vicar Apostolic Bishop Francis Xavier issued the order of authority declaring Father Porukara and Father Chavara *malpans* on 16 February 1844. In 1846, when Father Porukara left this world for his eternal abode, the entire responsibility of the seminary and priestly formation was vested upon Saint Chavara. He heroically continued to be the rector and *malpan* of the seminary all through his life.

Saint Chavara who had received the best discipline, spiritual and intellectual wisdom, and sanctity from Palackal *Malpan* could realize the importance and meaning of seminary formation from his own personal experience. His experiential conviction was so edifying to ensure that wisdom and sanctity are especially inevitable for a priest and are always a real gain for priestly life. Therefore, he knew that if priests were empowered through right training and formation they would engender ample good for the growth and spiritual uplift of the people of God. As the biographer of Saint Chavara, Father Leopold wrote: "Our young cleric realized that an uneducated priest was not only inefficient to do anything worthwhile in his pastoral work, but may be even detrimental to the salvation of souls. Therefore, after receiving the Tonsure, he devoted himself all the more earnestly to his studies so that he might become

a knowledgeable minister of God.”<sup>1</sup> The word of Prophet Malachi, “for the lips of a priest should guard knowledge and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts” (Mal 2:7) was invariably assimilated by him as his own and he fulfilled it in his personal life. Even when Syro-Malabar Church was devoid of her own personal leadership, hierarchy, and seminary, the hands that formed priests and bishops for the Syro-Malabar Church were that of Saint Chavara.

Since the seminary at Mannanam was insufficient to fulfil the needs of the vast Kerala Church, he established in compliance with the order from Verapoly, a seminary each attached to the monastery at Vazhakulam in 1866 and another at Elthuruth in 1869, respectively. Even today the Church is privileged to enjoy the fruits of his innate feat to mould faithful priests in the vineyard of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The priests who had their education in the monastery seminaries were the daring associates who co-operated with Saint Chavara to confront the schisms. They were the ones, who, during the time of Roccas schism, adhered to the churches. They were the priests who went around and motivated the people to remain in true faith, managed the church administration as deputies, and courageously fought for the local bishop. He reformed the education scheme of the seminary according to the needs of the hour to have a number of similar soldiers in future too. It is a historical fact that at a time when Syro-Malabar Church had owned no leadership or headquarters, Mannanam Monastery was considered as the centre of the Church. The valiant warriors

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<sup>1</sup>Beccaro, *Biography of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 6.

who protected the faith of the Church were none other than these religious priests trained by Saint Chavara.

As those who belong to the state of priestly life are obliged to strive relentlessly to seek out the good will and salvation of others, they ought to ensure their personal salvation and growth in virtue as well. Therefore, he considered it his primary concern to transform the priests unto the likeness of Jesus. In pursuit of this view, he made arrangements to fulfil the mission significantly through the seminaries under his care. He organized retreats for priests every year; he revised and compiled canonical prayers with the approval of Rome; he unified the Order of Mass (*Tukasa*) to bring about norms and statutes. He was hailed as the ambassador of reconciliation between bishop and priests, and between priests and the people of God. Thus, this '*unconsecrated bishop* of the Syro-Malabar Church' regarded his priests as his co-workers and, as 'sons and friends',<sup>1</sup> respected them and served them as exhorted by the Vatican Council II. The life and example of this venerable saint was instrumental for the Church to be blessed with genuine vocation to monastic priesthood and be enriched with innumerable priestly formation centers.

#### **2.4.2. Pastoral Vision behind the Foundation of Religious Congregations**

The Church exists in the world precisely to proclaim the Gospel of Christ and to lead all the people to Christ and to the redemption offered by Him. The Church is confident of the fact that, although it is the fundamental mission of the church, it is accomplished practically through consecrated men and women. That is why Vatican II states that

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<sup>1</sup>LG 28.

“religious institutes of the contemplative and of the active life have so far played, and still do play, the main role in the evangelization of the world.”<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the Council exhorts: “Right from the planting stage of the Church, the religious life should be carefully fostered,” as “this not only offers precious and absolutely necessary assistance to missionary activity, but by a more inward consecration made to God in the Church, it also clearly manifests and signifies the inner nature of the Christian calling.”<sup>2</sup> Acknowledging this sublime mission of religious, the Church insists that “the religious should carefully keep before their minds the fact that the Church presents Christ to believers and non-believers alike in a striking manner daily through them. The Church thus portrays Christ in contemplation on the mountain, in His proclamation of the kingdom of God to the multitudes, in His healing of the sick and maimed, in His work of converting sinners to a better life, in His solicitude for youth and His goodness to all men, always obedient to the will of the Father who sent Him.”<sup>3</sup>

Saint Chavara was grief-stricken as the above mentioned factor was not realized in the Kerala Church, which had received the Christian faith eighteen centuries prior to his time. He was convinced that the lack of many good deeds in the Church was mainly because of the absence of monasteries and convents. Our saintly father expressed this sorrow in the *Chronicles* narrating the initial stages of growth of the religious congregations both for men and women. “To establish a religious house of penance for priests in Malabar since much good could have been

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<sup>1</sup>AG 40.

<sup>2</sup>AG 18.

<sup>3</sup>LG 46.

realized through it.”<sup>1</sup> He had expressed his views clearly: “In the land of Malayalam even though the true Christian religion was in practice from very early times, there existed no monasteries or convents. The people had heard of men and women who practised religious virtues but they didn’t have living examples of religious virginity... They had no option... They were living in this sad plight for a very long time.”<sup>2</sup> It was indeed a respite to his incessant grieving and sighing for the omission of immense good, the emergence of the two religious congregations like gallant forces, for two groups of consecrated people, one for men in Mannanam in 1831 and the other for women in Koonammavu in 1866,<sup>3</sup> respectively.

The foundation of the two congregations for men and women contributed marvelously for the stability of the new ventures initiated by Saint Chavara for the spiritual and material uplift of the Kerala Church and to extend it beyond the geographical boundaries of Kerala and to various countries around the globe. When he stated that “God has willed to found this Congregation for the salvation of our

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, vol. I: *Chronicles*, 1.

<sup>2</sup>CWC, vol. I: *Chronicles*, 1.

<sup>3</sup> The women religious community founded in 1866 by Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara with the help of Father Leopold OCD was called as *Third Order of the Carmelites Discalced* (TOCD). It was bifurcated in 1890 into two independent congregations, according to the rite, namely, Syrian and Latin, after the establishment of the Syrian Vicarates of Kottayam and Trichur in 1887. The Syrian community is now known as *Congregation of the Mother of Carmel* (CMC) and the Latin as *Congregation of Teresian Carmelites* (CTC). Saint Chavara is, therefore, the founder of these two women Congregations, namely, CMC and CTC.

Christian brethren"<sup>1</sup> and that "These monasteries so dear to Him and so beneficial to our souls,"<sup>2</sup> he had in mind the goal and meaning of the monastery and the convent that he instituted as 'house of asceticism' (*Tapas Bhavanam*), 'house of vision' (*Darsana Veedu*), 'House on high' (*Bes Rauma*), and 'abode of virtues' (*Punya Sanketam*). Through the numerous monasteries and convents in the five continents and thousands of Carmelite religious priests and sisters, how benevolently did God bestow redemption to innumerable souls, anchored spiritual growth of the Christians, extension of the Church, conversion through genuine measures for embracing faith and christening non-Christians!

In the same way, it is praiseworthy to place on record how many young girls in Kerala had been privileged to be brought up in the 'abode of virtues' to learn and teach biblical matters, catechism and other virtues, as well as handicrafts to become good Catholic girls, and to reach out to several parts of the world as awesome housewives, responsible executives with social affinity, holy and graceful consecrated virgins of the Church and the whole world! It is obvious that God has from eternity deigned to send such an inspiring founder and source of grace to awaken the modern Kerala Church in the person of our saint, to extend the missionary activities of Kerala Church to the ends of the earth, to offer to the universal Church zealous missionaries, even to enter African countries with the message of Jesus Christ, to become living witnesses of Christ's love in the social and charitable fields, to assure progress and integrity for the people of different caste and creed at the educational and cultural spheres, by means of creating opportunities,

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, vol. IV: *Letters*, VI/4.

<sup>2</sup>CWC, vol. IV: *Letters*, VI/1.

arenas and organizations to assimilate moral and Gospel values.

Even at the critical context of his own family becoming extinct without progeny, his priority was not to perpetuate his biological existence but to persuade and build up his barren Mother Church through his holy life and deeds. Therefore, with the firm conviction that the "Lord is my portion and cup" (Ps 16:5), he renounced everything that would endanger his vocation and consecration, and endearingly stood firm in his decision. As he had abandoned his own home and family for the sake of the Gospel, he was able to line up within two centuries a long array of thousands of daring consecrated souls who have dedicated their lives, efforts and fruits of their labour to God and for the Church.

Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara, founder of the indigenous religious congregations and the father of the religious is a prophet of mystical insight who could convince the Church through his own personal life that consecrated life is an essential gift *par excellence* not only for yesterday but also for the present time and in the future, and reveal the missionary nature of the Church through his children who are committed to leave behind their own native place and homes in quest of faraway places to bear witness to Christ. The one who had experienced excruciating pain as the Church was barren for want of canonized saints, although she was privileged to accept faith from Saint Thomas, could ultimately redress the loss through his own personal life and the lives of his children. He was able to lay the foundation of religious life in the heart of his Mother Church and to transform it as a significant reality of life, sanctity and mission of the Church.

If the Syro-Malabar Church is esteemed as a fertile soil for vocation and as a Church of integrity, vibrancy and missionary zeal in the entire universal Church, the Church is deeply indebted to this '*Indian Benedict*'.<sup>1</sup> As history testifies, in addition to the members joined in the religious congregations founded by Saint Chavara, there were many more young people who had responded to their call to religious and monastic life in various congregations and orders founded in the subsequent period. It was because of the multi-faceted activities of the members of the religious congregations founded by Saint Chavara. As pioneers, the pastoral and the educational ministries that they have rendered to the families and generations for their Christian formation, spiritual integration, and intellectual empowerment paved the way for many vocations. Therefore, it is indisputable that the committed and missionary children of Saint Chavara have played a magnificent role not only for the spiritual awakening of the Indian Church, but also for the spiritual development of the universal Church. It is an authentic testimony according to the history of the past fifty years (1962-2012) that the first mission diocese of the Syro-Malabar Church outside Kerala, namely, the Eparchy of Chanda was formed and developed by the CMI-CMC sons and daughters of Saint Chavara.

#### **2.4.3. A Pastor at the Service of Families**

Family is the basic unit of the Church and the society. The renewal of the family exemplified as the 'local church' and 'the basic school' is of supreme importance always and at all

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<sup>1</sup>It is an epithet given by late Bishop Kuriakose Kunnasserry of Kottayam during the inauguration of the bicentenary celebration of Saint Chavara's birth on 3 January 2004 at Mannanam.

seasons. It is the need of the hour to have a united and God-fearing family and society. Each Christian family is called to be a glaring sign of God's love in the world. The call to family life is a call to become an *icon* of the perfect eternal love of the Holy Trinity. When God created human beings in His own image and likeness as male and female and commanded them to become one, He revealed the very core of family life. In the "unity of the two," in their common humanity, they are called to live in a communion of love by becoming one, mirroring in the world the communion of love that is in God through which the three persons of the Trinity love each other in the intimate mystery of the one divine life.<sup>1</sup> A very similar idea we find in *Familiaris Consortio*: "Creating the human race in His own image and continually keeping it in being, God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation and, thus, the capacity and responsibility of love and communion."<sup>2</sup>

Imbibing the spirit of the Scripture and prompted by the Holy Spirit, in 1868, towards the fag end of his earthly sojourn, Saint Chavara prepared a very short write up, known as the *Chavarul* or 'Testament of a Loving Father', for his own parishioners as a sign of his indebtedness, love, and concern for them. Through this *Testament*, he provided insights for the transformation of family life according to the plan and will of the creator in order to be an abode of love and a replica of heaven. The opening sentence of this *Testament* is this: "A good Christian family is the image of heaven."<sup>3</sup> It is a treasury of wisdom that gives inspiration

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<sup>1</sup>Pope John Paul II, *Muleris Dignitatem*, Vatican, 1988, 7.

<sup>2</sup>Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, Vatican, 1981, 11

<sup>3</sup>K. E. Chavara, *Chavarul*, "Introduction," Kochi: Chavara Central Secretariat, 2018, 9.

and guidelines to families even today as it had done exactly done in the nineteenth century.

When we read carefully the *Chavarul* of Saint Chavara that begins by saying, "A good Christian family resembles the heavenly abode," it explicitly clarifies the vivid suggestions and exhortations involved as to how a family should observe faithfully in a practical way the commandments given by God through Moses. The commandments are the life principle given by God to his beloved children. Although handed down centuries ago, the observance of these commandments then and even now, as ideal for the people of God to live a life centred on God, makes the God-man relationship binding and very strong. Exploring this reality, it is admirably evident that Saint Chavara introduced a practical explanation on the commandments of God in his *Chavarul*. The ideal patterns of a spirituality of family presented in the *Chavarul* contribute benignly family renewal and thereby motivate spiritual dimension and spiritual growth of the Church and the society. This may be the incredible work widely read among all the compositions of Saint Chavara. We can see the influence of the *Chavarul* behind the revered 'good families' that are strong and firm, spiritually envisioned and authentic in faith as a specialty of Kerala.

Just like the *Chavarul*, he wrote some other letters also with a pastoral mind. This is very explicit in his *Testament to the Parishioners* and the *Letters and Circulars* he wrote during the turbulent period of Roccas schism. In one of his circulars he wrote to the faithful of the Syro-Malabar Church during the time of Roccas schism as follows: "... I tell you all this, my dear brethren, being desirous of your eternal salvation and lest you fall into the schism and incur the excommunication of the Pope and suffer the loss of your

soul.”<sup>1</sup> His life vision was also very pastoral. Everyone who is called for the service of the Lord should have this pastoral vision. That was his mind. He expressed this ideal very clearly in one of his retreats to the priests. In his “Reflection on *Vocation*,” he wrote about the purpose of one’s call as follows:

Jesus Christ, the Divine master has called you to follow his footsteps by purchasing your soul and the souls of your brethren with His precious blood, to save you from sin and make you an instrument of salvation for others; and make you virtuous and through you to make others virtuous, thus to unite you all with Him.<sup>2</sup>

In short, the pastoral vision, mind, and action of Saint Chavara is very explicit in his preaching ministry of the Word of God, in the foundation of the men and women congregations, in the formation of priestly and religious candidates and the family as a whole.

## **2.5. A Pastor in Action: Works of Mercy for the Salvation of Souls**

### **2.5.1. House of Charity**

The splendour of the spiritual advancement of the Church is witnessed in serving the afflicted while seeing the face of Jesus in them. The unassuming care and concern of Saint Chavara urged him to establish a ‘House of Charity’, probably the first of its kind not only in the Malabar Church but also in the whole of India for the care and nursing of the sick and destitute who had no one to support. This house of charity that he had proposed to run, with the help and cooperation of the parishioners, became the arena for

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, vol. IV: *Letters*, IX/4.

<sup>2</sup>CWC, vol. III, 25.

witnessing the Christian love and charitable service. “Build a modest charity home near the small chapel of yours and let, at least one or two sick people who have no one to take care of, stay in the house and thus try to cultivate at least a shadow of this virtue. This will help the act of mercy to grow in Malabar.”<sup>1</sup> On 29 November 2014, at the end of the vigil prayer held to inaugurate the ‘Year of the Consecrated Life’, Holy Father Pope Francis, who had addressed the religious, said to them: “Wake up the world.” He further added: “... leave your comfort zone and move to the periphery; to the needy and the poor.” He made also clear where and how the religious can be a credible sign to show the face of Christ to the modern world. Saint Chavara, in fact, responded to this challenge more than one and a half century ago and that is the result of the establishment of a ‘House of Charity’ that was never heard of in our mother land. The ever surpassing eloquence, vigour and vitality of the life and activities of Saint Chavara, who, fulfilling the words of Jesus Christ, “Whatsoever you do to the least of my brethren, that you do unto me” (Mt 25:40) a century and a half ago, poses a challenge before the self-centred world, before the ‘use and throw’ culture of the world forever.

### **2.5.2. Confraternity for a Happy Death**

Another remarkable contribution of Saint Chavara along with the ‘House of Charity’ is the ‘Confraternity for a Happy Death’. This is found in his circular written in 1843: “Of all the helps given to a man, the greatest is that given to him at the moment of death. This is again the greatest act of mercy. It is also supreme act of charity.”<sup>2</sup> The ‘Confraternity

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, vol. IV: *Letters*, IX/7.

<sup>2</sup>CWC, vol. IV: *Letters*, IX/7.

for a Happy Death' and the 'House of Charity' are sublime insights and models offered to the Church in a world engulfed by the culture of Death! An exalted witness that gives an exemplary example for the Church to respect and safeguard life!

In short, we can say that he was primarily a pastor; as a pastor who knew his sheep personally, and was concerned of their salvation fervently and committed himself fully and faithfully. An incident from his life narrated by his own spiritual father elucidates this very clearly. "One day Father Kuriakose was getting ready to visit a parishioner severely affected by small pox. People tried to dissuade him for fear of contagion. But he said to the people: 'This is my duty, and God will be at my side' and boldly went to the sick man's house. Not only did he administer the sacrament to the sick man, but also, with appropriate counsels, helped him to die a peaceful death."<sup>1</sup> Even in the establishment of the Charity Bhavan at Kainakary and the *Confraternity for a Happy Death* his aim was to save the souls. All those initiatives and endeavours of Saint Kuriakose elucidate that he was not only a theologian at the desk but also a pastoral theologian.

### **3. Saint Chavara, a Contemplative Theologian**

Finally, but primarily, Saint Chavara was a theologian on his knees: he was a man of God, a contemplative, and a mystic. He had deep intimacy with the Lord. He remained for long hours in rapt attention before the Eucharistic Lord. In his *Colloquies*, he wrote with much passion: "O My Father (*Ente Appa*), my heart however tells me to call you by no other name than my Father..."<sup>2</sup> The filial relationship of the

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<sup>1</sup>Beccaro, *Biography of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 8.

<sup>2</sup>CWC, vol. III, 5.

saint with Jesus and the heavenly Father is very well brought out in this book. However, in one of his letters, he wrote: "Oh Lord, do not be separate from us until we are one with you." This was his wish and prayer for himself and whomsoever he came in contact.<sup>1</sup>

### **3.1. Saint Chavara a Man of Contemplation**

According to Saint Teresa of Avila, the mystical doctor of the Church, Carmel is identified with prayer and the prayer of Carmel is contemplation. So, contemplation is the hallmark of a Teresian Carmelite. "Contemplation is intimately connected with the pure and perfect love of God which is God's greatest gift to the soul. It is deep and intimate knowledge of God by a union of love,"<sup>2</sup> says, a well known spiritual writer, Thomas Merton. If so, Saint Chavara is a man of very deep contemplation. His consciousness as the son of Saint Teresa led him to be a worthy son of her by being a contemplative both in spirit and action. He experienced the whole pervading love of God as his love and fortune, food and drink, breath and solace. He wrote in *Aatmanuthapam*:

You are my love, my joy and all my good fortune  
 How can I live, if not through you?  
 You are my breath; you are my food and drink  
 Where do I have solace except in you?<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, vol. IV: *Letters*, VII/6.

<sup>2</sup>T. Merton, *What Is Contemplation?* London: Burns Oates & Washburn, 1950, 3.

<sup>3</sup>CWC, vol. II: *Aatmanuthapam*, Cantos II, 143-146.

### 3.2. Saint Chavara: A Contemplative in the Model of Saint Teresa

Saint Chavara imbibed the spirit and the mode of contemplative prayer from the life and teaching of Saint Teresa. He was not only quite familiar with her teachings, but also her style and language. His understanding and articulation of meditation was identical with her. In her autobiography entitled *The Life*, Saint Teresa wrote: "Meditation in my opinion is nothing but falling in love with Jesus Christ, frequently conversing in secret with Him, who we know loves us."<sup>1</sup> Taken up by her teachings, Saint Chavara wrote:

Meditation is a conversation with God... *If meditation is a conversation with God, you converse with God as you do with a friend.* It is a common experience that two friends sitting side by side go on speaking nonstop with one another till they part. They are never short of matter to speak about. That means, *where there is love, there is always something to speak about.* Nobody has to teach one this kind of conversation. Two friends even if they do not know one another's language, will mutually speak and understand. *Even to sit in silence very close to the friend is a matter of satisfaction.* Then O! Mother, if bear true love for Jesus, I will have enough matter to talk with Him. If not, the *very feeling of together with Him* is rewarding. *If I have this genuine love, O! My mother, you find it less difficult to teach me the art of meditation.* O! Mother, affectionate and generous, you being a well accomplished mistress in the mysteries of meditation, I again seek your loving

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<sup>1</sup>Teresa of Avila, *The Life*, 8:5.

intercession in *obtaining for me from Jesus the great gift of love*.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, for Saint Kuriakose, to “*be united in love with God*”<sup>2</sup> is the core of meditation. With this consciousness he writes to the sisters: “Ah my dear children, these days you must meditate on the love of Jesus Christ. All the following eight days at least one sister must receive Holy Communion each day and reflect on God’s love.”<sup>3</sup>

In the *Way of Perfection*, referring the Primitive Rule, Saint Teresa said: “We must pray without ceasing ... because unceasing prayer is the most important aspect of the Rule...”<sup>4</sup> In a similar vein, Saint Chavara wrote to the sisters at Koonammavu as follows: “Above all, learn the art of loving Jesus Christ. Abide in the love of Jesus Christ; always sit before his face; walk along with him and converse with Him incessantly.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, Saint Chavara, out of his personal intimacy with Christ, imparted into the minds of the sisters how to become persons of mystical and infused contemplation. It is indeed a *sallapikkal*, a term used by Saint Chavara, meaning a free and loving chat with the bridegroom, a heart to heart conversation between the friends, the core of which is love, intimate and personal love.

### **3.3. Spousal Relationship: Mode of Contemplative Prayer**

The spousal mysticism which is generally the underlying theme in the writings of Carmelite mystics is basically

<sup>1</sup>CWC, vol. III, 2-3.

<sup>2</sup>CWC, vol. III, 3.

<sup>3</sup>CWC, vol. IV: *Letters*, VII/6.

<sup>4</sup>Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection*, 4:2.

<sup>5</sup>CWC, vol. IV: *Letters*, VII/6.

accepted by Saint Chavara. Just as Saint Teresa and other mystics, Saint Chavara also perceived God as the bridegroom and the soul as the bride. In his Letters to sisters, he wrote repeatedly that they are the spouses of Jesus Christ and Christ is the Divine Bridegroom. He addressed them with that respect and manner: "O! Queen and spouses of your Lord and King Jesus Christ, the state of life you have embraced is indeed great and praiseworthy."<sup>1</sup> "Remain with Him in your cell which is His royal chamber with joy and peace of mind."<sup>2</sup> The core of this relationship is *love with an undivided heart*. He wrote: "Consider how sweet is the voice of your loving Spouse, who is vigilantly watching in your hearts with jealousy, lest you love anyone more than Him and who is lovingly attending to all your needs."<sup>3</sup>

In the same vein of thought, we read in another letter: "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 enjoyment than what I give? 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 whispers to you: 'You must love me... I have given you everything I have. There is nothing which I have not given you.' Yes, he has given Himself to you... 'Oh Lord, do not be separate from us until we are one with you.'"<sup>4</sup>

In the epic *Anastasia's Martyrdom*, we see the mystical mind of Saint Chavara. See how the superior, Mother Sophia, encourages and empowers the candidate Anastasia

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, vol. IV: *Letters*, VII/2.

<sup>2</sup>CWC, vol. IV: *Letters*, VII/2.

<sup>3</sup>CWC, vol. IV: *Letters*, VII/7.

<sup>4</sup>CWC, vol. IV: *Letters*, VII/6.

before sending her away from the convent to face the tribulation and even death for the sake of her faith in Jesus. The language she uses is mostly of nuptial relationship.

Daughter dear, your blessed groom  
 Calls you with a longing love  
 Go, be quick  
 Recall your former days of joy  
 Days your king stretched out His arms  
 To clasp you close to Him with love  
 The Lord who climbed the cliffs and hills  
 The Lord who crowned his head with nails  
 The Lord who offered life and love  
 It is the Lord, your holy groom.<sup>1</sup>

In brief, in the life and writings of Saint Chavara, we find the integration of incessant prayer, meditation, contemplation, and mysticism. This was indeed the Carmelite charism of Saint Teresa of Avila that Saint Chavara acquired through his contemplative prayer and lived it in the inner recesses of his heart, which overflowed in his conversation and other modes of communication.

### 3.4. Means to Attain Contemplation

In his writings, especially in a Letter to Sisters, Saint Chavara instructed very clearly the 'little way' to attain the contemplation as depicted by Saint Teresa in the *Interior Castle*.

I wish that all of you listen to and learn this little advice. The straight way to the summit of perfection and the means not to tumble down from the heights is simply this: *Avoid wasting your time*. The time you save after your proper work and recreation should be *spent in spiritual*

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, vol. II: *Anastasaia's Martyrdom*, lines 51-60.

*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. At first you will not understand the language. Then it is that the Lord will begin to make you to understand the language. 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*, and 4. *Meditation*. It is enough for the time being to aspire to this fourth degree of prayer. Our Mother Teresa attained the seventh stage. Some of her sisters reached up to the fifth and sixth. *We must reach at least the fourth.*<sup>1</sup>

Thus, he recognized the Teresian style of contemplative prayer in terms of the seven mansions but with his own personal and innovative touch in view of inspiring those with whom he was communicating.

### **3.5. Conformity with the Will of God: The Apex of Contemplation**

The *summit of contemplation is the conformity of one's will with the will of God*, that is, union with God. Practically, this is manifested through obedience which is the fruit of contemplation. When we go through the life of Saint Chavara, we see in him a perfect model of submission to the will of God and obedience. To him, the source and model of such submission is Jesus Christ himself. The intense filial love experience and the oneness with the Father enabled

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, vol. IV: *Letters*, VII/8.

Jesus to surrender himself always to the Father and to obey His will until his death on the cross. The awareness of Saint Chavara that he is the son of God and the filial love that he experienced as God's son enabled him to say: "I do not desire anything else other than your will."<sup>1</sup> In the Chronicle of Koonammavu, we read his words as follows: "Have I a will of my own? ... I am ready to do as I am told. I don't wish to do anything according to my own will. I am ready to do only what I am commanded to do."<sup>2</sup> Indeed, he said *Hinneni*, meaning 'Here I am', and became a Servant or Slave of the Lord, *doulos tou Theou*, following the footsteps of Jesus and Mother Mary. Inspired by this example, the Chronicler of Koonammavu convent wrote: "*This Father was obeying all like a little child. The good example which he showed us till his death is something that everyone marvels at. Is it not right and lawful then, all of us learn from his good example and live accordingly?*"<sup>3</sup> Thus, he manifested the intimate union with the Lord, i.e., contemplation, through his life of obedience to the will of God. Thereby he himself became a proclamation, a witness to the self-emptying and saving love of God. However, his rich contemplative life found tremendous expression in serving the humanity, especially the Church, through his apostolic and altruistic activities. Again, in his letter to the sisters, he wrote just one year before his death: "Pray that ... I may spend the *rest of my life accomplishing always His will in all things* and finally to die a happy death."<sup>4</sup>

From the aforementioned historical and theological analysis it is very clear that Saint Chavara was not simply a

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, vol. III: *Colloquies in Meditation*, 21.

<sup>2</sup>CKC, vol. II, 12.

<sup>3</sup>CKC, vol. II, 13.

<sup>4</sup>CWC, vol. IV: *Letters*, VII/2.

pastor or an armchair theologian. He was, however, an ardent lover of God, a man of contemplation, an excellent pastor, who followed the path of Jesus, the Beloved Son of the Father and the Good Shepherd. He taught them, guided them, and prayed with them and for them. His writings are didactic as well as pragmatic. Though they are not very systematic and definite in articulations, they contain original theological insights and practical guidelines for their social, ecclesial, liturgical, and spiritual life. They also provide us access to his intense God experience, articulations of his master plan and insights on different states of life, practical wisdom for earthly life in view of heavenly life, etc.

Saint Chavara was a visionary than a scholar. His synthetic and mystical mind is very much in tune with the theological mind of the early Fathers of the Church. Hence, even if he did not write any systematic treatise on theology or theological disciplines, his writings, although most of them are occasional, are filled with theological visions and insights. From our attempt to categorize them in the light of the aforementioned three categories of theology or theologian, we could see that he was an integration of all the three models, namely, academic, pastoral, and contemplative theologies. By his academic pursuit, study, contemplative prayer, and pastoral and altruistic activities, he could accomplish in him all those three types of theology and became a true Catholic theologian.

With this findings we proceed further to bring out the theological insights of Saint Kuriakose Chavara in view of elucidating that he is a theologian as equally authentic and prominent as that of the Apostolic Fathers of the Church.



## Chapter 4

### AN APPRAISAL OF SAINT CHAVARA'S THEOLOGY IN THE LIGHT OF THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS

In view of understanding the authenticity and relevance of the doctrines implied in the writings of Saint Kuriakose Chavara, let us make a comparative study between the writings of him and that of the Early Fathers of the Church. Here our consideration is the main thrust of the teachings of the Apostolic Fathers who lived immediately after the time of the apostles, i.e., first and second centuries. According to J. Quasten, an expert in Patrology, the Apostolic Fathers do not aim at a scientific exposition of the Christian faith; their writings contain occasional utterances rather than doctrinal definitions. This is all the more true with regard to Saint Chavara's writings also. He did not write systematic and scientific treatises in view of teaching and imparting theology. But his writings have theology; they are saturated with theological visions and insights. So, just as in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, we see certain authentic theological insights and doctrines in the writings of Saint Chavara, which we highlight in the following sections.

#### **1. Pastoral Character<sup>1</sup>**

According to J. Quasten, typical of all the writings of the Apostolic Fathers is the *pastoral character*.<sup>1</sup> With regard to the

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<sup>1</sup>We have already seen the pastoral character in a more detailed manner in the previous chapter.

content and style, they are closely related to the writings of the New Testament, especially to the Epistles of the Apostles.<sup>2</sup>

As we have already seen in the last chapter, Saint Kuriakose Chavara was basically a pastor. Just as the Epistles of Saint Paul and early Fathers, most of his writings were also occasional. They are mainly his *Letters* addressed to the Holy Father, Prefect of the *Propagande Fide*, the co-religious, spiritual sons and daughters, and the faithful. He wrote as per the need of his subjects: to the Holy Father and to the Prefect of the *Propagande Fide*, for clarifying the doubts in order to tackle the problems emerged in the Church; to the co-religious, spiritual sons and daughters, for giving advices and instructions; to the faithful in order to admonish them to be firm in their faith and be obedient to their legitimate authority.

He wrote two letters to his parishioners, namely, (1) Testament of a Loving Father, a letter addressed to the Families, namely, *the Chavarul* and (2) A Letter calling the people to start a Home of Charity and to start a Confraternity for Happy Death. These two long letters are personal and are addressed to the parishioners of Kainakary (can be considered as a local Church) having biblical, spiritual, pastoral, moral, and social insights, advices, admonitions, instructions, practical means, etc. For example, the second Letter written in 1869 to the parishioners of Kainakary is a call to the people to start a Home of Charity attached to their Chapel. To make it possible he proposed, first, to start a *Confraternity of Saint Joseph* for Happy Death

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<sup>1</sup>Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. I, Westminster: Maryland Christian Classics Inc., 1993, 40.

<sup>2</sup>Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. I, 40.

in their parish. The members of the parish were advised to collect alms from the people and to start a Home of Charity in a modest way where they can give free hospice to the poor and the destitute and take care of all their material and spiritual needs.

In this letter, he wrote also certain revealed truths as well as some traditional beliefs very vividly. He wrote:

The grace of a happy death is necessary for all men... God the Father sent His only Son to the world. He lived here for thirty-three years and in the end offered his life and saved the humankind. The gates of heaven will be opened only to those who die in the state of grace. However holy a person be, if he loves a single sin and dies in that state merits eternal death. However great a sinner may be, if he repents over his sins at the moment of death, like the good thief who was hanged on the right side of the Lord, the gates of heaven will automatically be opened. This is the greatest happiness a man can have. *Of all the helps given to a man, the greatest is that given to him at the moment of death. This is again the greatest act of mercy. This is also the supreme act of charity.*<sup>1</sup>

This Letter is a very good and contains rich admonitions to serve body and soul in view of eternal life. It is saturated with pastoral insights; ultimately that is his concern towards the souls and the eagerness to save them.

When he wrote a circular to the people as the Vicar General in the context of Roccas schism, he exhorted them: "I tell you all this, my dear brethren, *being desirous of your eternal salvation* and lest you fall into the schism and incur the excommunication of the Pope and suffer the loss of your

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, vol. IV: *Letters*, IX/7.

soul.”<sup>1</sup> It is very clear that as the pastor, his primary concern was the *salvation of the souls*. Likewise, there are many examples in his writings that elucidate his pastoral concern. Since we have already discussed his pastoral mind in the last chapter, we shall proceed with further elucidation of the point.

## 2. Eschatological Character

Another important character typical of the writings of Apostolic Fathers is their eschatological character. The second coming of Christ was considered imminent by them. Consequently, the writings of the Apostolic Fathers reveal *a deep longing for Christ*, the departed and expected Saviour, a longing which very often takes a mystical form.

When we consider the writings of Saint Chavara, although we do not find an idea of immediate *Parousia* in his writings, very extravagantly we come across the doctrine regarding the four ends of human beings such as death, judgment, heaven, and hell. Moreover, we find very rich insights and doctrines concerning the purgatory, the necessity of praying and doing charitable acts for the souls in the purgatory, and the insistence to practise virtue in one’s life to face the last judgment peacefully. These ideas we find mainly in his poetic literature *Maranaveettil Padunnathinulla Pana (Dirge)*.

Also in his *Letter to the Parishioners* to begin a Home of Charity, he wrote very clearly the necessity of preparing for the death: “There are only two things that are important: in the first place, see that you don’t forget at any time that you will die at the most unexpected moment, that death will creep on you like a thief and so you must remember the words of our Lord: ‘watch and pray for you know not when

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, vol. IV: *Letters*, IX/4.

the moment will come' and, secondly, keep away from mortal sin that will engender fear of death and when you realize that you have sinned mortally, at once through confession or perfect act of contrition seek pardon of sin. Only then should you go to sleep."<sup>1</sup> Though death is a definite fact, its time remains indefinite. So, we must be vigilant and always be ready to encounter death. Vigilance and preparation are the two requirements that every person should cultivate in order to face death peacefully and joyfully. Here, in this *Letter*, the thrust is on the same four ends of human being: death, judgment, and the reward either heaven or hell. The exhortation to pray for the departed souls, offer Holy *Qurbana* for them, give alms as the reparation for their sins, etc., indicates how far the author has imbibed all the traditional beliefs of the Church and his pastoral mind and concern to convey these ideas for the good of the souls.

As mentioned above, we do not find an idea of an immediate *Parousia* in Chavara's writings as in the case of Apostolic Fathers; nevertheless, his writings, especially the poetic literature reveal a very deep longing for the vision of God, an unquenchable thirst, as we see in the Psalmist or in Apostle Saint Thomas. According to Pedro Lopez Quintana, former Apostolic Nuncio to India, "It was a unique initiative of Saint Chavara who had a prophetic insight to realize that the Church in India needed a confluence of her Christian patrimony with the rich and age-old heritage of the Indian spiritual traditions. The spiritual power of the Syro-Malabar Church which can be traced to the deeply personal Jesus experience of Saint Thomas the Apostle, had to be blended with the spiritual classics of India with their long tradition

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, vol. IV: *Letters*, 119.

of craving and longing for God realization. This indeed is what Chavara attempted to do.”<sup>1</sup> The observation of the Nuncio seems to be very right and relevant and is very well manifested in Chavara’s *Aatmanuthapam*.

In *Aatmanuthapam*, 168 lines of Cantos III and its Appendix together beautifully describe mostly the incidents related to the life of Christ. He is contemplating the Incarnate Word, the Babe, through the eyes of Mary, the mother. The beauty of it is that it’s every other line ends with the words, “I long to see.” For example, he writes in *Aatmanuthapam* as follows:

The Lord of Mercy, the Son of God  
 His glorious splendor, *I long to see.*  
 The fountain of mercy, God incarnate  
 Who, the form of man assumed  
 To uproot him from the slush of sin  
 The redeemer of humankind, *I long to see.*  
 How he stayed for nine months  
 In the womb of His mother *I long to see.*  
 Born in her womb, to Bethlehem he came  
 To obey mighty Ceaser, *I long to see.*  
 God becoming one with man  
 ‘Emmanuel’, *I long to see.*  
 His parents denied a resting place  
 Though painful, *I long to see...*  
 The good shepherd seeking his flock  
 That has gone astray, *I long to see.*  
 The Lord of goodness, proclaiming himself  
 As our loving friend, *I long to see.*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Pedro Lopez Quintana (Apostolic Nuncio of India), “Blessed Chavara and the Confluence of Christian Patrimony in India,” *Herald of the East* 1, 1 (2006), 2.

<sup>2</sup>CWC, vol. II: *Aatmanuthapam*, Cantos III, 1-100.

What we see in this Cantos III is a description of the longing of the poet to see the movements and plays of the infant Jesus and the way his pretty mother nurses him. Hence, in the first appearance, it may not give us eschatological ideas. Nevertheless, the inner craving of the poet, to see and to experience God who came to us in order to be with us, shows his long standing eagerness to see Him and to be with Him. This we can bring out from his sayings in other contexts too. For example, in his letter to the sisters, he wrote: "Oh Lord, do not be separate from us until we are one with you."<sup>1</sup>

### 3. Doctrine of Baptism

Another important theological concept that is predominant in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers is the importance they have given to baptism. According to the Apostolic Fathers, especially Saint Clement of Rome, "Baptism is called the *seal* as Saint Paul says (2 Cor 1:21-22) and this seal must be kept inviolate; 'For of those who have not kept the seal he says: Their worm shall not die, and their fire shall not be quenched and he shall not be a spectacle for all flesh', 'This therefore is what he says: Keep flesh pure and seal without spot, they may receive eternal life'."<sup>2</sup>

When we go through the life and writings of Saint Chavara, he is a man who acknowledged baptism as a gift of God and by that he became a spotless and fair son of God and to see and enjoy the heavenly joy. In *Aatmanuthapam*, he wrote abundantly regarding his reception of baptism and the graces bestowed upon him as the son of God. His writings attest to this fact:

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, vol. IV: *Letters*, VII/6.

<sup>2</sup>Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. I, 56.

O Fount of Mercy, in your crystal streams of grace  
 Was my soul once cleansed and made spotless fair  
 Beauteous, bright, bedecked in gems of virtue  
 Through my Baptism, a boon, a day of days.

What shall I render you, *My Lord and my God*  
 For all your wondrous gifts of mercy and love  
 For cleansing my soul, so holy, spotless and fair  
 At the very start of my journey of life.

Through Baptism's grace, you made me your cherished son,  
 And showed me heaven's joys to tend me grow<sup>1</sup>

Then, Your saving gaze fell upon me  
 And cleansing waters of Baptism I received.

The dawn of grace led to growth in virtue  
 Sumptuous goodness swelled my soul, as  
 In sacred waters, I was lavishly laved

And cleansed from guilt to *divine sonship restored*.

The fountain of grace, flushed forth from my soul

On that grace-filled day, Heaven rejoiced

As my name was writ on Eternity's page

Never so blessed a day, has seen my life.<sup>2</sup>

Saint Chavara has spelt out here the important graces that God had showered upon him through baptism. They are: Cleansed the soul and made it spotless, holy and bright, made as His cherished son; showed the heaven's joy; led to grow in virtue; and wrote the name in Eternity's page. However, he lived the baptismal purity in its fullness until his death and received the eternal life. This he acknowledged when he was on the deathbed: "By the grace

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<sup>1</sup>Cantos I, 32-42.

<sup>2</sup>Cantos II, 105-114.

of God, I dare to say that with their [the Holy Family's] help *I had no occasion to lose the grace I received in baptism.*"<sup>1</sup>

#### **4. Efficacy of Good Works for Salvation**

According to the Fathers, especially Saint Clement, almsgiving is the principal means by which sins are remitted. In Clement's Sermon, we read: "Almsgiving is, therefore, good even as penance for sin. Fasting is better than prayer but almsgiving is better than both. Love covers a multitude of sins, but prayer from a good conscience delivers from death. Blessed is every man that is found full of these things, for almsgiving removes the burden of sin."<sup>2</sup>

Saint Chavara was very much conscious about these realities. He adorned his life with selfless deeds and great zeal towards the salvation of souls. In the *Chavarul*, he wrote: "Days on which you have not rendered any good to others will not be reckoned in the book of life... Let no beggar leave your home empty handed; likewise, don't hesitate, as much as you can, to give alms."<sup>3</sup>

The Letter for the establishment of the *Upavisala* (Home of Charity) in his parish is a classical example that attests very clearly to the necessity and benefit of good works and acts of charity, especially the love and care one should show to the beggars, sick, and the terminal patients. For the projects of helping the poor Chavara used to approach the rich people and they used to contribute generously to his just demands. Through his life Chavara enkindled piety and concern for the poor and sick. By starting the *Confraternity of Saint Joseph* for a Happy Death, Chavara initiated a new

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<sup>1</sup>*Positio*, 548.

<sup>2</sup>Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. I, 57.

<sup>3</sup>Chavara, *Chavarul: Precepts for Families*, 14.

apostolate of helping and caring the sick and the dying. The members of this Confraternity were exhorted to attend to the needs of the sick and the suffering, and to adopt a poor family in the neighbourhood and provide it with food and clothes on the feast day of Saint Joseph. After starting the *Confraternity of Saint Joseph* among the parishioners of Kainakary in 1869, Chavara instructed them to establish in the parish a Home of Charity to take care of the poor and the aged and not to abandon the aged, the sick, the orphans, and the poor. In the *Testament*, he gave clear guidelines about the importance of showing concern to the poor people which would make their own lives sublime.<sup>1</sup>

The key idea behind his Home of Charity and the Confraternity of Saint Joseph for Happy Death is this: “of all the benefits we can render to a man the greatest is what we render to him at the time of his departure from this world... This is a gain, the greatest act of mercy. This is also the supreme act of charity. One cannot measure the greatness of such a deed.”<sup>2</sup> The means to actualize this project, according to him, is the alms that they receive from the parishioners. Thus, he showed the means to attain eternal life not only to the poor and the needy but also to those who have money and wealth by inspiring them to give alms for the wellbeing of the poor; moreover, this also is acclaimed as a praiseworthy model of involving and collaborating with the laity in meaningful acts of Christian charity.

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<sup>1</sup>J. Pathrapankal, “The Prophetic Personality of Blessed Chavara,” *Herald of the East* 1, 1 (2006), 27.

<sup>2</sup>CWC, vol. IV: *Letters*, IX/7.

## 5. Christology

In general, the Apostolic Fathers do not present a uniform Christological doctrine since they lived before the time of definitions done by the Ecumenical Councils. So, their Christology is primarily Scripture based. Christ is, to them, the Son of God, who is pre-existent and who collaborated in the creation of the world.<sup>1</sup> This is typically an articulation based on the Gospel of John, especially the Prologue.

The Christology of Ignatius of Antioch is exceedingly clear as both the divinity and the humanity of Christ are blended together in one person. "There is only one physician both carnal and spiritual, born and unborn, God became man, true life in death, sprung both from Mary and from God first subject to suffering and then incapable of it – Jesus Christ Our Lord."<sup>2</sup> "He is really of the line of David according to the flesh and the Son of God by the will and power of God; was really born of a virgin, and baptized by John in order to comply with every ordinance."<sup>3</sup> Here the author presents both the divinity and humanity of the incarnated Word Jesus Christ in one person. Exactly the same doctrine we find in the writings of Saint Chavara too.

### 5.1. Christ: Divine and Human

In his writings, especially in the *Aatmanuthapam*, we find a profound Christology of Saint Chavara. According to it, the second person of the Trinity, the Son, assumed human form. As the fulfilment of the promise made by God, the Son of God incarnated in the purest womb of Mother Mary. He is True God and True man. He was born as the first born of all

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<sup>1</sup>Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. I, 41.

<sup>2</sup>Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to Ephesians*, 7, 2.

<sup>3</sup>Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to Smyrneans*, I, 1.

creation and became our eldest brother. We read in *Aatmanuthapam* as follows:

Of God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit  
 The Son Incarnate in Mary's purest womb.<sup>1</sup>  
 Your promise to fulfil, came your Son  
 Assumed human form, on the earth  
*True man and true God* you came from above  
 And on earth sojourned our Elder Brother.<sup>2</sup>  
 The Almighty, the fountain of all goodness  
 The King of kings, Omniscient Lord of All  
 The second person of the Holy Trinity  
 The Lord born by the Queen of the world.<sup>3</sup>

Again, he says very clearly that the one who was born on earth as man is the Eternal Son of God. However, except sin, He made himself identified with the humanity.

Though born on earth as man  
 Though from Eternity the Father's Son  
 Though as man he took upon Him  
 The full human nature, all  
 Except the original stain of sin  
 A grace to match it, there was none.<sup>4</sup>

Again, in the aforementioned book, we see a very beautiful presentation of the incarnation of the second person of the Trinity as *Emmanuel* with minute details, which the poet longs to see. The third Cantos of the poem consist of 100 lines that describe the details of the birth of the Son. We encounter a very rich theology of incarnation in this text.

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<sup>1</sup>Cantos I, 71-72.

<sup>2</sup>Cantos II, 169-172.

<sup>3</sup>Cantos IV, 29-32.

<sup>4</sup>Cantos XI, 187-192.

The fountain mercy, God incarnate  
 Who ugly form of man assumed.<sup>1</sup>  
 He concealed in his form  
 The effulgence that dims the stars  
 The nativity of God the highest  
 From Mercy, the virgin, *I long to see*.<sup>2</sup>  
 God became one with man  
 'Emmanuel' *I long to see*.<sup>3</sup>

In the Appendix of Cantos III, lines 1-68, the poet narrates the very purpose of incarnation, God becoming *Emmanuel*, as to save humanity from the stain of sin and to elevate them to the right hand of God. So, the *Emmanuel* is the Saviour of the world.

To redeem humankind born low, Him  
 O that I may see!  
 Sinful me, to enrich with grace  
 To sorrow you bent  
 How you became the son of man  
 To save me I would see.<sup>4</sup>  
 To elevate us to the right hand of God  
 You the perfect, became man.<sup>5</sup>  
 The sweet smile you show your parents  
 Beloved Babe, I long to see.  
 O God Emmanuel, I, a sinner  
 With love, adore.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Cantos III, 3-4.

<sup>2</sup>Cantos III, 7-10.

<sup>3</sup>Cantos III, 15-16.

<sup>4</sup>Cantos III, Appendix, 13-18.

<sup>5</sup>Cantos III, Appendix, 47-48.

<sup>6</sup>Cantos III, Appendix, 61-64.

The basis of Christian faith is the mystery of the Triune God who is the communion of three divine persons, Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is the Father who sent the Son to the world in order to redeem the world from sin and sent the Spirit to be with us always. Nevertheless, it is through the Son we reach God and approach the divine mysteries. Since no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him (Mt 11:27), Jesus himself said: "no one comes to the Father but by me" (Jn 14:6) and "he who has seen me, has seen the Father; he who has heard me, has heard the Father; and he who has received me, receives Father who has sent me." Imbibing the spirit of these words of Jesus, Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara turned to Jesus who is both perfect man and God, to see, hear, and experience the Father.

## **5.2. Titles of Christ and Christological Themes**

In the writings of Saint Kuriakose, almost all the Christological confessions and titles pronounced by the early Church and the writings of the Fathers are found. He clearly presents also the basic Christological dogma, the divinity and humanity of Jesus in one person. Also he imbibed the faith confession of his Father in faith Saint Thomas the Apostle: "My Lord My God."<sup>1</sup> The Christological titles found in his writings are: Son of God,<sup>2</sup> Redeemer of the humankind,<sup>3</sup> My Lord,<sup>4</sup> Son Incarnate in Mary's purest womb,<sup>5</sup> True Man and True God,<sup>1</sup> Our Elder

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<sup>1</sup>Cantos I, 37; Cantos XII, 170.

<sup>2</sup>Cantos III, 1, 27.

<sup>3</sup>Cantos III, 6.

<sup>4</sup>Cantos II, 75, 87.

<sup>5</sup>Cantos I, 72.

Brother,<sup>2</sup> God-Man,<sup>3</sup> Son of Man,<sup>4</sup> Son of Almighty God,<sup>5</sup> Saviour of Man,<sup>6</sup> Emmanuel,<sup>7</sup> Christ,<sup>8</sup> King of Kings,<sup>9</sup> Son of Royal David,<sup>10</sup> Baby Son as great as the Father,<sup>11</sup> My Lord the Blessed Babe Emmanuel,<sup>12</sup> Lord of Mercy,<sup>13</sup> God of Mercy,<sup>14</sup> Almighty God supreme,<sup>15</sup> Good Shepherd,<sup>16</sup> Goodness Infinite,<sup>17</sup> Lord of All,<sup>18</sup> O Lord of the Gospel,<sup>19</sup> Lord of Goodness,<sup>20</sup> Redeemer,<sup>21</sup> My Treasure,<sup>22</sup> God-Born-Man,<sup>23</sup> Saviour of All,<sup>24</sup> My Father,<sup>25</sup> My Maker,<sup>1</sup> Shepherd

<sup>1</sup>Cantos II, 171.

<sup>2</sup>Cantos II, 172.

<sup>3</sup>Cantos II, 241; Cantos VI, 162.

<sup>4</sup>Cantos III, Appendix, 17.

<sup>5</sup>Cantos III, Appendix, 1.

<sup>6</sup>Cantos V, 141.

<sup>7</sup>Cantos III, 16.

<sup>8</sup>Cantos I, 60.

<sup>9</sup>Cantos I, 60; Cantos IV, 30, Cantos V, 76, 141; Cantos VI, 41.

<sup>10</sup>Cantos IV, 170.

<sup>11</sup>Cantos V, 131.

<sup>12</sup>Cantos IV, 189.

<sup>13</sup>Cantos II, 1; Cantos III, 1; Cantos VI, 261.

<sup>14</sup>Cantos II, 43.

<sup>15</sup>Cantos II, 62.

<sup>16</sup>Cantos III, 97.

<sup>17</sup>Cantos II, 92.

<sup>18</sup>Cantos III, Appendix, 57; Cantos IV, 183; Cantos V, 25, 142; Cantos VI, 7; Cantos VII, 53, 265.

<sup>19</sup>Cantos III, 95.

<sup>20</sup>Cantos III, 99.

<sup>21</sup>Cantos IV, 206; Cantos VI, 288.

<sup>22</sup>Cantos IV, 206.

<sup>23</sup>Cantos V, 5.

<sup>24</sup>Cantos V, 28.

<sup>25</sup>Cantos V, 147.

Gracious,<sup>2</sup> Son of God,<sup>3</sup> Lord of Lords,<sup>4</sup> Son of the Most High,<sup>5</sup> Only Begotten Son of God the Father,<sup>6</sup> Son of the Mighty God,<sup>7</sup> Lord of Justice,<sup>8</sup> Lord and Master,<sup>9</sup> Lord of the World,<sup>10</sup> World's Redeemer,<sup>11</sup> My Lord,<sup>12</sup> My Master,<sup>13</sup> Saviour,<sup>14</sup> My Hope,<sup>15</sup> Redeemer,<sup>16</sup> New Star,<sup>17</sup> God, King of the Jews,<sup>18</sup> Lord God of the Universe,<sup>19</sup> My Master,<sup>20</sup> Author of All,<sup>21</sup> Creator Supreme,<sup>22</sup> Light of the World,<sup>23</sup> Son of the Mighty,<sup>24</sup> O Lord My God,<sup>25</sup> Eternal Son of God,<sup>26</sup> Co-

<sup>1</sup>Cantos V, 147.

<sup>2</sup>Cantos V, 173.

<sup>3</sup>Cantos VI, 7; Cantos VII, 8.

<sup>4</sup>Cantos VI, 7.

<sup>5</sup>Cantos VI, 41.

<sup>6</sup>Cantos VI, 45.

<sup>7</sup>Cantos VI, 71.

<sup>8</sup>Cantos VI, 155; Cantos VII, 552.

<sup>9</sup>Cantos VI, 286.

<sup>10</sup>Cantos VI, 304.

<sup>11</sup>Cantos VI, 307.

<sup>12</sup>Cantos VI, 309, 327, 333, 351; Cantos VII, 85, 141, 231.

<sup>13</sup>Cantos VI, 333.

<sup>14</sup>Cantos VI, 333.

<sup>15</sup>Cantos VI, 333.

<sup>16</sup>Cantos VII, 9.

<sup>17</sup>Cantos VII, 14, 20.

<sup>18</sup>Cantos VII, 29; Cantos VII, 594.

<sup>19</sup>Cantos VII, 51.

<sup>20</sup>Cantos VII, 51.

<sup>21</sup>Cantos VII, 55.

<sup>22</sup>Cantos VII, 93.

<sup>23</sup>Cantos VII, 111.

<sup>24</sup>Cantos VII, 124.

<sup>25</sup>Cantos VII, 214.

<sup>26</sup>Cantos VII, 258.

Existent with the Lord of All,<sup>1</sup> Sovereign of Humankind,<sup>2</sup> Royal Son of David,<sup>3</sup> My Father Beloved,<sup>4</sup> God of All,<sup>5</sup> I am Your Father Benevolent,<sup>6</sup> I am He,<sup>7</sup> I am the Creator,<sup>8</sup> I am Your Father, I Your Loving God,<sup>9</sup> My Father, My Creator, My Lord,<sup>10</sup> My Loving Father I am Your Son,<sup>11</sup> My God, My Love, My Master,<sup>12</sup> O Loving God,<sup>13</sup> My Father Beloved,<sup>14</sup> My Loving Father God Eternal,<sup>15</sup> the Saviour,<sup>16</sup> O My God,<sup>17</sup> My Blessed Father,<sup>18</sup> My Beloved Lord, My Father,<sup>19</sup> Lord of the Triple World,<sup>20</sup> Christ Our Lord,<sup>21</sup> My Son, Beloved, My Lord My God.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Cantos VII, 259.

<sup>2</sup>Cantos VII, 260.

<sup>3</sup>Cantos VII, 260.

<sup>4</sup>Cantos VII, 280.

<sup>5</sup>Cantos VII, 280.

<sup>6</sup>Cantos VII, 286.

<sup>7</sup>Cantos VII, 306.

<sup>8</sup>Cantos VII, 315.

<sup>9</sup>Cantos VII, 332.

<sup>10</sup>Cantos VII, 334.

<sup>11</sup>Cantos VII, 416.

<sup>12</sup>Cantos VIII, 1.

<sup>13</sup>Cantos VIII, 6.

<sup>14</sup>Cantos VIII, 15.

<sup>15</sup>Cantos VIII, 35.

<sup>16</sup>Cantos VIII, 50.

<sup>17</sup>Cantos VIII, 55.

<sup>18</sup>Cantos VIII, 61.

<sup>19</sup>Cantos VIII, 66.

<sup>20</sup>Cantos IX, 71.

<sup>21</sup>Cantos XII, 62.

<sup>22</sup>Cantos XII, 170.

### 5.2.1. Christ as *Appan*, the Father

The basic God-consciousness of Jesus was this: God is his Father and He as Father's Son. Saint Kuriakose too had a similar experience. For example, in *Aatmanuthapam*, he wrote:

While being nurtured in body and mind  
Was I beloved too of God, my Father.<sup>1</sup>

His experience and articulation that God is his Father and he is His son constitute the most sublime aspect of his God experience and awareness. He attained such a consciousness through his intense and intimate relationship with Jesus the Messiah.

At the zenith of his God experience, Saint Kuriakose calls Christ, the second person of the Holy Trinity, also as Father. It conspicuously comes to the fore in his meditations on the agony of Jesus where he called Him 'Father' (*Appan*) most affectionately. The following lines of *Aatmanuthapam*, which describe the agony of Jesus standing before Pilot, express this fact:

Many a query the villain made to you  
O God most pure, your blessed voice to hear  
But he, a sinner deserved not the grace  
"My Loving Father", I'm your son.<sup>2</sup>

He assumed the same feeling when he narrated the scenes at the foot of the cross:

His words divine he recalled to his mind  
"I am your Father, I'm your loving God  
Yet, you thrust this cruel spear in my heart,"  
Alas, my Father, my creator, my Lord.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Cantos I, 85-86.

<sup>2</sup>Cantos VII, 413-416.

<sup>3</sup>Cantos VII, 331-33.

Eight times, the author addressed Jesus as Father in the seventh Cantos of *Aatmanuthapam* and also twice in the eighth Cantos.<sup>1</sup>

In his meditation upon the passion of Jesus Saint Chavara addressed Him "*Appa,*" meaning Father, in the *Dhyana-sallapangal* also: "Oh merciful Father, I am unable to raise my eyes and look at your face. Lord, looking at your holy head, I feel frightened to think how it came to be pierced with thorns... O my Father (*Ente appa*), how graceful is your face! The rapturous Song of David in praise of the beauty of your face rings in my ears... But, my Father, my heart now gets heavy to look at your face... Alas! I myself disfigured my Father's face, the beauty of which David the Prophet sang plentifully..."<sup>2</sup> The extraordinary style of addressing Jesus as the Father clearly expressed his unison with the divine persons, than his ignorance. It is also an indication of his mystical union with the second person of the Trinity, who himself had affirmed categorically that "I and my Father are one" (Jn 10:30). It is noteworthy that when the Saint contemplated upon the passion of Christ that he addressed Jesus as Father. It may be because when he meditated upon the passion of Christ that he experienced the intensity of God's indefinable love in its depth and perceived the manifestation of that love in the self-oblation of Jesus on the cross. The overwhelming love led him to a mystical realm beyond the categories of human mind and intellect. This may be the reason for him to ignore the distinction between the Father and the Son.

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<sup>1</sup>Cantos VII, 223, 286, 343, 345, 416, 419, 532, 548, and also in VIII 61, 63, etc.

<sup>2</sup>CWC, vol. III, 6.

### 5.2.2. Christ as the Mother

Christ for Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara is not only his Father, but also his mother. This is a very unique way of expressing the Christ experience. See what he wrote in *Aatmanuthapam*:

You like a father patiently followed my trail  
 Whispered unto my heart, "you are my love  
 Mark ye, my son, a good Father am I  
 And a *mother* both" – you filled my mind.<sup>1</sup>

We may not come across many spiritual works in which God is described or addressed as mother. But there are clear references in the Scripture presenting God as a loving mother. For example, Prophet Isaiah mused: "Can a mother forget her sucking child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even if she forgets, I shall not forget you" (Is 49:15-16). Again, Jesus is said to have lamented in the Gospel of Saint Mathew: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem... How often I would have gathered your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not" (Mt 23:37). In these passages, the Scripture highlights the maternal character of God's love. In line with these, Saint Kuriakose recalled the caring, forgiving, self-giving, tender, merciful, and maternal love of Christ, who searched for him, carried his sins, healed his sickness, and sacrificed His life for him. It is this heartfelt, sweet experience of the maternal love of Christ that made the life of Saint Chavara beautiful like a green pasture, fruitful like a vineyard, sheltering like a tree, and dynamic like a running stream.

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<sup>1</sup>Cantos VII, 343-346.

## 6. Defender of Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction

In the history of Dogma, the Epistles of Saint Clement of Rome, especially the *Epistle to the Corinthians*, are very precious. It may be well called the *manifesto* of ecclesiastical jurisdiction. The context of the letter is the outbreak of disputes within the Church of Corinth during the reign of Domitian, which impelled the author to intervene. Some arrogant and impudent individuals had rebelled against ecclesiastical authority and driven the incumbents from office. Only a very small minority of community remained loyal to the deposed presbyters. Saint Clement's intention was to settle the difference and to repair the scandal given to the pagans.<sup>1</sup> Here, for the first time, we find a clear and explicit declaration of the doctrine of apostolic succession.

The doctrine of apostolic succession emphasized here is that the presbyters cannot be deposed by the members of the community by their own account, as the authority is not bestowed by them. The right to rule derives from the Apostles, who exercised their power in obedience to Christ, who, in turn, was sent by God.<sup>2</sup> He wrote: "The apostles preached to us the Gospel received from Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ was God's Ambassador. Christ, in other words, comes with a message from God and the Apostles with a message from Christ. Both of these orderly arrangements, therefore, originate from the will of God... From land to land they preached and from their earliest converts appointed men whom they had tested by the Spirit to act as bishops and deacons for the future believers. And this was no innovation, for a long time before the Scripture had spoken about bishops and deacons; for somewhere it says: 'I

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<sup>1</sup>Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. I, 43.

<sup>2</sup>Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. I, 46.

will establish their overseers in observance of the law and their ministers in fidelity.' Consequently, we deem it unjust to eject from the sacred ministry the person who was appointed either by them or later with the consent of the whole Church, by other men in high repute."<sup>1</sup>

Almost a similar situation occurred in the Syro-Malabar Church during the time of Saint Chavara. In the nineteenth century, the apostolic Church of Saint Thomas, namely, Syro-Malabar Church, which inherits the Chaldean Rite, was under the jurisdiction of the Propaganda Fide. So, as per the decision of the Holy See, the Church was ruled by the Latin Bishop of Verapoly, Monsignor Bernardine Baccinelli. Although he was a Latin prelate, he was the then legitimate authority of the Syro-Malabar Catholics due to the reign of the Propaganda Fide over the Syro-Malabar faithful. The dissatisfaction of the Syro-Malabar Catholics at the reign of the Latin prelates from the sixteenth century onwards caused the longing for the bishops of their own Chaldean Rite from Bagdad. Since, until the sixteenth century, it was Chaldean bishops from Bagdad who ruled them and the Catholics of Malabar were satisfied with their presence and shepherding. But the arrival of Portuguese missionaries in the sixteenth century and the disrespectful interference of them in their ancient Liturgy, tradition, and administration created a rivalry between the Syrians and the Latin authority. The native Syrian Catholics could not bear the Latin hierarchy's superiority and the distortion they made to their liturgy, the part of their apostolic heritage, that they received from their father in faith Saint Thomas, nourished and transmitted to the subsequent generations. It caused dissatisfaction among the Syrian Christians. To

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<sup>1</sup>Cited in Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. I, 46.

rectify this situation the Syrian community desired to bring back the Chaldean bishops of their own Rite and apostolic patrimony from Bagdad. Some people made serious efforts for this and they succeeded in their effort. The arrival of bishop Thomas Roccas in 1861 from Bagdad is to be evaluated in this context. But the effort to bring back the Chaldean bishop as their pastor was not according to the will and consent of the Holy Father. So, the arrival as well as the acceptance of Bishop Roccas was not legitimate.

Though the arrival of Bishop Thomas Roccas was illegitimate, when the bishop came the vast majority of the Syrian Catholics went after him. Since the bishop got a very solemn reception from the Syrian Catholics and he was a validly ordained bishop of the Chaldean Rite, he began to exercise the Episcopal duties in the Malabar Church without the due permission of the Holy See. Many followed Bishop Roccas and rejected their legitimate Bishop Bernardine Baccinelli of Verapoly Vicariate. This created a chaos in the Church. Naturally, Bishop Baccinelli became helpless and could not control the faithful from going after the new bishop. Thus, a schism emerged in the Church. It is in this context Bishop Baccinelli appointed Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara, the Prior of the Monasteries, as the Vicar General of the Syrian Christians.

Saint Chavara, as a man of prudence and obedience understood the mistake of his people. He tried his level best to bring them back and to restore communion with the legitimate bishop. He fought against the unlawful intervention and rule of Bishop Roccas. Meanwhile, he wrote letters to the Holy Father enquiring the legitimacy of Bishop Roccas to exercise Episcopal power among the Syrian Catholics of Kerala. His intention was to know the truth and make sure the standpoint of the Holy See

regarding Bishop Roccas and thereby to convey the people the actual position of Roccas and to bring back the people to the legitimate authority of Bishop Baccinelli. After getting the response from the Holy Father, Saint Chavara wrote letters to the Syrian community presenting very explicitly the rightful authority of Bishop Baccinelli who was lawfully appointed by the Holy See and the duty and responsibility of them to be obedient to him. Hence, as the legitimate authority appointed by the Holy Father, the faithful of the Syrian community did not have the right and permission to substitute Bishop Roccas in the place of Bishop Baccinelli according to their will and wish. Thus, Saint Chavara defended the ecclesiastical jurisdiction among the Syrian Catholics of Kerala like Saint Clement of Rome.

The following letters of Saint Chavara to and from the Holy Father provide a clear picture of the situation in the Church and what was his contribution to tackle that situation. In his letter to the Holy Father Pius IX, Saint Chavara wrote as follows:

On 9 May 1861, a bishop Thomas Roccas by name came to us under the orders of Joseph Audo, the Patriarch of Babylon... This bishop preaches to the entire body of the faithful that he has been sent by the Patriarch with instruction to govern the Chaldean Christians of Malabar with the permission and orders of Your Holiness. But Archbishop Bernerdine, our Vicar Apostolic, has clearly stated in his personal letter as follows: "The Patriarch has sent the above mentioned bishop on his own wish, contrary to your wish and Order. So, anyone who receives Holy Orders or authority at his hands and the one who confers such authority will automatically stand expelled from the Church."

Yet, the priests and the faithful approve all his actions and continue flocking to him daily. They are following his footsteps. We fear that even before we receive a reply to this letter, all our parishes will have arrayed behind him, in obedience. All the parishes, except those few that are managed by the Carmelite priests, will be his followers... Hence, in all humility, with tear-filled eyes, we entreat Your Holiness to let us know the true state of affairs. The reply must be in our Chaldean Syriac language. It should specify clearly the request of the Patriarch and your reply to him and direct us of the dual authorities we should obey. In this conflict-ridden atmosphere, beset with problem, you who are adorned with all good will should point us the right path. We find such guidance absolutely necessary to give assurance to those brethren who are still in doubt.<sup>1</sup>

As a response to this letter, the Holy Father Pope Pius IX wrote a letter to him appreciating his earnestness in seeking His Holiness' advice on how to deal with the "unlawful" Bishop Roccas. Pope wrote as follows:

We are immensely pleased that you have consulted the Apostolic See, the Mother and Teacher of all the faithful, the great Church of Rome to remove the serious dispute among you on this vital issue. Now, my dear sons, you must know that as we, on 20 November 1860, had given a definite directive in writing to this Patriarch that on no account he should interfere with the affairs of the churches of Malabar. Bishop Roccas has come there on the order of the Patriarch acting only on his own volition.

Hence, my dear children, please understand that Bishop Roccas has no ecclesiastical authority that he was

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, vol. IV: *Letters*, I/1.

unlawfully appointed and that he has fallen under several ecclesiastical censures. And it is our brother, Bishop Mar Bernardine, the Archbishop of Persella and the representative of the Holy Apostolic See, who is the ordinary for the Churches of Malabar; and it is lawful for you to submit to him... From the Church of Saint Peter in Rome on 5 September 1861 in the sixteenth year of our Pontificate, (sd) Pope Pius IX.<sup>1</sup>

The ecclesial vision of Saint Chavara will be clearer if we go through the official circular he wrote and circulated among the parish churches in the context of Roccas invasion. The circular is as follows:

“He who is not with me is against me. He who does not stand with me scatters” (Lk 11:23) said the Lord. He who enters the sheepfold and exercises authority not having received it from the Pope, the successor of Saint Peter, does not gather but scatters the sheep. He who does not stand with the Pope, the Vicar of Christ, is the enemy of Christ. Such a shepherd and all those who join hands with him will perish in the eternal fire intended to the enemies of Christ. There is no doubt about it. The shepherd who has now started from Baghdad has neither the mandate of the Pope nor his authorization. He is planning to enter the sheepfold of Christ which is in Malabar as a wolf to scatter the sheep and drive them to the eternal fire of hell. I am fully convinced of this fact.

Hence, my beloved brethren, remember the words of our Lord that he who enters the sheepfold not through the right door is not the true shepherd, but the false one; he is a wolf in sheep’s clothing; if such shepherds come to you without the decree of the Pope, be cautious note to

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<sup>1</sup>CSW, vol. IV: *Letters*, I/2.

give ear to their false teachings, nor take sides with them and be prepared even to suffer martyrdom at their hands for being faithful to the true vicar of the Pope, the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly. If you happen to suffer martyrdom at their hands, remember that it will be the greatest grace of God you would receive.

Besides, I want you to know that if any one comes with the permission and the decrees of the Pope. It is necessary that in testimony thereof he should show it to one of our Vicars Apostolic, that is, either to the Archbishop of Verapoly or to the Bishop of Quilon and only with the knowledge and permission of one of them he can enter our churches and administer the sacraments or perform any other sacred ministry in the Church. I tell you all this, my dear brethren, being desirous of your eternal salvation and lest you fall into the schism and incur the excommunication of the Pope and suffer the loss of your soul.<sup>1</sup>

Here Saint Chavara stood like a warrior who has the duty consciousness to fight for the Kingdom of God to which he belongs. He expressed his readiness even to die for this noble cause. His concern was always the salvation of the souls. All these attested his firm faith in the words of Jesus that He instituted the Church upon Simon the Rock. The authority entrusted to Simon Peter and his successors is divine and nobody can demolish that by any means. The apostolic succession and ecclesiastical jurisdiction are, therefore, not man-made, but God's intent. Saint Chavara is seen as the 're-incarnation' of the Clement of Rome for the Church of Saint Thomas, the proponent and defender of the

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, vol. IV: *Letters*, IX/3.

revealed truth, the apostolic succession, and ecclesiastical jurisdiction.

A glance at the teachings of Saint Chavara in comparison with the Apostolic Fathers has made it clear that the writings of Saint Chavara are loaded with theological ideas and insights. In the Church of Kerala, we do not come across anyone ahead of him who had come up as a systematic theologian in the strict sense of the word to imitate or to follow. But by the divine grace, Saint Chavara articulated theological visions and insights so deeply and didactically through his writings. Just like the Harp of the Holy Spirit, Saint Ephrem, Saint Chavara also penned most of his writings in poetic form with the assistance of the Holy Spirit. A closer and critical study of those literatures in the light of the writings of the Apostolic Fathers and also contemporary theology would elucidate the fact that this literature contains revealed truths, multifaceted theological and ecclesial insights necessary for the Church of all times. He is a pioneer in this ecclesiastical realm and had paved a legacy ahead of times.

## Chapter 5

### ECCLESIOLOGY OF SAINT CHAVARA IN THE LIGHT OF VATICAN COUNCIL II

The Vatican Council II (1962-1965) is a watershed event in the history of the Catholic Church. It promulgated sixteen documents for the renewal of the Church and to foster reunion among the Churches. Among these sixteen documents the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*), the Decree on the Eastern Catholic Churches (*Orientalium Ecclesiarum*), and the Decree on Ecumenism (*Unitatis Redintegratio*) are promulgated on 21 November 1964. From the very outset it can be said that these three significant documents defined the very core of the Vatican II's ecclesiology, i.e., the Church is the communion of churches. Communion is an integral, all embracing, and multivalent category in the documents of Vatican II.<sup>1</sup> It is not only a central insight of the Vatican II, but it is also a central imperative of the Gospel.<sup>2</sup>

Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara lived and died (1805-1871) in the nineteenth century, that is, almost one century before the Vatican Council II. But towards the end of his life, the Vatican Council I (1869-1870) was convoked and it defined the Primacy and Infallibility of the Pope. Nevertheless, it is worth to note that in his writings we can see not only the teachings of the Vatican I, but also glimpses of the

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<sup>1</sup>K. McDonnell, "Vatican II (1962-64), Puebla (1979), Synod (1985): Koinonia, Communion as an Integral Ecclesiology," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 25 (1988), 400.

<sup>2</sup>E. Falardean, "Growing as the Domestic Church through the Eucharist," *One in Christ* 34 (1998), 19.

ecclesiology of the Vatican II. Hence, in the following pages, we make a critical appraisal of his ecclesial vision in the light of the three aforementioned documents of the Vatican Council II.

### **1. Saint Chavara: One Who Ascertained Apostolic Foundation**

Saint Kuriakose Chavara was born and brought up in the Syro-Malabar Church, an ancient apostolic Church of Oriental tradition. As a true son of this apostolic Church of Saint Thomas, Saint Chavara had profound conviction that his mother church is built upon the foundation stone of Apostle Thomas. In various contexts, he repeatedly affirmed and proclaimed this truth. For example, a few excerpts from what he wrote in the *Nalagamam* (Chronicle) are significant: "This Malabar (Kerala) which had received the faith from Saint Thomas, the Apostle";<sup>1</sup> "people in Malabar had true faith from ancient times...";<sup>2</sup> "we, the *Nazranees* claim to be Christians of ancient origin..."<sup>3</sup> These mentions of Saint Chavara reiterate the apostolic foundation of the Church in Malabar and his unwavering faith and conviction in the same. Keeping this in mind let us go through and evaluate the content of his letters to the legitimate authorities, especially the Prefect of the *Propaganda Fide*, to bring out the implication and impact of this apostolic consciousness in the subsequent history of the Syro-Malabar Church. Before entering into it, let us have a brief understanding of the meaning of the concept of apostolicity of the Church and the

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, vol. I: *The Chronicles*, 146.

<sup>2</sup>CWC, vol. I: *The Chronicles*, 193.

<sup>3</sup>CWC, vol. IV: *Letters*, IX/2.

consciousness of the forefathers of the Syro-Malabar Church regarding its apostolicity.

### **1.1. Apostolicity: One of the 'Notes' of the True Church**

One of the constitutive characteristics that define what really the Church of Christ is the apostolicity. It is a *mark* or *note* of the true Church of Christ. The other three are the unity (oneness), holiness, and catholicity. Theologically speaking, apostolicity refers to the continuity with the mission and ministry of the apostles that they received from Christ. In the early centuries, this continuity was sought primarily in the teaching and the carrying on of the authentic life and worship. After the sixteenth century Reformation, Catholic use of the term apostolicity focuses on the validity of holy orders and the succession of bishops by accepted standards of consecration.<sup>1</sup>

### **1.2. Syro-Malabar Church: An Apostolic Church**

The Syro-Malabar Major Archiepiscopal Church is one of the 24 churches in the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. It is the second largest Church among the 23 Oriental Catholic Churches. Unlike many other Churches in the Catholic communion, the Syro-Malabar Church had the rare privilege and honour of being founded directly by an apostle, viz., Saint Thomas in the first century itself,<sup>2</sup> which

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<sup>1</sup>Monika K. Hellwig, "Marks (or Notes) of the Church" in Michael Glazer and Monika K. Hellwig, eds., *The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia*, Dublin: Gill & Macmillan: 1994, 545.

<sup>2</sup>Rajendra Prasad, the first president of India, has observed on the antiquity and significance of Christianity as follows: "Remember, Saint Thomas came to India when many countries in Europe had not yet become Christian and so those Indians who trace their Christianity to him have a longer history and higher ancestry

is very unique and praiseworthy. Hence, they are also known as Saint Thomas Christians. There are many historical evidences and testimonies to prove the apostolicity of these Christians and their right faith, valid administration of all the seven sacraments – of course, with their own unique style of celebration – and the very communal manner<sup>1</sup> of exercising authority. Above all, the very existence of the living community which bears the very name of the Apostle Thomas and the very presence of the tomb of the apostle in India are undeniable evidences of this truth.

The speciality of this Church is that it has the cradle culture of Christianity and is located in the Asian Continent, which is the cradle of many world religions including Christianity.<sup>2</sup> Although the Church in India is born and

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than that of many of the European countries. And it is really a matter of pride to us that it so happened.” Cited in R. Venkataraman (Former President of India), “Chavara Represents Indian Christianity at Its Best” in *The Lord of Heaven and Earth*, 88.

<sup>1</sup> Typical expression of such a style is the *Palliyogam* (Parish assembly/ assembly of the Church). *Palliyogam* is a unique and traditional manner of church administration in the Syro-Malabar Church. The *yogam* consists of adult males and priests attached to the parish. The *palliyogam* administers the temporalities of the parish and looked after the Christian life of the people. J. Kallarangatt, “Ecclesiological Perspectives of Saint Thomas Christians” in *Mar Thoma Margam: The Ecclesiological Heritage of Saint Thomas Christians*, ed. A. Mekkattukunnel (OIRSI 355), Vadavathoor: 2012, 145.

<sup>2</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, Vatican: 1999, §6. Here, Pope John Paul II states as follows: “Asia is the cradle of the world’s major religions – Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. It is the birthplace of many other spiritual traditions such as

brought up outside the Roman Empire and the believers lived among the pagans and they had no Christian Emperor or King to protect and promote their faith, this ancient Apostolic Church kept its faith intact. Geographically speaking, the Christians of India, especially of Kerala, were very far from the See of Saint Peter, i.e., Rome, and had no means to have frequent contact with the universal head of the Catholic Church. Nevertheless, until the twenty-first century, they kept their true faith intact and the communion with the successor of Saint Peter was cordial and uninterrupted. We see the ecclesiological consciousness of this Church in the *Varthamanppusthakam* through the words of Paremmackal, the author of the first Malayalam travelogue, as follows:

By the infinite mercy of God and by the merits of the Apostle Saint Thomas, its first apostle and founder, our community has until now followed faithfully as far as it could, the customs and the rite of our forefathers who confessed the name of God and suffered much for the same in the midst of pagans and other peoples. God has, therefore, mercifully kept it unimpaired under its kings and masters as He did multiply and give increase to the children of Israel under their several kings.<sup>1</sup>

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Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Zoroastrianism, Jainism, Sikhism and Shintoism.”

<sup>1</sup>Cathanar Thomman (Thomas) Paremmakkal, *The Varthamanappusthakam: An Account of the History of the Syro-Malabar Church between the Years 1773 and 1786 with special emphasis on the events connected with the journey from Malabar to Rome via Lisbon and back undertaken by Malpan Mar Joseph Cariattil and Cathanar Thomman Paremmakkal*. Rendered into English with an Introduction and Notes by Placid J. Podipara, Rome: 1971 (*Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 190), 29.

May be due to ignorance or lack of openness towards the native Christians and their culture, heritage, liturgical language, liturgical practice, and the administrative system, the Portuguese missionaries who came to Kerala in the sixteenth century and the subsequent period misunderstood the age-old customs and practices of this Apostolic Church and made attempts to abolish them.

### **1.3. Threats and Challenges Faced by the Apostolic Church**

The threats and challenges the native Christians in India faced from the missionaries, especially from the Synod of Diamper (1599) onwards, were enormous.<sup>1</sup> The core of the challenges they faced from the missionaries are:

1. Prohibition of the coming and shepherding of the Chaldean bishops of their own Rite from Persia and the imposition of Latin rule.
2. Destruction of the Chaldean liturgical texts and the practice of their Chaldean liturgy that was the common heritage of the Churches of Edessa, Persia, Mesopotamia, and India, who consider Apostle Saint Thomas as their father in faith and the imposition of Latinized liturgy.
3. Abolition of the position and status of the "Metropolitan of All India" and the "Archdeacon of All India."

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<sup>1</sup>J. Thaliath, who did a scientific research on the Synod of Diamper, presents the situation of the Malabar Church as follows: "The Malabar Church was helpless at that time and had to bow to the Portuguese power. Rome was too far away and there was not only nobody to represent and sponsor the Malabar Church in Rome but even for the writing and delivering of letters the Syrian Church in Malabar was entirely at the mercy of the Portuguese." J. Thaliath, *The Synod of Diamper* (OCA 152), Roma: 1958; Reprint Bangalore; 1999, 95.

#### 4. Suppression of the All India Jurisdiction.

In short, the Latin rule abolished the autonomous juridical status and identity of this Apostolic Church.

After the Synod of Diamper (1599) and the *Coonen Cross Oath* (1653) the Thomas Christians tried their best and made many efforts to re-establish their lost birth-rights and privileges. They argued very emphatically that they are an Apostolic Church as equal as the Church of Rome. According to them, just as the See of Saint Peter at Rome and the *Law of Peter* as their patrimony, the Syro-Malabar Church is the See of Apostle Saint Thomas and the *Law of Thomas (Mar Thoma Margam)* is the sum and substance of their patrimony. The Thomas Christians had deep regard for their apostolicity, Syriac language, and liturgy. To affirm and to re-establish their apostolic heritage, they sent letters and petitions to the legitimate authority. See, for example, the letter written by the lay leaders of the Church to Pope Gregory XIII in 1578:

O Pastor of all Christians, we, your sinful and unworthy sons of India, wish to inform you that we have been Christians from the time of Saint Thomas the Apostle, a disciple of our Lord. Thus, we have become sharers of the Baptism, sacraments and the Body of our Lord. Our worship (liturgy) is in the Syriac language which was handed down to us by our Father Saint Thomas. Our forefathers and we ourselves are well instructed in this (Syriac) language.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Arch. Vat. Secreto, Armad VII, Caps.V. No. 14. *Tuam o maxime Pastor omnium Christi Dei charitatem certiolem facimus nos indignos peccatores Indiarum filios a temper Domini nostril Sancti Thomas Discipuli Domini Christianos esse ac Baptismatis filios et Sacramentorum et corporis Domini et Dei nostril esse participles*

But that was an unheard cry of the flock of God, a flock deprived of proper head of its own on earth. Although the Holy See provided them prelates *via* the *Propaganda Fide*, they were also not much different from the prelates sent by *Padroado*. The tragic situation of the Thomas Christians was the absence of a head from within the community. It is in this context that we have to see and evaluate the role of Saint Chavara.

**1.4. Proponent of the Apostolicity of Syro-Malabar Church**  
 Saint Chavara was one of the strongest proponents of the apostolicity and the identity of the Thomas Christians. J. Pathrapankal, an eminent Bible scholar and theologian, rightly observes:

Looking at what Chavara did and wrote for the Church and his people in Kerala during the nineteenth century, one could very well say that he had this profound sense of history. He knew, only too well, that the Church in that part of India had an authentic apostolic tradition and a genuine spiritual wealth which got blurred and confused through the historical vicissitudes of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries after the arrival of the Portuguese. The Kerala Church was in need of renewal and revitalization.<sup>1</sup>

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*nostrasque orations esse lingua Siriaca vel Chaldaica nobis a Domino nostro Sancta Thoma tradita et nos praedecessores nostros hac lingua doctos esse.*" S. Giamil, *Genuine Relationes Inter Sedem Apostolicam et Assyriorum Orientalium seu Chaldeorum Ecclesiam*, Rome: 1902, 85.

<sup>1</sup>J. Pathrapankal, "Chavara, a Prophet of Our Times" in Kalluveettill and Kochappilly, eds., *The Lord of Heaven and Earth*, 132.

He brought it into the notice of the head of the universal Church in right time through his letters. Saint Chavara wrote to the Prefect of the *Propaganda Fide* as follows:

We are Mar Thoma Christians. We have received our faith from Saint Thomas. For the past many years we had no bishop of our own. But those who have received their faith in very recent times have a bishop of their own... Hence, your Eminence, I am placing before you a suggestion which I consider good. It is good to have two bishops here: one for the Latin Church and other for the Syrian Church...<sup>1</sup>

When we go through this *Letter of Saint Chavara*, naturally, a question arises: Why Saint Chavara suggested or proposed separate bishops for the Latin and Syro-Malabar Churches? The simple answer is: "for the sake of the Church, the Body of Christ, itself." A closer look into this *Letter* gives us the impression that the proposal raised by Saint Chavara was very crucial with regard to the identity and growth of the Syro-Malabar Church; it was historically based, theologically sound, and ecclesologically valid. It is also existentially related to the very apostolicity and the catholicity of the Church. He acknowledged and highlighted the existence of various Churches having their own apostolic heritage, liturgy, liturgical language, liturgical practice, and administration. However, he clearly indicated that both Latin and Syrian Churches were two equal but different Churches under the supremacy of Pope. Hence, he asked the *Propaganda Fide* to appoint bishops for both Churches separately. According to him, it is the right and duty of the Holy See to provide bishops for each Church and not the task of Latin Church to provide bishops for the Syrian

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, vol. IV: *Letters*, II/5.

Church or any other Churches. There is no supremacy to the Latin Church over other Churches; the supremacy is granted to the Pope, since he is the successor of Peter, the first among the twelve apostles. Consequently, he is the head of the universal Church. As the Pope he has authority over all the Churches and not as the head of the Latin Church. Under the reign of Pope both Latin and Syrian Churches are equal and they have their own uniqueness. This uniqueness is to be protected and promoted.

In order to understand the farsighted theological and ecclesial vision of Saint Chavara behind this prophetic and historical letter, we have to look at it in the light of the Second Vatican Council's teachings, especially the *Lumen Gentium*, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, and the *Unitatis Redintegratio*. With regard to the individuality of each Rite as particular or individual Church,<sup>1</sup> the Council document declared as follows:

The Holy Catholic Church, which is the Mystical Body of Christ, is made up of the faithful who are organically united in the Holy Spirit by the same faith, same sacraments, and same hierarchy. But they combine into different groups, which are held together by their hierarchy and so form particular Churches or Rites.

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<sup>1</sup>The council is not consistent in the use of ecclesiological terms such as particular, individual, local Churches. Particular Church appears very often and usually designates a diocese (CD 11, 23, 28, 36). It is also used to refer to the Churches in the same region or culture (AG 22) and to refer Rites or the individual Churches (OE 2-4, 10, 16, 19). Local Church is also used for diocese (AG 19, 27). Here, by particular Church we mean an individual Church having its own liturgy, theology, spirituality and ecclesiastical discipline. Universal Church is, therefore, the communion of individual Churches.

Between those churches there is such a wonderful bond of union that this variety in the universal Church, so far from diminishing its unity, rather serves to emphasize it. For the Catholic Church wishes the tradition of each particular Church or Rite to remain whole and entire and it likewise wishes to adapt its own way of life to the needs of different times and places.<sup>1</sup>

We find a similar idea in the *Lumen Gentium* also. There we read as follows:

By divine providence it has come about the various Churches established in diverse places by the apostles and their successors have in the course of time coalesced into several groups, organically united, which preserving the unity of faith and the unique divine constitution of the universal Church, enjoy their discipline, their own liturgical usage, and their own theological and spiritual heritage... In and from such individual Churches there come into being the one and only Catholic Church.<sup>2</sup>

Based on the conciliar teachings, the Oriental as well as the Latin Codes of Canon Law give legal force to this by the following canons:

The rites of the Eastern Churches as the patrimony of the entire Church of Christ, in which there is clearly evident the tradition which has come from the Apostles through the Fathers and which affirm the divine unity in diversity of the Catholic faith, are to be religiously preserved and fostered.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>OE 2.

<sup>2</sup>LG 23.

<sup>3</sup>CCEO c.39.

The Christian faithful have the right to worship God according to the prescripts of their own rite approved by the legitimate pastors of the Church and to follow their own form of spiritual life so long as it is consonant with the doctrine of the Church.<sup>1</sup>

The ecclesial vision of Saint Chavara with regard to his Mother Church and the prophetic mind of the content of his aforementioned letter are to be appraised in the light of these magisterial teachings. The authenticity, validity, and the farsightedness of his proposal are very clear in the light of these documents. It is worthy to note that it took more than a century to get legal acceptance to the farsighted ecclesial vision of Saint Chavara. Nevertheless, the influence and the impact that it created in the history and life of the Syro-Malabar Church and in the universal Church at large are tremendous. It has become a decisive thought and policy in the teachings of the Second Vatican Council as well as in the post-conciliar ecclesiology. In the following pages, we highlight certain important points implied in the letters of Saint Chavara in the light of the Council teachings.

### **1.5. Apostolic Patrimony: Part of Undivided Heritage of the Universal Church**

The growth of the mystical body of Christ consists in the organic growth of all the Churches founded by the apostles and their successors. Moreover, the growth of every apostolic Church is essential for the expansion of the universal Church. The universal Church is in and from the Churches. It is an organic communion of different individual Churches. Consequently, the suppression or the

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<sup>1</sup>CIC c. 214.

damage of any one of the apostolic Churches means damage of the Body of Christ.

Saint Chavara was very much conscious about this reality and was very vigilant to safeguard the apostolic heritage of his Mother Church. The issue raised by him expecting a positive response from the Holy See indicates his ardent desire and alertness to protect and promote the undivided heritage of the Church. The teaching of the Second Vatican Council is an approval of his ecclesial mind. For example, in the introductory number of *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, the Council fathers speak as follows:

The Catholic Church values highly the institutions of the Eastern Churches, their liturgical rites, ecclesiastical traditions, and their ordering of Christian life. For, in those Churches, which are distinguished by their venerable antiquity, there is clearly evident the tradition which has come from the apostles through the Fathers and which is part of the divinely revealed, undivided heritage of the universal Church.<sup>1</sup>

Almost the same idea we find also in the Decree on Ecumenism:

... This entire heritage of spirituality and liturgy, of discipline and theology in the various traditions, belong to the full catholic and apostolic character of the Church.<sup>2</sup> These are very sound and solid theological statements. The Council, thus, acknowledged and declared the venerable antiquity and tradition of the Eastern Churches which have come from the apostles of Christ through the Fathers and are part of the divinely revealed, undivided heritage of the universal Church. This heritage is the precious patrimony of

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<sup>1</sup>OE 1.

<sup>2</sup>UR 17.

the universal Church. Consequently, the Council accepted the very antiquity, apostolicity, ecclesiality, and individuality of the Eastern Churches and their position in the eternal plan of God and in the history of revelation. The Council fathers, thus, put forward the apostolic faith as the basic criterion of a true Church.

By the providence of God the Syro-Malabar Church is also one of the Eastern Churches founded by an apostle. So, it is a matter of delight for the Saint Thomas Christian Community that, as an Eastern and Apostolic Church, it is also part of the undivided heritage of the universal Church. Hence, protecting its precious patrimony is a theological and ecclesial imperative. So, its antiquity and apostolicity cannot be neglected or suppressed by any other Church in the Catholic communion. If it had so happened, that is detriment to the undivided heritage of the Church of Christ. However, the negligence of any apostolic Church with the undivided heritage is a great loss to the universal Church. History proves that the impudent and unauthorized imposition of Latin rule upon the ancient apostolic Church of Saint Thomas, the effort to demolish the Syrian liturgy and the attempt to annihilate the succession of the ecclesiastical head of theirs to rule this indigenous and apostolic Church, caused such negligence and damage.

## **2. Promoter of the Restoration of Autonomy**

When we evaluate the content of the letter of Saint Chavara quoted above, we get the impression that it was his agenda to restore the autonomy and the unity of the Syro-Malabar Church, including unity with the Jacobite Church. However, it is to be remembered that every restoration demands some sort of renewal also. The question is: why and how her autonomy is to be restored and the unity is to be attained? If

we delve deep into the mind of Saint Chavara and consider his life, activities, and the writings, especially his letters integrally, we can deduce the conclusion that he made use of the methodology of the Second Vatican Council, namely, to “return to the sources” in a remote way. If there were some deviations or distortions in the life of the Church from the original spirit, that should be corrected and restored. The Syro-Malabar Church also should be renewed and restored because she went away from her original liturgical, spiritual and canonical heritage. Saint Chavara realized that in order to renew and restore the Syro-Malabar Church in its pristine purity, especially its liturgy and the way to recover the genuine theology and the spirituality of this Church and, finally, to establish the autonomy and unity of the Church, the only possible way was to restore the indigenous hierarchy of the Church with its apostolic heritage.

### **2.1. Head from the Community: An Imperative for an Apostolic Church**

As mentioned above, the Syro-Malabar Church as an Apostolic Church has the undivided heritage of the universal Church. Hence, to protect the precious heritage and patrimony of this Church is very crucial and decisive. This calls for an indigenous ecclesiastical leader, well acquainted and experienced in the heritage of the Church. The forefathers of this Apostolic Church, including Saint Chavara, were conscious about this fact. In one of his letters, Saint Chavara wrote very openly about the problem the Church had faced due to the lacuna of a head of its own:

... in Malabar our priests know only the Syriac language which they use for liturgical purposes but their bishops and missionaries use a different language and follow a different rite. This situation stands in the way of unity.

The mutual understanding that should exist between the Father and his spiritual children is entirely missing here. Day after day mutual relations are not improving; rather even the thought for unity is being obstructed and the mutual relations have deteriorated... Again, the language used by the bishop to ordain priests is not the same as the one used by the priests. Hence, there is lack of devotion and the existing bond between them is not that of a father and children, but that of a master and slaves. This gives rise to a slavish fear in the priests and in the common people. *Such a discrepancy of the rites is not found anywhere in the world except among the Syro-Malabarians.*<sup>1</sup>

As the successors of the apostles, the bishops of each apostolic Church are the custodians of its apostolic heritage and the visible centre of unity. So, they have the duty and responsibility to protect and promote this precious patrimony and to transmit it to the successive generation through their solid teaching, liturgical celebrations, and pastoral guidance. It will strengthen the unity and collaboration in the Church. In the Malabar Church, however, this role of the bishop is lacking in all realms, especially with regard to their liturgical language and liturgical practices. That is why they repeatedly stated that ours is an apostolic Church, and that they should have their own bishops to rule over their faithful and the freedom to

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, vol. IV: *Letters*, V/17. In this context, the following words of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* can be understood as a response to the cry of the Syro-Malabarians: "... in faithful obedience to tradition, the sacred Council declares that holy Mother Church holds all lawfully acknowledged rites to be of equal right and dignity; that she wishes to preserve them in the future and to foster them in every way (SC 4).

live their ecclesial identity and patrimony and celebrate their liturgical functions in their own language. So, Saint Chavara proposed to have two bishops simultaneously: one for Latins and another for Syrians. Consequently, he aimed the restoration of the individuality and autonomy of the Syro-Malabar Church with its own proper head and Rite.

## **2.2. The Necessity to Be Led by One's Own Bishop**

The important reason for the longing of a bishop of one's own land, caste, and rite is the desire to have a stable leadership to the people according to their apostolic heritage and faith. He realized that this is the magnificent way to set the stage to avoid the omission of various kinds of possible good<sup>1</sup> and the commission of various mistakes. The sheep always listen to the shepherd. Saint Chavara very clearly recognized that the voice of strangers will scatter the sheep (Jn 10:1-18). In one of his circulars to the people of God in the context of the unlawful arrival of Mar Thomas Roccas at Malabar and the illegitimate exercise of episcopal authority in the Church, he wrote: "My beloved brethren, remember the words of our Lord that he who enters the sheepfold not through the right door is not the true shepherd, but the false

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<sup>1</sup>For example, he writes: "... we see that the Greeks and the Latins have excellent theological books and good treatises, and when we ask ourselves why we the Syrians have not produced so far good books or treatises and how this situation can be improved, the answer we find is that all nations and people and not only the monasteries, have their own bishops and missionaries who are well-versed in sacred studies and that they have produced in the course of years good literary works and theological treatises." The main reason behind the absence of theological centres and scarcity of theological treatises, he finds in the absence of a head of its own. CWC, vol. IV: *Letters*, V/17.

one..."<sup>1</sup> Hence, he wrote to the Head of the *Propaganda Fide*, Alexander Bernaba:

We are Mar Thoma Christians who have received our faith from Saint Thomas. For the past many years we had no bishop of our own. But those who have received their faith in very recent times have a bishop of their own. Provoked by such envious thoughts when they get an opportunity, they will go to Babel, saying 'Let us resort to Babel for getting a bishop of our own Rite.'<sup>2</sup>

With this Saint Chavara illustrated the mental disposition of an Apostolic Church and her members. He sought out to explore why did, like the magnetic needle that always pointed towards the north, the brethren of his own flesh and blood called *Nazranees* of Kerala have their hearts set from earliest times on getting Syrian bishops.<sup>3</sup> It was because of the mental affinity that the people had for their own ancestral beliefs and liturgical language. That is why at the end they approached Babel for a Syrian bishop which ultimately led them to scandalous disunity. They would not have depended on Babel if they had bishops from their own land and their own Rite. Saint Chavara continued writing:

Hence, Your Eminence, I am placing before you a suggestion which I consider good. It is good to have two bishops here: One for the Latin Church, and the other for the Syrian Church. Then, their longing to have a bishop of their own will cease. Then, gradually their relationship with Babylon will end.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, vol. IV: *Letters*, IX/4.

<sup>2</sup>CWC, vol. IV: *Letters*, II/5.

<sup>3</sup>CWC, vol. I: *Chronicles*, "Some Episodes of the Past," 146.

<sup>4</sup>CWC, vol. IV: *Letters*, II/5.

Here Chavara argued for a very important ecclesiastical right: the right of the people of God to be led by their own native bishops. This is an existential right universally accepted and practised. The violation of this right is considered detrimental to freedom and autonomy. In all respects, it is an aberration. For centuries, the Church of Saint Thomas was experiencing this anomaly. Centuries-long struggle, protests, reactions, rivalries, and the non-cooperation that emerged and existed in the Church especially from the sixteenth century onwards were the manifestation of this incongruity. Although Rome was also responsible for this absurdity due to not providing bishops of their own Rite in due time, the Vatican Council II, by its teachings, rectified the situation and thereby certified that the standpoint of the Church of Saint Thomas, especially of Saint Chavara was right. The letter of Saint Chavara to the Prefect of the *Propaganda Fide* and the suggestion he had put forward was remarkable in this respect. Historians are of opinion that his letter had great impact in the subsequent period of the history of the Church to the formation of independent Vicariates for Syrians (1887) and Latins and the decision of the Holy See to provide indigenous Vicars Apostolic (1896) to the Church of Saint Thomas.<sup>1</sup> The culmination of this position we see in the conciliar teachings.

### **2.3. Bishop: The Visible Head of the Body of Christ**

As it is evident from history, one of the decisive factors that promote the growth of the Church and the deepening of the apostolic faith is the Bishop. As the successor of the apostles, the bishop teaches the community the mystery of Christ event; he takes the leadership in celebrating the Christ event

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, vol. IV: Note to *Letters*, II/5.

through liturgy and guides the people of God to the heavenly abode. Therefore, it is vital to have a bishop of each Church bearing the same apostolic tradition, patrimony, and language of that particular Church. A body without a head is dead; it cannot grow. Likewise, without a bishop, who is the visible head, the Church cannot grow. The members of the Syro-Malabar Church had this awareness. That is why Paremmakkal wrote in the *Varthamanappusthakam* as follows:

A community without its own head and ecclesiastical ruler taken from within itself cannot prosper nor get strong. To bring salvation to the children of Israel who lay persecuted in Egypt, God in His infinite mercy appointed Moses who was himself of their own race and community.<sup>1</sup>

Again, in the same work, he wrote:

... If a community possesses a head from within itself that community will grow and get strong. This is a truth clear to us and to all the communities, and it is also ordained by the natural law. Hence, the nations of Europe, the Italians, the French, the English, the Portuguese and the others elect their civil and the ecclesiastical heads from among themselves. Nay, even the Greeks, the Armenians, the Syrians and the other Christians who suffer under the servitude of the Turks, appoint their national and ecclesiastical heads from among themselves and in this Malabar all except the Pazhayakuttukar (Syrians in communion with Rome), from Brahmin down to the Pulaya caste, have their leaders and religious heads from among themselves. When something pertaining to these communities is at

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<sup>1</sup>Paremmakkal, *The Varthamanappusthakam*, 29.

stake the heads of these communities before anyone else come forward to their help.<sup>1</sup>

Saint Chavara had this consciousness. That is why he requested for a Syrian bishop for his Church. Vatican II acknowledges in *Lumen Gentium* that “it is through the bishops the apostolic tradition is manifested and preserved” (20). Since “by the function of those who through their appointment to the dignity and responsibility of bishop, and in virtue of the unbroken succession, going back to the beginning, are regarded as transmitters of the apostolic line.” Hence, the Council exhorted: “Provision must be made therefore everywhere in the world to protect and advance all these individual churches. For this purpose, each should organize its own parishes and hierarchy, where the good of the faithful requires it” (OE 4), especially when the faithful belong to different Churches having different liturgical and spiritual heritages. Hence, the pastoral guidance of bishop of each Church is vitally important for the integral ecclesial growth of the faithful and the protection and promotion of those individual churches and their heritages intact.

#### **2.4. Bishop: Bearer and Sharer of Apostolic Patrimony**

As history testifies, the Syro-Malabarians can keep their Rite in its full sense only under the jurisdiction of their own Hierarchs. Their history, social and socio-ecclesiastical institutions are all different from those of any other Catholic community in India or elsewhere. So, under the Latin jurisdiction it was impossible to preserve and develop fully their apostolic, liturgical, and disciplinary heritage that the Second Vatican Council later enjoins them to preserve and

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<sup>1</sup>Paremmakkal, *The Varthamanappusthakam*, 35f.

develop for the spiritual good of their faithful. The teachings of the Council proved that Saint Chavara's position was right and his arguments sound. The following Council teachings speak for itself:

History, tradition, and very many ecclesiastical institutions give clear evidence of the great debt owed to the Eastern Churches by the Church universal. Therefore, the holy council not merely praises and appreciates as is due this ecclesiastical and spiritual heritage but also insists on viewing it *as the heritage of the whole Church of Christ*. For that reason this council solemnly declares that *the Churches of the East like those of the West* have the right and duty to govern themselves according to their own special disciplines. For these are guaranteed by ancient tradition seem to be better suited to the custom of their faithful and to the good of their souls.<sup>1</sup>

Almost the same idea is found in *Unitatis Redintegratio*:

The Churches of the East while keeping in mind the necessary unity of whole Church have the power to govern themselves according to their own disciplines.<sup>2</sup>

The fight of the apostolic Church of India against the missionaries was centred on this point. They wanted to protect, live, and promote their liturgical and spiritual heritage; however, they wanted to be shepherded by their own pastors. When these rights were denied they were frustrated and began to react. The main concern of Chavara's letter was to re-establish this fundamental right by the appointment of a bishop of their own Rite.

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<sup>1</sup>OE 5.

<sup>2</sup>UR 16.

### **3. Promoter of Communion of Churches**

As it was mentioned earlier, communion is the central theme of Second Vatican's ecclesiology. It is a revealed fact that One God is the communion of three persons and the three distinct persons are equals. None of them is subordinate or superior to the other. This Triune God is the ontological basis of ecclesial communion. The Church is the icon of the Holy Trinity. The unity in diversity, one and many, and equality of all are the key ideas behind the theology of Communion. They are the hallmark of the Catholic Church. The Council recognized thus the wonderful diversity of the Churches that does not diminish the unity but rather enhances it. In other words, the Holy Catholic Church is the communion of various individual Churches and the diversity of them is not detrimental to the unity of the Church, rather it manifests the entirety and the wholeness of the Church. Nevertheless, they all are under the supremacy of Pope, the successor of Saint Peter.

Though the Saint Thomas Christians had no theological centres in India to teach systematic theology and ecclesiology, they lived this profound communion theology of the Vatican II. They respected the Law of Peter as equal as Law of Thomas and both as part of the Universal Catholic Church. That is why they received the Latin missionaries so cordially when they reached here and gave the freedom to mingle with them and share with them their faith and culture. But the imposition of Latin liturgy and administration created tension between these two Churches. Nevertheless, in the subsequent period, Saint Chavara lived and witnessed very profoundly this cordiality and communion with the Latin missionaries. Although there were many rivalries between the Latin missionaries and the indigenous Syrian Christians, he could see goodness in

them. He considered the missionaries as his brethren in faith and in Christ, respected them, appreciated their zeal for souls, their sacrifice to leave their country, parents, conveniences, etc., for the sake of the Christians and other people. For example, in the chronicles he wrote:

... From those lands have come many missionaries prompted by good intentions and absolute charity leaving their relatives and homelands with the sole motive of teaching the true religion and the way of salvation. To these spiritual fathers and prelates who spread the true faith and show us the way to heaven, we submit only because we need them and since there is no alternative left to us. But what God expects of us is to love them whole-heartedly and to accept their words as God's because they gave up everything they had to save our souls and are striving and suffering for us out of true love...<sup>1</sup>

Again, in his *Testament* to the members of the Congregation, he wrote as follows:

... We are obliged to remember in a special way before God the family of Petro Beccaro of Aqui in Italy, because they have stood by us in uniting ourselves in Christ and helped us exercising their prudence to unite as one body the Catholics: the Nazranees, the seven hundred, the five hundred, the three hundred and the sixty-one in Christ. You are yet to see numerous other benefits accomplished by them. For this, remember the Vicar Apostolic, as mentioned above, who was instrumental in all these and

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, vol. I: *Chronicles*, "Some Episodes of the Past: God Be Praised," 146.

offer yourselves to God as a people avowed to labour for eternal happiness.<sup>1</sup>

He respected and promoted each Rite; at the same time, for the spiritual benefit and the salvation of souls he adapted with due respect and with permission certain pious practices from Latin Rite. A typical example is the adaptation of liturgical service for Holy Saturday. He translated it from the Latin ritual and sent it to Rome for the approval and implementation in the Syrian Churches,<sup>2</sup> since there was no liturgical celebration among the Syrians for the Holy Saturday. He was open to accept and respect the other Rites in a 'catholic'<sup>3</sup> spirit and for the good of the souls. It shows his attitude that the various rites or individual churches in the Catholic Church are not independent entities. They are the manifold expressions of the one and the same faith in Jesus Christ handed over through different apostles. Hence, while protecting and promoting one's own patrimony, one has to respect and, if it is needed, share the spiritual wealth to each other as it is not against the Catholic mind. What is detrimental to the Catholic Church is suppressing or replacing or degrading the apostolic patrimony of other Churches and establish a dominion over the other. See what the Council taught us: In *Unitatis Redintegratio*, we read as follows: "far from being an obstacle to Church's unity, such diversity of customs and observances only adds to her splendour and is of great help

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<sup>1</sup>The Testament of Fr. Chavara written in August 1870; see also CWC, vol. IV: *Letters*, 73.

<sup>2</sup>CWC, vol. IV: *Letters*, II/3.

<sup>3</sup>The word 'catholic' comes from the Greek word *katholiki* derived from *kath'holu* means integral, wholeness, etc.

in carrying out her mission..."<sup>1</sup> "The entire heritage of spirituality and liturgy of discipline and theology in their various traditions, belong to the full catholic and apostolic character of the Church."<sup>2</sup> "This variety of the local churches ... is particularly splendid evidence of the catholicity of the undivided Church."<sup>3</sup> As we have seen, with regard to this respectful and admirable acceptance of equality, individuality, and communion of Churches, Chavara is a typical model.

### **3.1. Equality of Churches**

An ecclesiological theme related to this communion concept is the equality of the Churches. The basis of this equality is that each individual Church has the apostolic heritage which is part of the divinely revealed and undivided heritage of the Church of Christ. So, each Church is wholly the Church though not the whole Church. Hence, the basis of the equality of each individual church consists not in the quantity - number of the faithful and institutions that it has - but its content of apostolic heritage. *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* 3 categorically affirms this truth: "They are of equal dignity, so that none of them is superior to the others as regards rite and they enjoy the same rights and are having the same obligations, also in respect of preaching the Gospel to the whole world." The Eastern Apostolic Churches are, therefore, not the substations or branch offices of the 'universal Church' considered as the Latin Church. They are not parts of the worldwide Latin Church. They are really Churches of God. This equality of the Churches is

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<sup>1</sup>UR 16.

<sup>2</sup>UR 17.

<sup>3</sup>LG 26.

expressed by a venerable expression “sister Churches” in *Unitatis Redintegratio* 14.

As we have seen already, in his letter, Saint Chavara asked bishops for Latin Church and Syrian Church separately. That is an indication that he accepted the equality as well as the individuality and the diversity of both these Churches. Although he stood for the basic right of his mother Church, he was not reluctant to appreciate and acknowledge the richness of the Latin Church and the apostolic heritage of that Church as that of him. His openness towards the Latin Rite is explicit in his enthusiasm to study Latin language, collect Latin theological books, adopt certain pious practices and para-liturgical services, etc., for the benefit of his own Church. At the same time, his enthusiasm to rediscover and re-establish the spiritual wealth of his own Church is highly commendable. A typical example is the compilation of the Syriac Breviary and his earnestness to print and propagate it for the spiritual benefit of the priests of this Church. His affinity towards the Syriac liturgy and language are very well expressed even at his deathbed. On 1 January, i.e., one day before his death, he asked to give him the sacraments. Then, Fr. Gerard Beccaro, brother of Chavara’s spiritual father Fr. Leopold Beccaro, asked him: “in which rite do you desire to receive the last sacraments and indulgences?” Even though Fr. Chavara’s desire was to receive the sacrament from Fr. Leopold, he said: “... If it is in my own language (that is Syriac), I too can join to give the response.”<sup>1</sup> This is a clear indication that he was very faithful to his Rite in his life until death.

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<sup>1</sup>*Chronicle of Koonammavu Convent*, vol. II, 20.

### **3.2. Promoter of Brotherhood and Sisterhood of Churches and Ecumenism**

A very important contribution of the Second Vatican Council, in accepting the equality of all the individual Churches, is the re-establishment of the early Church's understanding of the churches as sister or brother Churches. This is a key notion of the ecclesiology of Vatican II. This idea we find in *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* as well as in *Unitatis Redintegratio*. In OE 2, we read: "... Between these churches, there flourishes such an admirable brotherhood that this variety within the Church in no way diminishes her unity, but rather manifests it." The principal motive behind this is the apostolicity and sacramental fraternity of the churches. In the ecumenical realm, this idea has much importance. Instead of a mother-daughter/son relationship, which connotes a superior-inferior realm, relationship between sisters and brothers connotes equality, and is considered to foster unity among the Churches. This is very well manifested in *Unitatis Redintegratio* 14 where the Council fathers frankly admit the sisterly relation between the See of Rome and the Orthodox Churches.

When we go through the letters of Saint Chavara, we see a proleptic experience of this outlook in his writings. For example, in the aforementioned letter to the *Propaganda Fide* asking separate bishops for Latins and Syrians, he added one more thing as follows: "This would be very opportune and useful. There are also many non-Catholics in our midst who are our own kith and kin, now known as Jacobites. The above solution will help them renounce schism and return to the unity of the Catholic fold."<sup>1</sup> In another letter also he indicates the same thing: "If we succeed in the plan proposed

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, vol. IV: *Letters*, II/5.

above<sup>1</sup> the one objection put forward by the Jacobites that we Syrians have no bishops of our own Rite will be solved and there is every chance for the Jacobites of Malabar joining our fold.”<sup>2</sup>

Here we see his ardent desire of the communion of the separated brethren with the Catholic fold. The main hindrance on the way to unity was the absence of a bishop of their own Rite. As it is evident from history, the so-called Jacobites were part of the apostolic Church of Saint Thomas until the *Coonen Cross Oath* in 1653 and the subsequent events. The protest against the Latin prelates, namely, the *Coonen Cross Oath*, caused a schism in the Church and that gradually ended up in the formation of a non-catholic community, namely, the Jacobites. The struggle to preserve the identity of the Saint Thomas Christians (*Mar Thoma Margam*) was clearly visible in this conflict between the Saint Thomas Christians and the Portuguese authorities. Here Chavara was arguing that they were not only ecclesiastically, but also biologically kith and kin. Consequently, the Jacobite Church was considered a sister Church. Hence, if the Syrian Catholic community could have had its own bishop, naturally, in the assessment of Saint Chavara, they would have come back to the Catholic communion. In brief, by the aforementioned words, he emphasized two things: the sisterhood of the Churches and the necessity of a bishop of one's own Rite to foster

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<sup>1</sup>The plan he proposed is if there is no possibility of getting a native Syrian bishop at least to get “a European missionary bishop in whom are combined knowledge, devotion and familiarity with our Syriac language and our Syro-Malabar Rite.” See CWC, vol. IV: *Letters*, V/17.

<sup>2</sup>CWC, vol. IV: *Letters*, V/17.

Ecumenism. In the course of time, Vatican Council II articulated it through the conciliar documents as we have noted above. Here also we see the prophetic mind of Saint Chavara and the ecclesial vision that was ahead of his time.

In short, Saint Chavara lived in the nineteenth century in a turbulent ecclesial situation under the jurisdiction of Latin bishops. He visualized the future of his mother Church. As an inborn charismatic leader and a talented pastor, he stood for the rights of his mother church and the communion of the Churches. From his letters, we could deduce his ecclesial vision and insights. They are very much in tune with the teachings of Vatican Council II. His historic letter to the Propaganda Fide is a remarkable one in that respect, especially for re-establishing the individuality, equality, and autonomy of the Syro-Malabar Church in the Catholic communion. Nevertheless, he always stood for the unity of the Church and communion with the Holy See and other Churches. It shows that he was a man ahead of time, a seer with futuristic vision and wisdom. He was an ecclesial luminary. By all means, "... this father of ours was a model and a guiding light to all the Christians in Kerala. Moreover, he was like a pillar that supported the Catholic Church because of the zeal he evinced in its expansion and the protection of faith."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>This is a testimony written by one of the first members of the first indigenous women religious Congregation founded by Saint Chavara. See *Chronicle of the Koonammaavu Convent*, vol. II, 23.

## CONCLUSION

The Catholic Church is blessed with a galaxy of saints. Each saint proclaims the truth of the Gospel and mirrors the face of Christ in a vivid manner. Saints are the living interpretation and true witnesses of the Gospel of Christ. Although each saint was born, lived, and died in a particular time and place, by their sanctity and wisdom they become the common treasure of the universal Church. This is a reality and that is all the more true with regard to the Fathers and Doctors of the Church.

Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara is one of such canonized saints of the Church who lived in the nineteenth century in Kerala. He is a paradigm for the twenty-first century Church in eminently integrating virtuous, apostolic, ecclesial, and pastoral life and wisdom. Generally speaking, he is well known as a social and ecclesial reformer but the spiritual and theological enlightenment that he has ignited through his writings are not properly brought out and widely propagated. This is detrimental to the spiritual enhancement and theological growth of the Church. Hence, an attempt was made to bring out the theological visions and insights hidden in his writings. Our study proved that he is a distinguished theologian who could integrate academic, pastoral, and contemplative dimensions of theology in a profound manner. It is not because he wrote many volumes of theological treatises, but he gained theological insights from his first-hand experience: experience of God through prayer and pastoral commitment as a priest, religious, and Vicar General of the Syro-Malabar Church through many humanitarian and salvific activities.

Though he was not a formally learned man by the secular and ecclesiastical standards, the insights he offered through his writings are as worth as that of the Apostolic Fathers of the Church. His writings contain the doctrines and dogmas of the Church in a vivid manner. He has touched upon almost all key areas of theological investigation. Nevertheless, we didn't include all of them in this work. Surprisingly, though he lived almost one century before the Vatican Council II, he could anticipate the mind of the Council in various aspects and apply it in his living context. For example, he imbibed the centrality of liturgy for the renewal of the Church from within, the first and foremost duty of the pastors to preach the Word of God, the urgency of providing formation to the family, necessity of giving solid formation to the seminarians, the necessity of fostering religious life for the missionary endeavour of the Church, need of giving catholic education to the children, offering all possible care to the poor and the needy, etc. In addition to these, he ascertained the need of protecting and promoting the apostolic heritage of the Church, acknowledged and asserted the apostolic succession and the ecclesiastical jurisdiction, demanded the shepherding of bishop for each Rite from their own Rite, defended the unity of the Church, promoted the communion with the Holy See, encouraged unity with diversity in the Church, and upheld the equality of churches. It shows that he was not simply an arm-chair theologian, but a man with divine wisdom and pastoral prudence. He was basically a pastoral theologian who had the smell of the sheep. Above all, he proclaimed through his life the best-known maxim of Evagrius, "If you are a theologian, you pray truly; if you pray truly, you are a theologian."

In short, the foregoing study has elucidated that Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara was a prophetic theologian who linked and integrated the mind of the apostolic fathers as well as the Second Vatican Council. He could integrate the academic, pastoral, and contemplative dimensions of theology through his life, activities, and writings. Thus, he could support the Church, which is the temple of God, like a pillar and a guiding light to the faithful by being ever luminous in his commitment to Jesus Christ and his people.



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