



IGNITING MINDS TO TRANSFORM THE SOCIETY

**“Legacy of K. E. Chavara for Innovative and
Inclusive Education” and Other Essays on Education**

Saju Chackalackal CMI



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Other Essays on Education*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	vii
<i>Chapter 1</i>	1
Legacy of K. E. Chavara for Innovative and Inclusive Education	
<i>Chapter 2</i>	59
Integral Vision of Education for an Enhanced Humanity	
<i>Chapter 3</i>	87
Philosophy of Education and an Integral Outlook	
<i>Chapter 4</i>	103
Religious Literacy and Secularism	
<i>Chapter 5</i>	115
Education for Gender Justice	
<i>Chapter 6</i>	123
Dharmaram in the Vision of Blessed Chavara	
<i>Appendix</i>	133
Golden Jubilee of Dharmaram College: A Pioneering Institution of Quality Education	
Bibliography	137
Index	141

PREFACE

Persons who are remembered and whose memory is perpetuated by the subsequent generations are those who live for others. They are those who dedicate themselves for the cause of others in such a way that there is no room for their selfish ends; for them, life is a continuous saga of selfless giving, a giving that enhances the lives of others. It is in empowering others that they find the purpose of their lives realized. Jesus Christ and many others whom we remember and whose lives and teachings are perpetuated are solely based on their excellent life of "self-less self-giving."

The Indian Christianity also has a number of such personalities whose dedication and hard work have not only given shape to the organized church structures, but have created a new culture of Christian self-giving. In spite of all the odds, they could make an indelible mark in the hearts and minds of the people only because of their readiness to let go their comforts and, focused on the future of the community, they could work incessantly for the

welfare of the society at large. Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara, a Catholic priest from Kerala, who was instrumental in initiating a number of innovative practices to empower the people and to set right the misconceptions of social structures and religious perceptions, is well known for his ground-breaking involvement in the educational ministry of the Catholic Church in India. His lasting legacy and innovative vision are perpetuated through the members of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI) and their numerous institutions spread across India. While the world vision offered by Jesus Christ remains the foundation for all Christian missions, the methods adopted and the thrusts given by Blessed Chavara have become the inspiration for all the missions undertaken by the CMI members and their institutions.

The mission undertaken by these institutions would be successful in making an indelible mark in the consciousness of the people when, following the example of Jesus Christ and the innovative methods of Blessed Chavara, they begin to exist completely for those members of the society whom they reach out through various institutions and activities. As institutions become stronger and better established, we run the risk of losing sight of the original vision and thrust so as to slip into more of self-centred interests. If a Christian – be it an individual or an institution – begins to function for the sake of self-interest or begins to exist for oneself, it is the beginning of losing one's *Christianity*. For, when a Christian ceases to exist for others, he or she would cease to be a *Christian!*

Therefore, it is necessary that all those who follow the footsteps of Jesus Christ and abide by the methods of mission adopted by Blessed Chavara continue to live for others at any cost. Yet, given the human frailties, it is natural that human beings sometimes lose focus on the original inspirations and visions. In such a context, it becomes essential for us to design ways and means to keep us close to the elements of the vision and inspiration that ultimately shaped the life and mission of inspiring visionaries like Blessed Chavara. Hence, Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram has started a new Centre for Chavara Studies and Research to celebrate and perpetuate the vision of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara. This noble venture, I hope, would create opportunities for the staff and students of DVK and the members of the CMI Congregation and the larger Indian Church to seriously engage with the person, vision, and contributions of Blessed Chavara. A creative engagement with such a noble visionary would pave the way not only for understanding his vision and mission, but also to imbibe and perpetuate the same in the time and place where all of us are placed.

As Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram is engaged in forming future missionaries and priests for the Church and in equipping already ordained ministers with deeper and specialised knowledge about realities such as God, human, and the world, including all creations, it is my ardent hope and desire that everyone would be inspired by the life and example of Blessed Chavara in preparing themselves for a proper 'Christian' mission in today's world. Given the thrusts of today world dynamics, most of which are guided

by self-centred interests, this mission of DVK is a challenging one. Yet, as DVK has taken upon herself the fundamental mission of perpetuating the life vision of Jesus Christ through its academic and non-academic programmes, she cannot shy away from this basic responsibility. Therefore, it is hoped that the Centre for Chavara Studies and Research would enlighten all the members of DVK and those who come in touch with her to imbibe the spirit that moved Blessed Chavara in his life's mission and Christian commitment.

One of the best means of empowering others, especially the young generation is through different modes of education. Following the footsteps of Blessed Chavara, we have a great responsibility to offer a method of education that would enhance the life of the individual who partakes in the process of education, whereby he or she would also be equipped to become an instrument of enhancing life for others. If our educational institutions and programmes become centres of empowering others, including the downtrodden and the marginalized, opening up the horizons of growth and success to everyone, then, they would really become centres of Christian education.

As Blessed Chavara, being inspired by the person of Jesus Christ, lived for others and dedicated all resources that he could pool for the common good of the people, every Christian faithful and institution should aim at being and becoming a presence that would enhance the life of others. The vocation of a Christian would be realized only when one's life becomes life-giving in every sense.

CHAPTER 1

Legacy of K. E. Chavara for Innovative and Inclusive Education

1. Introduction

India is a land that has always been involved in a deeper search for the attainment of truth and transformation in the same. Among the *ṛṣis* of the old, we come across an eternal longing for ongoing transformation, an unceasing and affirmative search for the real, a move towards light, and a quest to attain the life eternal. All these yearnings are immortalized in the chant of India:

Asatō mā sat gamaya

Tamasō mā jyotir gamaya

Mṛtyor mā amṛtam gamaya

*Ōm Śānti, Śānti, Śānti!*¹

¹*Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad*, 1.3.28.

Indeed, this quest succinctly brings to us the importance of education and other human transformative processes. Although such a noble and forceful quest was inherently part of India in general and Kerala in particular, it is sad to know that formally pursuing this quest was restricted to certain classes of people, whose eligibility for the attainment of knowledge was exclusively based on birth. Moreover, the religio-political structures were so rigid that the scriptural justification for the enforcement of such inhuman religious and legal injunctions deprived the people and the rest of the world of their natural development and evolution. This, in turn, crippled the social and cultural progress of the people of India. Such crippled and crippling social structures, even if backed by religious authorities, are certainly unjust and bound to be pulled down. As the horizon of human development in the Kerala society of the nineteenth century began to darken, the limited openings that were available to certain individuals such as Kuriakose Elias Chavara (1805-1871),¹ Chattampi Swamikal (1854-1924), Sri Narayana Guru

¹Kuriakose Elias Chavara was born on 10 February 1805 at Kainakary, a tiny village near Alleppy, as the youngest son of Kuriakose Chavara and Mary Thoppil. After his initiation in a local village school (*kalari*) under the guidance of a teacher (*āśān*), in 1818, Kuriakose was admitted to the Pallippuram seminary, run by Father Thomas Palackal, to undergo training necessary for ordination as a Catholic priest. After a period of training and study extended over eleven years, in 1892, he was ordained priest by Monsignor Maurelius Stabilini, *interim* Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly. After his initial service in different parish churches and assistance at the Pallippuram seminary, young Kuriakose joined Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara, two senior priests, in founding the first indigenous religious congregation for men, Carmelites of Mary Immaculate, by laying the foundation stone of the first house in

(1856-1928), and Ayyamkali (1866-1941) paved the way for personal and societal transformation through the imparting of basic education to all and various other programmes for social uplift.

K. E. Chavara was a unique personality both by secular and religious standards. More than the contributions in the form of institutional establishments enveloping the different realms of society that he had made, the vision he has bequeathed to the later generations is noble and worthy of emulation. He was a man of prophetic vision which challenged him and his contemporaries to respond to the ills of the time; despite mounting difficulties, he proactively responded to those challenges by letting himself and all the resources that he could gather together, be spent for the greater good of the society. Moreover, his prophetic vision was equally matched by his practical mission, which ultimately made him an instrument of personal and social transformation. Thus, his life and mission stand out from those of his contemporaries by being “revolutionary in concept and application.”¹

Chavara was not a mere social reformer. He was an Indian to the core, a *r̥ṣi* whose consciousness was firmly

Mannanam on 11 May 1831. Chavara, along with ten others, formally constituted the religious community on 8 December 1855; he assumed the office of the superior general of the community, which he occupied till his death on 3 January 1871. He had founded communities of this religious congregation at six different places in Kerala, all of which had been opened up on the request and support of the people from the localities.

¹Justin, “Foreword” in Tharaniyil, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 3.

established in God experience which prompted him to involve himself in supporting and enhancing the lives of his fellow human beings, especially of those who were marginalized by the then existing socio-political structures. In 1986, R. Venkataraman, the then President of India, remarked on the life of Chavara in the following words: “A mystic, he could also be an engine of activity. Capable of withdrawing into his innermost being, Chavara was at the same time a motive force for the establishment of a social order in which everyone could live in dignity and faith.”¹ As a seer rooted in a universalizing faith experience, his strategies for reformation of Indian society emerged out of his firm conviction that the hapless masses must be supported and accompanied in their attempts to uplift their lives. Not only did he trust in God in everything he did, but was ready to sacrifice himself and all that was at his disposal for the good of the people around him, without expecting anything in return. It is this *niṣkāmakarma* practised by Chavara that makes him a social reformer par excellence, especially in the context of the nineteenth century Kerala. *Niṣkāmakarma* is seen only in the lives of those who have practised yogic *sādhana* climaxing in total *kenosis* (self-giving), whereby the union between themselves and the divine, between themselves and the others, and between themselves and the entire creation is attained. *Niṣkāmakarma yoga* is not a state of withdrawal from the world and inaction, but an impelling inner call to involve oneself in integral selfless action to transmit the wholeness

¹Venkataraman, “Chavara Represents Indian Christianity at Its Best” in Kalluveetil and Kochappilly, eds., *The Lord of Heaven and Earth*, 86.

experienced in one’s own inner self to the other, be it human or any other element in creation, so that personal and social transformation could be effected.

Abdul Kalam has stated in his book, *Ignited Minds: Unleashing the Power within India* that “when we believe in our goals, that what we dream of can become reality, results will begin to follow.”¹ It is here that minds are ignited. The right ignition of imagination and all other human powers that are facilitated by the educational endeavours would propel the right mindset. The right action can open the whole new horizon of human development and social transformation. Chavara not only dreamt of a society liberated from the evils perpetuated by vested interests, but also tried hard to abolish such evils by way of positive involvement in the form of education, the print media, setting up of centres for the care of the sick and the old, etc. The ignition of the Spirit that Chavara had in his personal life turned out to be the power to ignite many, especially the members of the CMI and CMC congregations in the Syro-Malabar Church of India.

Ideally, education is a process that should ignite the minds of those who participate in the process, which, in turn, should result in personal as well as social transformation. These transformations depend very much on the nature and quality of the education imparted in any society, without disregarding any particular group of people based on caste, colour, gender, etc. Placed in the context of the nineteenth century Kerala, Kuriakose Elias Chavara –

¹Kalam, *Igniting Minds*, Preface.

visionary and activist, religious and administrator, charismatic leader and true Christian disciple – could initiate unparalleled personal and social transformation through both formal and non-formal education by starting schools and other institutions. The social uplift that he ignited in the Kerala society has such a far reaching and lasting impact that those initiatives are continued and perfected by the CMI and CMC institutions that he has started. The content, style, and the dynamics that were put in place by the educational initiatives of K. E. Chavara and, later, by the various educational institutions established and maintained across India by the members of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI) are so conspicuously innovative and inclusive that they have not only created ever vibrant ripples in the social and cultural scenario of India, but also continue to be catalysts for a better, dynamic, and all-inclusive social transformation of India.

2. Common Good of the People and the CMI Foundation

One agenda of beginning the monastic life – as Chavara shared it with Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara¹ – was to withdraw from the active life of the world; in fact, he had a natural affinity for asceticism and contemplation. As it had turned out, however, the plan was altered. The reply from the then bishop is telling: “We have only a handful of

¹Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara, two senior Catholic priests, the former being the rector of Chavara while he was under training in the seminary and the latter being an associate of Palackal, were involved in conceiving and executing the establishment of the first religious house in Mannanam.

priests like you to guide the people of God in the proper way and if you go for contemplative monastic life who will take care of them? *If you prefer going for monastic life to teaching the people, start a monastery that may benefit all.*”¹ This statement was a clarification of the mission that Chavara and his confreres would undertake in the course of time, initiated through the channels opened up by the CMI Catholic religious fraternity, the first of its kind started in India. Although he had an ardent desire to cherish the personal call, the discernment of the need of the people made Chavara (along with Palackal and Porukara) to engage himself wholeheartedly in the service of the society at large, reaching out to all, including the downtrodden and the marginalized. As it is captured by his biographer, K. C. Chacko, “... he [Chavara] withdrew from the world so as to permeate it more forcibly.”² A. M. Mundadan, a renowned Church historian, elaborates it further: “He retired from the world not because he was afraid of it, or tired of it, or disliked it, or belittled it, but because he wanted to leaven the dough, to educate and to reform the sons and daughters of God, so that they became really His children. With a singleness of purpose he tried all through his life to equip himself with knowledge, wisdom and virtue and disseminate them to his fellow religious, priests, nuns and the laity at large.”³

¹Kanianthara, History of the Foundation of Mannanam Monastery (Malayalam), 6; emphasis added.

²Chacko, Blessed Father Kuriackos Elias Chavara, 61.

³Mundadan, Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara, 345.

The initial inspiration to found a monastery, as it is recorded in the *Chronicles* that Chavara had written, is referred to as a quest to establish a *Darśanaveedu*,¹ a house of vision, or a house that facilitates profounder experience or vision of reality, the ultimate and the manifest. Although its primary significance is spiritual with a specific Indian-Christian content, the very name seminally captures the various missions that were to become prominent in the life of Chavara and, subsequently, the CMI community and its institutions. The establishment of the first indigenous religious congregation in India was keen on the spiritual fervour and the vision of the divine that would transform their personal spiritual life; equally significant was the intention of Chavara and other founders to be available for the uplift of society through the vision that they had acquired through their spiritual *sādhana*. In fact, the vision was fundamentally Christian, yet universally open and contextually all-embracing. Keeping in mind the noble Indian worldview of *vasudhaiva kudumbakam* (universal brotherhood), the CMI institutions turned out to be facilitators of a new vision in the Kerala society (and gradually the larger Indian society) of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These institutions imparted such a

¹Chavara, *Chavarayachante Sampoorana Kruthikal (Collected Works of Blessed Chavara)*, vol. 1: *Nalagamangal (The Chronicles)*, 1: "Seeing the considerable good had not been done in Kerala due to the absence of a *tapas Bhavan* (house of penance) even for priests, he desired to start a *darsanaveedu* at least for priests." (Translation from Thomas Panthaplackal, "The Ecclesial Dimension in Chavara's Endeavours" in Kalluveetil and Kochappilly, eds., *The Lord of Heaven and Earth*, 195).

vision to everyone associated with them that everyone was made to be part and parcel of their programme, be it religious or secular, preaching or teaching. The *darśan* imbibed by the members of the CMI, in turn, inspired all those who came in contact with them through the various institutions. A statement in the *Cochin Census Report 1901* made by Shankara Menon is worth noting in this regard: “The Christians, who form one-fourth of the [Kerala] State are better off in education than the members of other communities. As a school is attached to every church, the children of this community get better opportunities to attend school. In these schools, they are taught to read and write; they also get a chance to study certain lessons in the Bible. The efforts of the missionaries, especially those of the indigenous priests, need special mention. Moreover, the services they render in the area of primary education are very special and noteworthy.”¹ It is to be remembered that Chavara insisted that all children, irrespective of religion or caste, should be admitted to these schools, though attached to churches. Church was chosen as the centre of education by Chavara as it was considered to be the ideal place of social anchoring, to meet and teach, and also because Chavara, as the Vicar General of the Syrian Catholic community, had no political power to issue commands to the public, but only ecclesiastical power over the Christian faithful, which he conscientiously exercised for the welfare of the people.

¹Shankara Menon, *Kochin Census Report, 1901*, cited in Kokkattu, *Vazhthappetta Chavarayachante Dalit Darsanam*, 30-31.

3. A Holistic Approach to Education

Chavara was an educationist with a vision for the blending of the classical with the modern. As he started to establish educational institutions, he paid attention to the fact that the children should not only be initiated into the modern Malayalam language, but also into Sanskrit and Tamil. While Tamil was taught in the ordinary education system of the day,¹ Sanskrit was not accessible to many, especially to those who belonged to the non-Hindu communities and the marginalized peoples. It is in this context that Chavara conceived of the necessity of instructing students in Sanskrit and started a Sanskrit school in Mannanam. Apart from the high social status that is attached to the learning of Sanskrit, Chavara realized that the school would initiate the children into the age-old wisdom of the land, which, in turn, would also mould and refine their character. His quest for modern education did not immediately catch up with that of English education, as, in the given circumstances, English was almost invariably associated with the Protestant missionaries attached to the British colonial rule. Moreover, getting access to trained personnel in English also was almost impossible.² However, in 1885, the quest of Chavara to blend the ancient learning with that of the modern is

¹It was known as *Kalari*, i.e., a school with a single teacher, along the tradition of *Gurukulam*.

²Officially, the Catholics belonging to the Syrian tradition were forbidden by the ecclesiastical authorities of the Diocese of Verapoly from seeking any assistance or support in education from any other community. This insistence barred the Syrian Catholics from taking advantage of the English education imparted by the English missionaries.

found realized with the starting of a Catholic English High School at Mannanam by his successors.¹

By starting a Sanskrit school, Chavara made sure that the marginalized members of society, especially those from the Dalit communities, had access to letters and culture that was considered the sole domain of the higher castes. At a time when untouchability was so widespread and education was the exclusive birthright of the upper castes, it was practically impossible for the children of the lower castes to get admitted to schools. Considering these children as the children of God, and understanding their prerogative for education, Chavara strenuously struggled for their uplift. One of the most rewarding initiatives that he had put in place was keeping the schools accessible to all sections of the society. This was a revolutionary step towards the elimination of not only poverty, but also untouchability and discrimination. In fact, understanding the dynamics of the life of the poor from the lower strata of the society, especially the fact that the children, instead of having been given access to education, were absorbed into agricultural labour, Chavara strategically put in place a midday meal

¹The first CMI English private school was started in 1874, which was later developed into a full-fledged high school in 1885. See Honere, “Secondary and Higher Education in Catholic Malabar” (article published originally in 1924), Kuriachan Puthukkattil, *KCSL Vidyabhyasa Rangathe Prakasa Gopuram*, Changanacherry, 1994, 189, cited in Chennattussery, “CMI Congregation and the Syro-Malabar Church” in Kochappilly, et al., eds., *The Way of Life*, 314).

scheme for school children.¹ The strategy was such that he distributed not only the meal but also the required books and clothing to those who regularly attended the school. Against the background of economic backwardness of many people in the nineteenth century Kerala, this was a move in the right direction, as Chavara could mobilize children from the nearby villages to regularly attend the schools. If Kerala could make an impact in the arena of primary and secondary education, later in the twentieth century, the innovative steps, including the midday meal scheme, of Chavara must be recognized as significant milestones.

In his capacity as the Vicar General of the Diocese of Verapoly (Kerala), in 1865, Chavara was instrumental in issuing an innovative and epoch-making directive to all Catholic parishes, by the then Archbishop Barnadenos, to start schools attached to every church. It is from this order and the subsequent practice that the very word "*Pallikudam*" – having a school attached to the church – has probably evolved.² It was insisted in this mandate that if the school is

¹Chavara was a man of practical sense. He believed that a noble cause should not suffer due to the lack of funds. With the support of certain generous Catholics, he purchased some paddy fields near the St. Joseph's Monastery in Mannanam with a view to cultivate rice and other agricultural products, which would in turn be the source not only for the midday meal, but also to procure the necessary educational assistance, including the books and clothing.

²Valerian, *Malankara Sabhamathavinte Oru Veera Santhanam or Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan*, 137. Chathamparampil and Kureethara write: "The order that the churches that do not follow the instructions would be closed down, had a salutary impact in creating a revolutionary change in the academic hemisphere. That circular which was written by Fr.

not opened under the parish church, the latter would be closed down. This was a strategic instruction to channelize the resources of the parish community to put in place the required facilities to run schools. Had it not been for this insistent move from Chavara, the schools that came up on most of the church premises – mostly in the rural villages of Kerala – would not have been a reality; then, naturally, the educational matrix of Kerala, which now boasts of full literacy, would have been totally different. If the State of Kerala has such a glorious achievement in the field of formal education, the contribution of the Catholic Church, which was moved into the field of education by Chavara, is very significant.¹

Chavara also wrote about the importance of education in the life of an individual and the necessity of due care in monitoring the progress as follows: “When children reach the age of discretion, they should be sent to school. Besides, the parents should enquire about their studies and their friendships. On Sundays, what they had studied during the

Chavara in his own hand, was signed with the official seal by Archbishop Bernardinos. Fr. Chavara did not remain complacent after getting the circular issued. He delegated the members of his Congregation to ensure the implementation of the order and to energize educational activities. Each monastery was to oversee these activities of the parish churches in its neighbourhood...” Chathamparampil and Kureethara, “Unique Contributions of Blessed Chavara in Educating the Kerala Society,” 125.

¹It is due to the visible and stable success of his educational enterprises that his portrait is exhibited in the Kerala Legislative Assembly Hall in Thiruvananthapuram.

previous week is to be examined.”¹ Thus, in the educational policy of Chavara, teaching the youngsters was not only a significant responsibility of teachers, but also, to an equal measure, a serious responsibility of parents and senior members of the family. These instructions are of greater value when we realize the fact that most of those who sent students to schools at that time were not necessarily educated; even those who were educated were mostly engaged in agriculture. Given this context, Chavara’s instructions become really significant, especially as they were the most practical insistences which went hand-in-hand with his foundation of schools and other institutions for the common good of the society. It was an invitation and insistence to the parents and elders of the family to personally accompany and tutor the children at home as they were instructed in schools. The collaboration between parents and teachers that Chavara visualized is, ideally speaking, the best suited module for effective learning and social upbringing of children.

In his “Testament of a Loving Father” (a letter of 1868, addressed to the people of Kainakary, his hometown or village), Chavara has given valuable directions not only on family life and religious observance, but also insightful directives regarding education. In view of the development of personality in children, he has proposed that from their childhood, they must be given freedom and recognition; at

¹Chavara, *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul*, “Upbringing of Children,” §6, in *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara*, vol. 4: *The Letters*, 113 (translation altered).

the same time, he maintained that freedom is not licentiousness but the exercise of personal discretion and choice with an understanding of the responsibility. Further, Chavara insisted that, as they mature in age, they should be given the right to choose their own vocation or status in life; he went one step further in instructing that the youngsters be free to select their own life partners.¹ The revolutionary character of these instructions, especially the aspect of personal freedom and, finally, the choice of life partner, would be better appreciated only when we understand that the rule of the day even in the twenty-first century Kerala – without caste or creed difference – is arranged marriages. While insisting on the proper education and grooming of the children, Chavara did realize the fact that children could emerge as independent and self-reliant persons only if they are given the chance to exercise their choices; indeed, he wanted the parents and elders of the family to accompany them in making them stand on their feet. Truly, the approach of Chavara was holistic, aiming at the integral development of the individual, with parents, teachers, and religious leaders contributing their mite at one stage or the other to this development.

4. Non-Formal Education to Break the Barriers

4.1. Partnership with the Public in Education

Most of the educational institutions, in the secular or religious sphere, were started by Chavara relying on the

¹Chavara, Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul, “Upbringing of Children,” §14, in Complete Works of Blessed Chavara, vol. 4: The Letters, 115.

financial and political support of the people of the locality. This is found verified starting with the first religious house in Mannanam, the foundation of the seminary in different locations, the setting up of schools in Mannanam and Arpookkara, the printing press, and the starting of the convent in Koonammavu. As all these institutions were directly or indirectly contributing towards the uplift of the people and the transformation of the society, Chavara had no reservation in tapping the resources from those who could afford them and who had the goodwill to contribute towards such noble causes. This is yet another instance of informal education whereby he could not only pool the resources from the public, but also conscientize them with regard to their responsibility for the common good, especially for the good of the marginalized and the less-privileged.

4.2. Formation of the People in Charity

To educate is not only to introduce the pupils to letters and advanced thinking. Education is fundamentally a process of humanization, leading to personal as well as societal transformation, which caters to the wellbeing of every member of the society in an inclusive manner. Chavara had a keen mind and nothing of importance escaped his attention. Although, the mission of Chavara, as an ordained minister of the Church, had taken him far away from his native village near Alleppey, he maintained very close contact with his relatives and the people of the village. Given the context of this village, Chavara was aware of the fact that there were elderly and sick people who were not

properly cared for in the families, especially due to social and economic backwardness. However, he was not ready to resign himself to it or to choose look the other way as if it was nothing of his concern. In view of providing for the welfare of this group of hapless people, Chavara decided to open an orphanage in his own native village, the maintenance of which was entrusted to the people.¹ The home for the destitute (originally known as *Upaviśāla*, meaning a house of charity, and meant for the care of the destitute, sick, and dying who did not have anyone to care for them) was established in 1869 at Kainakary, his native village.

As the first institution of organized humanitarian services in Kerala, Chavara’s simple but farsighted vision proposed a very simple strategy. In order to run this *Upaviśāla* he formed an association of laypeople, namely, “Confraternity of St. Joseph for Happy Death.” Apart from the generous donations he had collected from the public to form a corpus fund for the foundation of the institution, he proposed that all families spare a handful of rice every time they cooked and the produce of one coconut tree. It was an instance of instructing the whole community with regard to their responsibility towards the downtrodden and the needy. Instead of a theoretical discourse, Chavara could impart the lesson of reaching out to the needy, despite the personal inconveniences and material difficulties, through the mechanism of running the *Upaviśāla*, primarily by way

¹Chavara, “Second Letter to the People of Kainakary,” in *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara*, vol. 4: *The Letters*, 117-128.

of their daily collaboration. According to Chavara's instruction to the people of his native village, "the day you could not do any good for others is not counted in your life."¹ It is really praiseworthy to see that he could evoke a proactive social consciousness and ignite a sense of responsibility for the other among his own people by way of initiating various voluntary acts of charity.²

4.3. Instruction in Religion and Formation of Goodwill

The settings of the church during the lifetime of Chavara were not very conducive to the imparting of a renewed consciousness. For, the churches were more attuned to be ritualistic. However, as he became involved in the affairs of the community in his capacity as a parish priest, Chavara identified that it was the best opportunity to instruct the faithful and to guide them to a transformed consciousness and way of life. Hence, he started the practice of preaching homilies during the masses, which was not a custom in Kerala churches at that time. The homilies he preached were well appreciated for their Christian content and the sense of practical application in the daily life of the people. As this

¹Chavara, Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul, "Upbringing of Children," §13, in Complete Works of Blessed Chavara, vol. 4: The Letters, 108.

²Following the footsteps of Chavara, the CMI congregation runs the following institutions to reach out to the orphans and differently-abled persons: 2 centres for the street children, 3 centres to take care of the beggars, etc., 5 AIDS care centres, 7 homes for the aged, 7 orphanages, 9 centres for the mentally challenged, 10 centres for the physically challenged, and 20 free boardings for poor children. They also run 51 clinics and 9 hospitals in extending medical care to the needy. See "CMI Congregation at a Glance," *CMI Diary 2011*, 2.

practice was found to be very fruitful, in the course of time, other priests also started to preach homilies. Thus, the Sunday services in the churches were no more an instance of mere ritualistic experience, but the ideal setting to offer instruction in religious and social value consciousness. Later, after the establishment of the monasteries, Chavara also initiated retreat preaching in parishes on an annual basis.¹ As his confreres from the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (then, TOCD or Third Order of the Carmelites Discalced) were available, Chavara could design the retreats in different parishes in such a way that they turned out to be instances of introspection and collective decision making for the heralding of a better society.

5. Inclusive Education

While the prophetic vision and most of the uplifting and inspirational activities initiated by the socio-religious reformers of the nineteenth century Kerala were restricted to the in-group members of the religion of the reformers, we find a total departure from this practice within the mission of Chavara. Neither his prophetic vision for a better tomorrow nor the innovative practical action needed for realizing the vision was restricted to the members of his own religious community, i.e., the Syro-Malabar Catholics of Kerala. Whether it is in the starting of the schools, convents, or press, the inclusive approach was a necessary characteristic of Chavara’s involvement. As the children from the socially and culturally marginalized were offered a chance to be

¹Mundadan, Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara, 241-243.

educated, Chavara facilitated not only their socio-cultural and financial betterment but also their re-integration into the mainstream of society.

The admission policy of the schools that were opened up by Chavara or other missionaries was not restricted to the members of his community; indeed, the integral education imparted by Chavara was at the same time an inclusive one to the core, so much so that he insisted on the admission of children from backward classes, which was impossible in the then existing schools run under the auspices of the upper caste or the state government.¹ The revolutionary character of Chavara's decision to admit students from all classes into the school will be better understood when we take note of the fact that he not only admitted them to the school, but also even dared to offer them training in the Sanskrit language (in 1846, he started a Sanskrit school in Mannanam), which was traditionally forbidden to the members of the Śūdra community and the outcastes.

In the context of the deprivation meted out to millions of the lower castes and the outcastes, the Indian Constitution has made special provisions to protect their interests through affirmative action, especially in the form of reservation in educational institutions and job opportunities. Although it was an epoch-making decision made by the Indian democracy, the fact is that not many from among the lower castes and the outcastes could be brought to formal

¹Menon, "A Renaissance Leader Who Walked Ahead of His Time" in Panthaplackal, *A Pear Truly Indian*, 78.

education. Despite the fact that many have taken advantage – and some of them undue advantage at that – of the special provisions offered by the Indian Government, even after almost six decades of the promulgation of the Indian Constitution, the government policies are yet to penetrate into the heart of the problem and enable the downtrodden and the marginalized to feel respected and self-reliant. If we could place the initiatives of Chavara against this background, which he set in motion in 1846, we would realize the importance of his futuristic vision and goal-oriented practical action. His inclusive and universal outlook, inspired by the Christian vision and mission, motivated him to invest whatever was at his disposal for the good of the people, especially of those who were excluded by the inhuman socio-religious systems of the time. Indeed, while India as a nation took another one hundred years or more to develop a social consciousness that recognized the human dignity of the marginalized, Chavara and his institutions did initiate effective processes of educating the masses, without any discrimination in the name of caste or creed.

5.1. Women Empowerment and the Foundation of Convents

The same was said to be the vision behind the initiation of the starting of the convent and the education of women, heralded by schools and boardings started under the management of the sisters. Jossy and Kochumuttom write:

It was a time when women were largely deprived of even the basic rights of education, property inheritance,

and proper clothing. They were not expected to attend even the retreats and festivals in the parishes, and family gatherings such as *Sradham*, *adiyantiram*, and weddings; and they had no role in the process of making policies and decisions in the family, the Church and the society. Thus, the women, especially the Syrian Catholic women, were extremely underprivileged religiously, socially, economically, and educationally. The establishment of a religious congregation for women was certainly an antidote to those socio-cultural evils affecting women, as its subsequent history has already proved.¹

Against this background, starting the religious congregation for women, according to Chavara, had a twofold purpose, as is evident from the chronicles of Koonammavu convent: "Besides striving for their own spiritual realization, the members of the Congregation have to teach other girls, and train them in some handicrafts."² It is clear from the original goal of founding the convent that its primary thrust included, along with the spiritual realization of the members, education, social uplift, and the wellbeing of womenfolk in the society. Indeed, the starting of the convent

¹Jossy and Kochumuttom, *Dream Fulfilled*, 4 (style of the text is slightly modified).

²Chavara, *Collected Works of Chavara*, vol. 1, 195; see also *Chronicle of Koonammavu Convent*, 23, cited in Jossy, "Blessed Chavara and the Founding of the CMC Congregation," 15. The *Positio* also affirms that the scope of starting the religious community for women was to train and educate girls. *Positio*, 131.

was a powerful instrument to empower women in a multi-dimensional manner.

The subservience of women in the Indian society has its source in their preclusion from formal education. This remained a destructive phenomenon within the Indian society, especially owing to the practices prevailing in the Hindu community, which was also extended to other communities. Forbidding formal education to any particular group of humanity not only closes the door for socio-cultural advancement, but also economic independence and wellbeing. This could be found verified in the nineteenth century Kerala society, where women were mostly restricted to the chores of the household and in the agricultural field. All these phenomena constituted a vicious cycle so much so that freeing them from the clutches of a male chauvinistic slavery was almost impossible. In fact, the lack of economic independence led to the maintenance of a brutal and unbecoming gender-based segregation which was not only socially destructive but also unproductive and backward-looking for the whole Indian society.

While some male chauvinistic seers of the past made room for the institution and maintenance of subjugation of women in the Indian society, there were some other liberated and liberating enlightened seers who adopted an all-liberating perspective in their vision and mission. Chavara was one such who wanted to put an end to the oppression and subjugation of women by the male dominated religious and secular society. The best way to set things right, as he had understood, was to provide them the

opportunities for education. Given the context of Chavara's initiatives, most of which were channelized through the religious setup of the Catholic Church in which he was also an ordained minister, he spontaneously planned for the establishment of a convent.¹ Although the original inspiration was to provide a conducive atmosphere for the training and development of chosen women to lead a spiritual life according to the Christian tradition, by itself, it turned out to be an apt instrument and the best opportunity to provide quality education not only to those who became members of this religious society (originally started with four members, this community was divided later into two congregations and they were christened as Congregation of Mother Carmel – CMC – of the Syro-Malabar Rite and Congregation of Teresian Carmelites² – CTC – of the Latin Rite), but also to a large number of young women whose care was entrusted to these trained and spiritually motivated religious women. It must be noted that the foundation of the convent turned out to be a confluence of divine and human grace, facilitating the enlightenment and integral development of the womenfolk through education. It is heartening to note that the women trained within the walls of these convents have turned out to be catalysts of social and cultural transformation of Kerala and the wider

¹The involvement of an Italian Carmelite missionary, Leopold Beccaro, was certainly important in realizing the project. While Chavara is officially acclaimed to be the founder of the CMC congregation, Beccaro is considered to be the co-founder.

²Visit the official website for more information on the history of CTC at <http://ctccongregation.org/history.asp>, accessed on 20 April 2011.

Indian society. It must be noted, once again, that the educational initiatives of Chavara, which blossomed through the Carmelite convents, have championed the uplift and empowerment of the womenfolk setting a noble example for the rest of the society to be emulated. Indeed, the rest of the society, especially their counterparts from the majority Hindu society of Kerala as well as the minority Muslim community have treaded the same path, and all these initiatives together have made such a lasting impact upon the social fabric of the Kerala society to such an extent that Kerala stands on the top compared with all other states of India in the number of formally educated and self-reliant women.

Admitting students from all classes, including girls and those from the backward classes, and offering chances for their formal education in the school were strategic steps in Chavara’s educational endeavours, as they later turned out to be conspicuously powerful in effecting social and cultural transformation and the grooming of a self-reliant group of people from among the subaltern in Kerala society.¹

¹Writes J. Chirayil: “At a time when the women folk of lower castes were not permitted to cover the upper part of their bodies, Fr. Chavara wanted to raise the status of women in general. For this purpose they should be educated. He founded a religious order for women (CMC) to educate girls irrespective of caste and creed and thus help them ascend the social ladder. He wanted all the Harijans to go to school, study and equip themselves to be eligible for government services and thus come to the limelight of administration. If we look back we can see that thousands and thousands of girls of lower castes and Harijans were educated together with the students of upper castes in these schools.” Chirayil, “Bl. Fr. Chavara: The Saviour of Harijans” in Plathottam, *Bl.*

Although the starting of the seminary and congregation for women which required high investment in terms of time and resources may be identified as primarily serving only the Christian community, an extensive analysis of the impact made by those who received training in the seminaries and convents would attest to the fact that even other institutions abroad adopted an inclusive approach, and they were instrumental, in the course of time, in realizing Chavara's prophetic vision and inclusive action in the distant lands in India and even outside.

5.2. Uplifting and Empowering the Subaltern Communities

The marginalized in the society, especially the Dalit in the Indian society, must be given opportunities to redeem their own humanity and to let them experience the glory of being human before any other right or privilege is offered to them.¹ The most effective strategy to realize this ideal was to open up educational facilities to the members of such communities. Whether it was for training of the local hands for the administrative needs of the colonisers or the genuine concern for the betterment of the less privileged, many would attest to the fact that, historically, the opening of various educational institutions by the Christian missionaries in India paved the way for quality education

Kuriakose Elias Chavara: The Saviour of Harijans, the Protector of the Poor, 62-63.

¹In order to get a realistic picture of the trivial caste practices and the humiliation involved on the part of those who were considered to be outcastes, see Logan, *Malabar Manual*, vol. 1, 118-119.

accessible to the poor and the underprivileged and, consequently, the social transformation and improvement in the lives of those oppressed classes. When the missionary schools were opened mostly by the various Christian denominations in different parts of the country, there were only very few initiatives of the sort from the Catholic church of the time. This was certainly true in the Kerala context. However, as Chavara established himself as the head of the newly founded religious community, and as his acceptance was extended to the larger Christian as well as secular society, he took bold steps to open up schools attached not only to the institutions that he had established, but to attach educational institutions to every church so much so that education became the catchword among those involved in the administration of Catholic churches across Kerala. One most notable dynamism of all these schools opened up under the supervision and patronage of Chavara is the fact that they were schools which were open to pupils from all strata and all classes of society, without discriminating against any student on the basis of class, caste, or gender. Here is the cornerstone of Chavara’s innovative and inclusive vision of education, which he conceived and practised in the Kerala society of the nineteenth century, which was practically divided along the lines of caste and class.¹

¹Swami Vivekananda, in 1897, stated that the society of Kerala (he referred to as Malabar) is a lunatic asylum, as it is shamefully divided on the basis of caste and related practices: “Was there ever a sillier thing before in the world than what I saw in Malabar? The poor ‘Paraiyah’ is not allowed to pass through the same street as the high caste man, but if

A paradigm shift can be seen in the emphasis that Chavara laid on the uplift of the Dalit and women.¹ Usually, a person in authority would have been more attuned to look after the welfare of those who were close to the establishment and to maintain the status quo; he would prefer to cater to their needs as that would, in turn, safeguard and perpetuate his status in authority as well. However, Chavara had a totally different approach and perspective in dealing with the people around him. Without disregarding the welfare of the mainstream society, but at the same time without succumbing to the dominating and exclusive approaches prevailing among the higher castes and the well-to-do ruling class of the society, Chavara designed different strategies in the arena of education that would not only enlighten the world to the plight of the

he changes his name to hodge-podge English name or to a Mohamedan name, it is alright. What inference would you draw except that these Malabaris are all lunatics, their homes so many lunatic asylums and they are to be treated with derision by every race in India until they mend their manners and know better. Shame upon them that such wicked and diabolical customs are allowed." Vivekananda, *Complete Works of Swamy Vivekananda*, vol. 3: *The Future of India*. See http://www.ramakrishna vivekananda.info/vivekananda/complete_works.htm, retrieved on 15 April 2011.

¹There were a few schools for the education of girls; however, they were restricted to the girls from the upper castes. Formally, the schools owned by the government were opened up for the girls from Christian and Ezhava (a group outside the *Cāturovarṇya*) communities only in 1910. Formally availing educational facilities to the dalit communities was all the more difficult, and it took longer. In 1914, even a 'Nayar-Pulaya' conflict arose as a girls' school in Neyyattinkara (Uruttusalam) was opened up to the girls from the Pulaya community. See Kokkattu, *Vazhthappetta Chavarayachante Dalit Darsanam*, 28.

marginalized but would also put in place provisions and institutions to take care of their needs and to pave the way for the emergence of a new perspective that was more inclusive of and beneficial to the people of the marginalized classes. In 1930, Chavara started two Malayalam schools in Mannanam and Arpookara keeping in view the formal education of the Dalit communities.¹ Chavara was a man with practical sense. Hence, wherever he started educational institutions, especially for the underprivileged, he also made detailed provisions for their maintenance. Fr. Parappuram Varkey wrote in his *Chronicles* that apart from the donations Chavara had taken from the churches and wealthy people to construct the structures needed to run the school, he bought a large stretch of cultivable land for the same purpose and gave instructions to the Monastery that they should continue to take care of the affairs of the school.²

5.3. Chavara’s Writings and Their Educational Significance

Along with his institutional initiatives of starting schools, convents, hostels, and the printing press, Chavara understood that true social and cultural transformation could come forth only through ongoing encouragement and guidance, facilitated through books and other writings. One would wonder at the fact that despite his heavy religious and administrative commitments, he found time to compose literary works, both in prose and in poetry. His prolific

¹Apart from these two schools, Chavara opened schools at Edathuva, Pulincunnu, and Kainakary, which were accessible to the deprived classes. See Moozhoor, *Blessed Chavara: The Star of the East*, 77.

²Cited in Valerian, Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan, 137.

writing style is attested by the fact that the extant works, including the *Chronicles* that he had authored, are said to be more than one hundred.¹ While some of his writings provide us deeper insights into the history of the time – both of the church and the society – the others offer down-to-earth instructions on how a family life is to be conducted with decorum and in the fear of the Lord. One of his writings, “Testament of a Loving Father,” addressed to his own parishioners, was well received by the people of Kerala as it offered insights into and directions on the vicissitudes of daily life. Through this “Testament” Chavara called for a life imbued with a sense of social justice and equality. This was a clarion call from a prophet who was intent on setting things right in a society that was divided along caste and class lines. All his writings are imbued with a fundamental Christian vision, which has nothing to do with conversion of people into Christianity, but offered solid foundation for a lasting social life. In fact, his inclusive vision of society, based on fundamental Christian values, enabled him to usher in social reforms within a society that had had no history of social reform to bridge the gaps in society.

¹All these works have been published in four volumes in 1981-1982 by the CMI Prior General. The English translation of these works, *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara*, were also published from Mannanam by The Committee for the Cause of Blessed Chavara in four volumes in 1990 under the following titles: volume 1: *The Chronicles*, volume 2: *Compunction of the Soul, Dirge, and Anasthasia’s Martydom*, 3: *Spiritual Writings*, and volume 4: *The Letters*. For a description on the works of Chavara, see Sebastian Poonoly, “Writings of Blessed Chavara,” 64-72.

Chavara, a blessed poet, who wrote in his mother tongue Malayalam, has three major poems to his credit. They are *Ātmānuthāpam* (Compunction of the Soul), *Marāṇaveettil Pāduvānulla Pāna* (Dirge), and *Anasthāsyāyude Rekthasākṣitvam* (Anasthasia’s Martyrdom). These writings are rich in spiritual content and human inspiration. These literary productions were primarily Christian in content; in them we find an attempt to crystallize the author’s deeper Christ experience for posterity and to transfer the same for the benefit of his fellow beings. C. P. Sreedharan, in his review of the literary compositions of Chavara, opined that Chavara’s primary goal in all these writings was not to bring people to the religion of Christianity; instead, his sole intent was to bring Jesus Christ to the people and into their lives.¹ Thus, most of his writings were inspirational to the core.

Concurrently, it is important to note that Chavara wrote these poems in Malayalam; its significance will be clear only when we realize the fact that most of the writers of the time wrote either in Sanskrit or in Tamil, two classical languages of India, both of which were prevalent in the literary circles of the nineteenth century Kerala. Just like many effective social reformers, Chavara’s choice of the language seems to be telling upon the fact that he wanted to reach out to the masses; he wanted to inspire them with a noble value consciousness. He knew quite well that a mostly illiterate

¹Sreedharan, “Kraisthava Chaitanyam Malayālavalkaricha Kavi” (Malayalam) in Moozhoor, ed., Chavarayachan Vividha Veekshanangalil, 76.

society in Kerala will not be benefited by writings in classical languages; in fact, instructing and inspiring the masses was possible only by communicating with them in their own mother tongue. This indicates that Chavara's literary productions were made with a social and spiritual intent. He wanted to bring about personal and social transformation through his writings.

5.4. Print Media Aiming at the Transformation of Society

Despite the insurmountable difficulties he faced, Chavara was convinced of the effectiveness of the printing press in the ongoing education – be it in the sphere of religious or secular life, or formal or non-formal education. Hence, he started preparations to build a press by consulting the then existing two printing presses (CMS Press, Kottayam and Government Press, Thiruvananthapuram); with the assistance of a carpenter he made the first wooden press in 1844. It took some more time to manage the other accessories and peripherals for printing and, in 1846, *Jñāna Piyūṣam* (Spiritual Ambrosia), the first book printed in St. Joseph's Press, Mannanam, came out. According to his biographer, K. C. Chacko, "the most far-reaching, illuminating, edifying and even sanctifying field of activity initiated by Fr. Kuriakose through the monasteries in general and primarily from Mannanam was that of printing."¹

¹Chacko, *Blessed Father Kuriackos Elias Chavara*, 97. Mathew Ulakamthara has opined along the same line: "If you ask me, what is Chavara's most valuable service to the Kerala Church, I will say that it is the

Chavara was convinced of the great good that could be channelized through the print medium. As a person who was inspired by the rare but available books¹ (some of them were handwritten copies of their original, as neither he nor his teacher Thomas Palackal could afford to buy them), he knew that the transformation of the Kerala Church as well as the larger society could be effected, along with education, through the publication of good books. While the existing presses were imported from Europe, we find in this project Chavara’s unflinching determination to make an indigenous printing press. Although it was initially ridiculed and rejected by many as a sign of mental derangement,² the conviction and farsightedness of Chavara stood the test of the time and finally succeeded in making the press, cutting the types, and procuring the required materials, and, thus, paving the way for printing. In the course of time, a number of publications have come out from this press and the other presses established by the CMI congregation.³ Capturing the

establishment of St. Joseph’s Press of Mannanam” (“The First Kerala Apostle of the Press” in *Chavara Charamasadabdi 1871-1971*, 44).

¹Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 445; see also 346.

²See “Editorial,” *Nazrani Deepika*, 10 January 1896, cited in Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 354.

³CMI congregation has 16 printing and publication centres, 16 book centres, 6 media centres; it also runs more than a dozen periodicals, including magazines and journals. The first newspaper in Malayalam, *Deepika* (1887), was originally established and published from St. Joseph Press, Mannanam. Later, it was shifted to Kottayam; in the course of time, the ownership and management of this newspaper and its subsidiary publications have been transferred to the Church in Kerala and it now functions under the management of a public limited

great enhancement of common good attained through the printing press and publication, Jacob Marangattu affirms: "Foreseeing the spiritual, intellectual, and cultural advantages and the progress which the press and publication would bring to the community, Chavara established a printing press at Mannanam, the first printing press of the Catholic Church in Kerala. We can confidently say that Chavara is a 'blessed' man who was behind the two most effective means of communication in the Indian Church of his time: the pulpit and the press."¹

6. CMI Institutions as Torchbearers in Modern Education

Chavara laid the foundation of the CMI vision of education. Taking into account the different spheres of education that Chavara had opened up during his lifetime, anyone would be convinced that he was such a versatile educationist. Being both innovative and inclusive in his educational policies, Chavara focused on both the religious and secular spheres of education. As we have already seen, immediately after the laying of the foundation stone of the first indigenous religious institute, in 1833, the first organized seminary (centre for the training of priests) was opened in Mannanam. Later, in 1846, the first school also started functioning from the same campus. Although there are differences in the content and approach adopted by these two types of educational endeavours, both possess the

company, *Rashtra Deepika Ltd.* See <http://www.deepika.com/>, accessed on 20 April 2011.

¹Marangattu, "Blessed Chavara: A True Pastor in the Footsteps of Jesus," 77.

common aim of developing integral human beings who would be personally transformed and socially integrated. While religious education is more attuned to the creation of a set of committed leaders of society, public education imparted through schools and colleges primarily focuses on the integral development of individuals who would become responsible members of a family and the nation at large. Indeed, assuming the role of leaders in nation building and service to the humanity is necessarily shared by both the spheres.

6.1. Chavara and CMI Ecclesiastical Education

Chavara had taken full advantage of the education imparted at the *Malpanate* (training centre for priestly candidates modelled after the *Gurukula* system) under the direction of Thomas Palackal. According to the first biographer of Chavara, Leopold Beccaro, an Italian Carmelite missionary, Chavara, even as a 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.”¹ Hence, he worked hard to learn languages and the sacred sciences, especially

¹Leopold Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara* (originally written in Malayalam in 1871), trans. Postulation of the Cause of Bl. Chavara, Mannanam: St. Joseph Monastery, 2003, 6. According to Joseph M. O. Nedumkunnam, “realizing that the good future of the Kerala Church lies in well disciplined priests, the founding fathers established a seminary at Mannanam.” “Chavara and the Religious Congregation of Mary Immaculate” (Malayalam) in *Chavara Charamasadabdi 1871-1971*, 6.

the Bible, so much so that, after his priestly ordination, he was acclaimed to be very efficient both in preaching and teaching and administration of the affairs entrusted to him.

When Chavara started assisting his *guru* Thomas Palackal in instructing the students in the *Malpanate* (at Pallippuram), he is said to have inspired the candidates to invest their best into the training. Later, when the seminary started to function in Mannanam, Chavara was instrumental in designing the programme in such a way that at the end of the training, they would be more effective in realizing not only the salvation of the souls, but also the renewal of the society as a whole and the uplift of those people who were segregated against in the social and religious structures of Kerala.

As it has been already mentioned, the foundation of the first indigenous religious congregation for men is coupled with the foundation of the first formally organized seminary in the Syro-Malabar Church of Kerala. In 1833, the first seminary was established at Mannanam (i.e., just two years after the laying of the foundation stone for the monastery). It was meant for the seminarians of both the religious community and those of the diocesan clergy. Compared to the *Malpanates* conducted exclusively by one priest, the new seminary with a formal training programme under the auspices of the CMI Mannanam monastery was conducted with more priests to instruct and discipline the candidates, and this was found to be more effective. Those priests and missionaries who completed their training in this seminary were acclaimed to be well-versed in the Bible and equipped

with various skills to communicate the Word of God and to administer the needs of the communities. In fact, according to Kaniampampil, “What prompted him to start a serious and systematic seminary formation was his deep conviction that the growth and wellbeing of the Church could emerge only through the instrumentality of priests spiritually deep-rooted, morally upright, intellectually erudite, and well-trained in communication skills.”¹ Seeing the good that this seminary under the leadership of Chavara had brought about, the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly, Monsignor Bernardin instructed Chavara and his confreres to start more of such seminaries in different parts of Kerala (Vazhakulam in 1866, Elthuruth in 1868, and Pulinkunnu in 1872) so that quality ecclesiastical education could be imparted to all candidates for priesthood and a spiritual and social renewal could be effected through the organs of the Catholic Church in Kerala.

It is interesting to note that Chavara facilitated the learning of Sanskrit both to priestly candidates and children from various parishes in the school established in Mannanam in 1846. At the time of the establishment of the Sanskrit school, he sent out an instruction to various parishes that two students each should be sent to the school. Although these two groups do not seem to be very huge in terms of the number, it was another innovative and strategic step adopted by Chavara to ensure that the members of the Catholic Church in Kerala had people who were well-versed

¹Kaniampampil, “Blessed Chavara and His Unique Contributions to the Church in India,” 4.

in Sanskrit, a language in which many of the classic literary compositions of the country were available. In the course of time, this facilitated the training of many a Christian in Sanskrit, who, in turn, also made significant contributions to the Sanskrit language. Moreover, the learning of Sanskrit language by a few in the Church is to be identified as a very significant step as it gradually opened up the gates of Indian and Hindu thought to the Christian community. Knowledge of Sanskrit facilitated better understanding of their worldview and greater appreciation of their life patterns. Thus, the recognition of Indian philosophy and its adoption into the seminary curriculum, which may be recognized as an innovative step adopted by the Indian Catholic Church after the Vatican Council II, have their beginning in the praiseworthy vision of Chavara as it is reflected in the starting of Sanskrit school.¹ Moreover, the later generations have made significant contributions in this regard not only by imparting training in Sanskrit language, but also by opening up various centres of learning with a specific focus on Indian culture. The establishment of cultural and dialogue centres across the country by various Christian Churches in general, and by the CMI members in particular,² especially after the Vatican Council II, have accentuated the processes already set in motion by the open-minded and all-embracing educational motive of Chavara.

¹Moozhoor, *Blessed Chavara*, viii.

²The CMI congregation has established 17 cultural centres, 3 art galleries and museums, and 5 dialogue centres in different parts of the country.

The contribution of Chavara and CMI institutions in the area of ecclesiastical education is momentous. “From its very inception, giving leadership in intellectual, spiritual, and contextual formation to the priestly and religious candidates has been one of the perceptible charisms of the CMI congregation.”¹ The seminary established in Mannanam, in 1833, and the programme of training initiated by Chavara, were extended further by the opening of three more seminaries, as stated above. At a later stage, when the facilities in the seminary had to be upgraded, it was re-founded at Chethipuzha, in 1918. The inspired members of the CMI congregation, especially Fathers Maurus Valiyaparampil and Jonas Thaliath, had greater plans to transfer this seminary to Bangalore in view of better and more effective training and wider socio-cultural exposure to the students and thus to assume wider apostolic responsibilities. Thus, in 1957, the Dharmaram College was founded in Bangalore. Although it started to function as the major study house of the CMI congregation, in the course of time, it has attained greater heights. In 1976, the Faculty of Theology was established as an independent institute, having the powers to award the degrees of bachelors and masters in theology and bachelors in philosophy. The Faculty of Philosophy was established in 1983, raising Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram (DVK) into the status of a pontifical athenaeum with the provision to award degrees up to PhD in philosophy and theology. Determined about the further growth of the athenaeum, and sensing the need

¹DVK Handbook 2010-2011, 13.

of the Syro-Malabar Church to have well-versed experts in Oriental Canon Law, an Institute of Oriental Canon Law was established in 1999.

Dharmaram has made great strides in the path of growth by opening up four regional extension centres to impart contextualized training to the priestly and religious candidates. The first, in 1983, Darsana Institute of Philosophy was established in Wardha, Maharashtra. The second, Samanvaya Theology College started functioning in Bhopal in the year 1994 as an extension centre of the Faculty of Theology. At present, Samanvaya has centres also in Rshikesh and Kolchur in Jagdalpur. Further, four institutes of theology and philosophy are affiliated to DVK. With a number of postgraduate and doctoral research programmes, DVK has more than 1100 students (the largest among the ecclesiastical centres of learning in India) taking their training in disciplines such as philosophy, theology, canon law, spirituality and counselling.

One of the main thrusts and the unique features of Dharmaram, which has set its “face and fabric of Dharmaram” over a period of half a century, is the openness towards other churches and religions. While the ecumenical thrust has made more academic collaboration between DVK and United Theological College, Bangalore, the development of a positive approach to other religions is crystallized through the establishment of the Centre for the Study of World Religions (1971) and the *Journal of Dharma* (1975). These two merit special mention as they have been instrumental in bringing about an inclusive approach not only in Dharmaram and Bangalore, but also among those

who were trained in Dharmaram, as they have become the carriers of this noble legacy throughout India, and have become very powerful advocates of interreligious dialogue and positive collaboration among the followers of different religions in social and cultural fields. The Fellowship in Religious Experience (FIRE), a unique venture of CSWR, which offers a positive ambience to anyone who participates in the religious worship of different religions performed by the members belonging to those religions, has been adopted by many such movements and institutions. So also, the promotion of scientific research and publication of research findings through the *Journal of Dharma* has offered the chance to the wider world of scholarship to understand and cherish the best of different religions. Indeed, these two organs have positively contributed to the inculcation of an inclusive approach, after the model of Chavara, in the pluralistic religio-cultural context of India.

Along with the formation of the clergy, the CMI's take keen interest in the formation of the laity as well. There are various programmes offered at Dharmaram to cater to the training of those who want to deepen their understanding of the Bible, Christian doctrine, etc. The Centre for the Study of World Religions, the Centre for Dalit Solidarity, the Centre for Environmental Studies, the Centre for Women Studies, etc., are its organs which keep the portals of DVK open to the wider world for the training of all, including the laity, in the disciplines that require special attention in the development of a renewed society. There are various philosophical and theological journals published by the CMI fraternity, from DVK and elsewhere, to bring to the public

the latest research findings in different domains of ecclesiastical interest. While *Journal of Dharma: Dharmaram Journal of Religions and Philosophies* and *Jeevadhara: Journal of Theology* (both in Malayalam and English) have successfully carried out their mission over a period of 35 years, there are many other scientific journals, such as *Third Millennium*, *Asian Horizons*, *Vinayasadhana*, *Iustitia*, etc., published with the intention of reaching out to the public at large. One of the key features of these journals is the aim of pooling together international scholarship in the development of a genuinely Indian and Christian thought and perspective, be it in the domain of philosophy or theology, or any other specific area of interest. Another significant involvement of the CMI members is the starting of the Indian Theological Association (by Constantine Manalel) and the Association of Christian Philosophers of India (with Albert Nambiamparampil as an initial collaborator) at the national level. There are many other organizations which are founded and managed by the CMI members and institutions in different parts of India. In all, these institutions and organizations have been continuing the legacy of innovative and inclusive methods of formal and non-formal education in the domain of ecclesiastical studies as they were opened up by Chavara and his first generation confreres.

As it has evolved, the ecclesiastical education imparted by the CMI congregation is also innovative and inclusive. Following the footsteps of Chavara who made the innovative step of starting a formal seminary education system in Mannanam, Dharmaram has made multifarious

innovations in religious and priestly formation. With the intention of integrating the best of the Indian culture into the training of the students, Dharmaram has made an innovative curriculum, incorporating the history of Indian philosophy, which includes the learning of Sanskrit and other classical languages, *Śruti*, *Smṛti*, the Orthodox and Heterodox Philosophical Systems, and Modern and Contemporary Indian Thought. Moreover, the teaching of many systematic subjects is also imbued with the contributions from Indian thinkers. This has also paved the way for the opening of the Centre for the Study of World Religions (CSWR) and the publication of *Journal of Dharma*. Another innovative step made by DVK is the opening of Dharmaram Academy for Distance Education (DADE), which offers distance education programmes (postgraduate diploma) in more than 10 branches of ecclesiastical learning. DADE has opened up the domain of ecclesiastical learning to those interested parties who cannot afford regular programmes to learn subjects related to philosophy, theology, canon law, and spirituality and counselling. With a well-developed curriculum and scientifically developed course materials prepared by experts in each field, this programme has already made a great impact, especially among the laity and the religious who are otherwise involved in various services and missions.

The coexistence of DVK and Christ University on the same campus and the mutual collaboration between these two institutions of higher learning in various academic and non-academic projects facilitate more inter-disciplinary learning and research. The creation of the Departments of

Philosophy and Theology under the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in the Christ University has also opened up the horizons of both the institutions to bridge the gap between the ecclesiastical and general study programmes, which has been found to be very advantageous to the students pursuing various degrees under the ecclesiastical system.

In view of providing quality philosophical and theological training also to women in the Church, Dharmaram was opened up to the women religious, and it has the distinction of being the first seminary in India to be opened up to women. It is heartening to note that there are currently many women enrolling for various courses in all the ecclesiastical disciplines that are offered at DVK. The quest to provide inclusive education has also inspired the opening of different centres and programmes, especially the Centre for Dalit Solidarity (Faculty of Philosophy) and the Centre for Women Studies (Faculty of Theology). These centres offer programmes to the whole student body in such a way that they are gradually conscientized for a more inclusive Christian approach in all their missions and activities. From the perspective of the Indian Church, DVK has the unique distinction of having students not only from all the three churches in the Catholic communion (i.e., Syro-Malabar, Latin, and Syro-Malankara churches) but also from non-Catholic churches and denominations. The exchange of views and the knowledge of the lifestyle and ritualistic practices of all these different traditions enable the students to develop a cordial understanding and openness towards

those who adopt different positions and practices even with regard to Christian vision and life.

6.2. Public Education and CMI Institutions

The life vision of Chavara has set the tone and texture of the CMI institutions that he and his successors have founded across India, from Kanyakumari in the South to Poonch of Jammu and Kashmir in the North. The innovative steps that Chavara had initiated in bringing about an inclusive and holistic education have been followed by the CMI institutions. The social commitment of all CMI institutions, including the educational institutions, is obvious in their decision and implementation of a policy according to which 10% of the income of any institution is to be spent specifically for the uplift of the marginalized and economically weaker sections of the society. Along this line, every educational institution earmarks and spends a significant amount of money in its annual budgetary provisions for supporting students from the locality, especially those who come from the marginalized sections or poor families.

The initial steps to establish schools on the part of Chavara and his colleagues have taken wings in the form of establishing more educational institutions across the breadth and width of India. K. C. Chacko wrote while narrating the educational endeavours of Chavara: “He had even planned a central college for Catholics when he was Vicar General; only it did not materialize then owing to

various unfavourable circumstances.”¹ Despite the non-realization of this centre for higher education during the time of Chavara, the CMI educational institutions penetrate all strata of the society and various localities, including remote villages, and they include a number of quality schools, including special schools, university colleges, teacher training colleges, medical and engineering colleges, a deemed university, and various centres of ecclesiastical learning and research.

The first university college of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate, Sacred Heart College, was established in Thevara, Kochi, in 1944. The presence of CMI institutions in different parts of India is very vibrantly felt through the services rendered by various types of educational institutions. At present, there are 24 science, commerce, and arts colleges, 12 professional colleges, 5 nursing colleges and schools, 1 polytechnic (Carmel Polytechnic, Punnapra, Alappuzha), 9 teacher training colleges, 12 industrial training centres (ITC), 72 higher secondary schools, 112 high schools, 6 special schools, 132 upper primary schools, 150 lower primary schools, 139 kindergartens, and 47 hostels and boarding houses for students. Along with the above, CMIs have established a medical college (Amala Medical College, Trissur), two engineering colleges (Rajagiri Engineering College, Kakkanad, Kochi and Christ College of Engineering, Bangalore), 15 documentation and research

¹Chacko, *Blessed Father Kuriackos Elias Chavara*, 64. See also Chathamparampil and Kureethara, “Unique Contributions of Blessed Chavara in Educating the Kerala Society,” 124-125.

centres, and a deemed university (Christ University, Bangalore).¹

While recognizing the innovative and quality higher education imparted through various university colleges and other centres of learning under the management of the CMI congregation, it must be mentioned that Christ University in Bangalore has made a great leap in offering more innovative programmes of education, including professionally oriented undergraduate, postgraduate and research programmes. Established in 1969, as an affiliated college of the Bangalore University, it has become the most sought-after educational institution in the City of Bangalore. By the introduction of innovative and modern curriculum, insistence on academic discipline, imparting of holistic education and with the help of creative and dedicated staff, Christ University has been continually rated among the top 10 educational institutions of the country. It has the rare distinction of being the first institution in Karnataka to be accredited by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) and the University Grants Commission (UGC) for quality education. On 7 October 2004, the UGC had conferred autonomy to Christ College. On May 20, 2005, it became the first College in South India to be reaccredited with A+ by NAAC. UGC has identified it as an Institution with Potential for Excellence in June 2006. Later, on 22 July 2008, under Section 3 of the UGC Act, 1956, Ministry of Human Resources Development of the Union Government of India has

¹See http://www.cmi.in/information_list.php?action=search&category=id&txt=6&by_colms=col, accessed on 16 April 2011.

declared it a “Deemed-to-be University.” According to the vision statement of Christ University, “education should be relevant to the needs of the time and address the problems of the day. Being inspired by Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara, the founder of Carmelites of Mary Immaculate and the pioneer in innovative education, Christ University was proactive in defining and redefining its mission and strategies reading the signs of the time.”¹ With its three faculties, 28 departments covering various disciplines, around 200 academic programmes (including professional courses such as BTech and MBA, and research programmes at the level of MPhil and PhD) Christ University has already made a benchmark in higher education. It is a champion in imparting education with value consciousness and social commitment,² after the model of holistic education imparted

¹See <http://www.christuniversity.in/secmenudisp.php?mid=1&subid=2>, accessed on 20 April 2011.

²The social commitment of Christ University is very obvious in terms of its community reach out and developmental programmes in places like Hoskote (Karnataka) and Chandrapur (Maharashtra). There are occasions for students to extend their services in village contexts, and students from these supported villages are given chances to make use of the facilities on the campus. There are certain programmes which have got social work as a necessary component in the credits earned for the degree. Christ University is committed in offering quality education to the poor and the marginalized in the society, which can be seen from the actual spending for socially oriented programmes (during the academic year 2010-2011, the following allocations have been made: fee concession: ₹ 16,500,000; scholarship or financial assistance to students: ₹ 13,020,000; and contribution to social cause: ₹ 30000000, all the three totally amounting to ₹ 59,520,000, i.e., about six million rupees) is In view of serving the local community, a Kannada Medium School, Christa Vidyalaya, is established by the CMI congregation on the same campus,

by Chavara, equipping its students to sail through the vicissitudes of life in the twenty-first century with excellent professional competence and service-oriented personal confidence. The deemed-to-be university status has enabled Christ University to redesign many of its regular academic programmes to be embedded with social awareness and commitment, which is believed to be setting in a new academic culture among both the faculty and students to be more proactive in the given socio-economic milieu of India.

Education imparted by the CMI institutions focuses on the all-round development of students.¹ Hence, as the CMI presence was spreading across the country, members have initiated and animated various student movements such as

and its establishment and maintenance are supported from the commonly pooled resources of various educational endeavours on Dharmaram College campus; this school is continuously adjudged to be the best Kannada Medium School in the whole of Bangalore. Christ University started an evening college to facilitate the formal learning of those boys and girls who have already been forced to work in order to support their families. Although the evening college does not have too many students, this is a praiseworthy venture with a social face, where hundreds of students are supported by its management and staff.

¹A new venture of the Christ University is worthy of mention here. In view of offering holistic education to all students, Christ University has put in place a new scheme of certificate courses called “Mandatory Extra Disciplinary Elective.” This scheme offers the chance to all undergraduate students to be necessarily introduced into different courses belonging to other disciplines. For example, a commerce student will have to take two MEDE from non-commerce disciplines, such as science or arts subjects, during the course of first two years. This new initiative intends to partially wedge the gap that extreme focus on specialisation has brought in.

Neelamunnani, Deepika Children's League (DCL), Kerala Catholic Students' League (KCSL), Kerala Catholic Children's Association (KCCA), *Chavara Sauhruda Vedi*, etc. Along with faith formation and personality development of the children of the Church, these organizations have provided a very effective platform for their integral growth. Moreover, these organizations also have been instrumental in nurturing leadership qualities, social consciousness, and the readiness to address the needs of the society.

As educational and cultural developments are not restricted to educational institutions and student movements, the CMI members have also focused on the development of various cultural and inter-religious dialogue centres across the nation. In all, there are seventeen such institutions established and managed by the members of CMI congregation. A few among them are Kalabhavan (Kochi), Chavara Cultural Centre (Ernakulam and Kozhikode), Darsana Cultural Centre (Kottayam), Upasana (Thodupuzha), Divyodaya (Coimbatore), Centre for the Study of World Religions (Bangalore), Navachetana (Bhopal), Sadharmyam (Srinagar), and Jeevan Dhara (Jaiharikhal on the Himalayas). This list also includes two such centres abroad: CIIS, Rome, Italy and Chavara International Centre for Indian and Interreligious Studies, Sacramento, California, USA.

The web of CMI educational institutions across the different states of India aims at "the formation of the human person for the fulfilment of his individual and social

responsibilities.”¹ Every CMI educational endeavour considers “the integral formation of the human person for the fulfilment of his/her individual and social responsibilities.” Further, it aims “at forming leaders who are intellectually competent, spiritually mature, morally upright, psychologically integrated, physically healthy and socially acceptable; who will champion the cause of justice, love, truth and peace and who are ever open to further growth.”²

It is obvious that the CMI educational institutions are limited in their reach, especially when we consider the extent of India as a nation with over billion people. Hence, intelligent planning and prioritization are usually employed. “Our limited resources dictate that we concentrate our energies in conducting institutions that provide quality education, especially for the benefit of the underprivileged. We are also obliged to reach out to the people who do not find a place in our institutions, through non-formal and non-institutionalized methods of education.”³ These involvements “aspire towards creating a just and humane society where the dignity of the human person is respected, where unjust social structures are challenged, where our cultural heritage of *ahimsa*, religious harmony, and national integration are upheld, and where

¹“CMI Vision of Education,” §1.1, in General Synaxis Secretariat, *In Search of CMI Charism and Identity*, 345.

²“CMI Vision of Education,” §4.6.

³“CMI Vision of Education,” §3.2. CMI congregation runs 55 non-formal education centres in different parts of India. See “CMI Congregation at a Glance,” *CMI Diary 2011*, 2.

the poor and the marginalized are especially taken care of.”¹ From this angle, in every educational institution run under the management of the CMI, programmes of social awareness are a necessary ingredient of the curriculum. That is, apart from the professional training imparted to interested and selected students in social uplift programmes, the CMI education has the necessary component of social awareness programmes which take the students to the real world outside the lecture halls so that they become aware of the ground reality of the lives of the masses and prepare them to respond to their needs in the most genuine way possible.

Moreover, the education imparted in CMI institutions is conspicuously religious, though not necessarily exclusively Christian in the narrow sense. The “CMI Vision of Education” articulates the justification for setting the religious thrust of the education imparted as follows: “Drawing inspiration and guidance from the life of Jesus Christ and all the noble sages, *rşis*, and prophets of our country, from the Gospel we proclaim, from the cultural heritage of our nation which is deeply and fundamentally religious, and from the spirit and tradition of the CMI vision of education, we respond to the demands of our times manifested in the needs of individual and society.”² It must also be stated that the CMI institutions, while very clearly maintaining the Christian focus, have not been functioning as centres to convert people into Christianity; all our

¹“CMI Vision of Education,” §4.6.

²“CMI Vision of Education,” §4.5.

educational institutions, on the other hand, are employed as organs to convert people into better human beings imbued with gospel values such as truth, justice, and unconditional love for all, which both Chavara and the CMI congregation along with the entire church deem to be the end of all educational processes and projects.

7. Conclusion

The value and impact of the educational initiatives of Chavara cannot be inferred merely from the number of institutions that he had started. However, an understanding of the historical background of the then Syrian Catholics and other backward communities in Kerala in the domain of education,¹ especially the need to start from scratch, the courage and sagacity with which Chavara initiated the processes to start educational institutions attached to the monasteries and parish churches, his success in facilitating the collaboration of various individuals with their financial and moral support, his intent on opening the educational facilities to all children, including girls and the children from the marginalized groups in the society, his wisdom in choosing to start a Sanskrit school, accessible even to those who were otherwise forbidden to study that language, and his wholehearted involvement in the training of priests as the efficient and knowledgeable leaders of the Catholic community (and through them reaching out to the rest of

¹For a brief but excellent discussion on the educational status of nineteenth century Kerala, see Chathamparampil and Kureethara, “Unique Contributions of Blessed Chavara in Educating the Kerala Society,” 121-123.

the society) by establishing formal training in the newly-established seminaries, etc., indicate very powerfully the innovative nature of his educational involvement. Indeed, the educational endeavours of Chavara are deemed to be more innovative as they were successful steps having a lasting impact in bringing about a change in the consciousness of the people irrespective of caste, creed, gender, and economic status.

The integral view of life adopted by Chavara did not make a watertight compartmentalization between his religious commitment and commitment to society; for him they were two sides of the same coin,¹ where neither could be dismissed. His commitment to God was incomplete without his selfless services for the uplift of the humanity; his social consciousness and the acts of empowerment of all sections of the society, especially his conscientious and unflinching involvement in imparting education were incomplete without its religious fountainhead or commitment to Jesus Christ.

The greatness of an innovator does not lie only in his being personally innovative, but also in his ability to continue the strategy of innovation by those who succeed; the successors need to be not only innovative but they should also be capable of continuing the founding legacies to their full stature. Indeed, the innovative and inclusive education that Chavara had started is adjudged to be successful especially based on Chavara's sagacity and determination in sharing his noble vision and relevant

¹Venkataraman, "Chavara Represents Indian Christianity at Its Best," 87.

mission with his successors in the CMI and CMC¹ congregations. Cherishing the founding charism, these communities have continuously involved in nation building and the ongoing renewal of humanity through various institutions, especially through their educational enterprises.

Although critical estimates indicate that India has only 37.5% functionally literate people (i.e., those who can read, write, and understand),² the concerted efforts made by the Christian educational institutions across the country have made a very significant impact in the making of modern democratic India. While there were many who have contributed towards this cause, the role played by Chavara and the CMI institutions, especially in developing the educational index of Kerala and many other remote villages as well as towns and cities in different parts of India, and in imparting a value-based and professionally equipped education to the masses, is praiseworthy. CMI educational institutions continue to offer quality education to all. One of the thrusts of the CMI educational institutions, as it was adopted in the year 2008, is to make available quality education also to the poor and the marginalized.³ To this

¹With over 6270 members, 654 convents, 710 educational institutions (mostly catering to women), 58 healthcare institutions, 254 charitable institutions, and 8 social institutions, the Congregation of Mother of Carmel (CMC), which was founded by Chavara along with Leopold Beccaro in 1866, has made significant contributions towards the building up of Indian society. See for more information <http://www.cmc Sisters.org/statistics.php>, accessed on 21 April 2011.

²Chauduri, *The Great Indian Dream*, 49.

³CMI General Synaxis XXXVI, “Vision Statement,” §§34, 63 and “Action Plan and Resolutions,” §32, in *Communication, Communion, and*

effect, apart from following the instructions of the government educational agencies, all CMI institutions have made special provisions such as fee concessions and other admission strategies. Given the context of the twenty-first century and the fast pace in progress that humanity is making, the CMI institutions are called upon to be more innovative, inclusive, and proactive in their vision, mission, and strategies. They need to keep pace with the times and involve themselves in an ongoing self-examination so as to ascertain whether the personnel and institutional machinery are oriented to the glory of God and the common good of the people, which constituted the guiding principle of Chavara in all his educational and humanitarian endeavours.

As the members of the CMI congregation and its institutions continue to serve the nation in the best way possible, it is necessary that they not only continue the legacy of Chavara, but also open up modern avenues and novel strategies in education, sensing the pulse of the new generation and the needs of the twenty-first century. Most of the CMI initiatives are at the school level; of course, they are rated to be the best in the localities. Yet, the CMI pool of educators is yet to make their collective presence felt in offering a strategic breakthrough at the national level. In order to make this a reality, more concerted efforts and focused researches must take place.

While the public-private partnership will have to be ushered in to bring about lasting quality change in the Indian educational scenario, especially in the domain of higher education, CMI institutions are called upon to invest their personnel as well as material resources in imparting quality education to all at an affordable price. The already articulated and practised social commitment in CMI educational institutions should be made more vibrant and all-encompassing. Keeping the best patterns of educational innovation that Chavara had adopted, these institutions must provide for the same quality education also to the poor, who cannot otherwise enter the portals of many a private quality educational institution. Moreover, following the academically innovative and successful models of Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram and Christ University (both in Bangalore), more comprehensive educational patterns are to be developed to serve the growing interests of the new generation India.

Education facilitates change at various levels of human existence and social intercourse. If education were to cease to be innovative, it would turn out to be an instrument of the vested interests to maintain the status quo; it would lead to the creation of a society that would be next to the dead. Education must unleash the creative energies of human individuals which would be properly channelized for the integral growth of the whole of creation. When education is restricted to a particular class, it would turn out to be the most destructive tool in the hands of that class to demean and degrade the others to such an extent that one human would exploit the other in any inhuman manner. If

education is all-inclusive, making room for all, and inviting everyone aboard, humanity would begin to blossom and the human society would thrive together; instead of exploitation of one by another, what would emerge is the development and transformation of everyone and the realization of the wellbeing of all. Being an enlightened educator, Chavara was innovatively instrumental in providing an inclusive education. It is his courage and farsightedness, and his ability to inspire others in humane causes that enabled him to open up the centres of learning that he had started for the Dalits and women, which in turn, have been instrumental in transforming the entire society.

CHAPTER 2

Integral Vision of Education for an Enhanced Humanity

1. Introduction

“We are born human; but we become human.” That is, although physically all of us are born human, socially and culturally we have to become human beings through an arduous and lifelong process carried out within the human community. In fact, this becoming process cannot have a preset goal, by the attainment of which the process can be halted or brought to an end. In spite of being an unrelenting process, strategically, life should have proximate goals which we shall approach and realize individually and collectively through persistent and concerted efforts. It has to take into account not only the training of the intellect but also the will of human beings, as they have to balance and integrate the operations of these two vital faculties if they were to achieve a *humane* and integral development. Therefore, the educative process that begins even before we

are born forms and transforms us into beings that have a sense of meaning and value in life.

2. Education as a Humanizing Process

Education¹ is the most important means that initiates a multifarious process of humanizing which has been in vogue from the very beginning of human existence. In general, education involves imparting or acquiring knowledge through which the distinctive powers of reasoning and judgment could be developed, thus, intellectually and integrally preparing human beings to achieve maturity in life. According to S. Radhakrishnan, "the true aim of education should be the production of individuals harmonious in character and creative in spirit."² Maharishi Mahesh Yogi articulates it further in his famous book, *Science of Being and Art of Living*:

Education aims at culturing the mind of a man to enable him to accomplish all he would like to accomplish in the great field of life. Education should necessarily enable a man to make use of his full

¹The verb "educate," deriving from the Latin root *educare* (which is from *ex-*, "out" and *ducere*, "lead"), means "to rear," "to bring up," to instruct," and "to lead forth," and thus stands for training any person "so as to develop the intellectual and moral powers," or "to train, discipline so as to develop some special aptitude, taste, or disposition." Education, as a process, includes both "the systematic instruction ... given to the young [and adult] in preparation for ... life" and a "culture or development of powers, formation of character, as contrasted with the imparting of mere knowledge or skill." *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd Edition (1989), s.v. "educate" and "education."

²S. Radhakrishnan, *India and China*, Bombay: Hind Kitabs, 1944, 54.

potential in the field of his body, mind, and spirit. But it should also develop him in the ability to make the best use of his personality, surroundings, and circumstances so that he may accomplish the maximum in life for himself and for all others.¹

Thus, whatever is the method of education adopted by persons or a society at large, it must be capable of helping them derive those values, goals, and direction that are proper to the socialisation of human beings. Moreover, it should facilitate understanding each one’s inner self, potentialities, and possible horizons of development so that he or she could be properly prepared to face the challenges in life and make the best out of life.

3. Education as a Civilizing Process

Education, whether carried out at home or in an institutional setting, has the potential to mould the minds by way of imparting the core values that have been accepted and acknowledged by the society at large over a long period of time. Education becomes creative of the human spirit if it frees individuals and societies to re-create existing values into more harmonious configuration of life. It shall, however, not envisage a slavish style of adaptation, which will only tend to curtail the human spirit and its ingenuity. The ability of those who undergo education to think for themselves, to imagine and to be creative, and, thus, to identify the importance of the values inculcated must be

¹Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, *Science of Being and Art of Living: Transcendental Meditation*, New York: Meridian, 1995, 208.

respected and enhanced at all levels. It will result in a healthy and spontaneous acceptance or rejection of the values, paving the way for the development of a mature and vibrant culture or civilization. Thus, education shall be identified as the cornerstone of a civilization, and shall be approached with the uncompromising seriousness that it deserves as the soul of *humane* advance.

In fact, education is capable of initiating processes that may lead either to healthy development of individuals and societies, or to subversive and violent turn of events. History is witness to the fact that many a violent conflict has been initiated by subversive processes of education, and had been instrumental in destabilising thriving cultures and civilizations. However, it shall also be recalled that educative processes have been powerful enough to heal the political and cultural wounds caused by violent overtures – just or unjust – and political uprisings. It is obvious from the previous statements that education as a process can be both creative and destructive at the same time. Assuming that most of the educative endeavours are creative (especially, as it is also possible to transform even a subversive method of education into an ingenious resource for the development of humanity), we shall dwell on the contemporary scene of education, with the goal of highlighting certain positive dimensions that seem to be missing from the models adopted at various levels of institutionalized educative procedures.

4. Education as a Transforming Process

Education provides us with a chance to immerse ourselves in distilled *anemnesis* (meaning “memory”) and to the dynamic *poiéo* (meaning “to create anew, make, do”)¹ by joining the dynamic effects of human freedom to settled culture. The dynamic nature of the process would vary from mild to drastic transformations. It calls for an integration of the riches of the past, creativity of the present, and possibilities of the future. The success of a generation will depend, to a great extent, on its ability to weave together these triple dimensions of human existence consciously and integrally. A civilization will be acclaimed by the later ones only to the extent it has the sagacity to leap above its own

¹The two terms here have their inspiration from the quote of Radhakrishnan, where he proposes that “production of individuals harmonious in character and creative in spirit” is the aim of education. See S. Radhakrishnan, *India and China*, 54. But, he does not use the Greek terms. Notice that *anemnesis* is used in the nominative sense, due to the distilled character of whatever the humanity has achieved through the sedimenting nature of every instance of cultural and civilizational past, however perennial a certain culture may value its own “truths” and customs. The concept of *poiéo* is used here in the verbal sense, since it is an educative inculcation of ever-wiser possibilities (future) into the present by forcing possible futures into the present. In short, *poiéo* integrates all the three tenses of human advancement in the spiritual fruits of well-rounded education. It is an on-going process and, hence, partially free. All would agree that the most prized joy and wealth of a teacher (in a wider sense) is in freeing oneself and the students (in the general sense) to witness greater freedoms being kneaded by their private dough, with the admixture of lots and lots of other dough! This is an ongoing process. (I am grateful to Raphael Neelamkavil for suggesting the rich nuances of the Greek expressions used).

trivialities by having its firm foundations on the time-tested values bequeathed from the past, but at the same time determined to keep the wider horizons of the future as hope and reality at the same time. In short, the future, or realization of the projected possibilities, shall be the hallmark of relevance of any machinery of education.

5. Education as a Philosophizing Process

Education for civilization must have as its integral part an education for philosophizing. Each member of the human race must be enabled to think for himself/herself. Each one must be enabled to initiate a process of ever-enhancing rationale for life and its activities. Openness to the unseen horizons could be facilitated only when humanity is ready to look beyond the past and the present designs: an openness that calls for a readiness to part with the past and the present, a readiness to see through the future, and to recognize the superiority of the posterity to which one has contributed but a little! This will be realized only if each member of humanity is enabled to stand on his/her own feet; it is not a call for rejecting the rich traditions and valued customs; but certainly it envisions the ability on the part of individuals to look beyond what the human civilizations have achieved so far, a courageous but meaningful leap to the unknown, having firm faith in humanity's capacity to bring forth ever fresh and new dimensions to life in its ideal fullness. Though philosophy is largely understood in terms of its logical application, the philosophizing referred to here shall be understood more

along a holistic line.¹ This shall obviously involve all human powers such as thinking, feeling, intuiting (including the spiritual or mystical intuition), etc., all rolled into one. Education to holism by bestowing self-enhancing philosophizing to the individual (which is at the same time other-enhancing) is, perhaps, the intellectual and potentially actualizing summit of any system of education.

At this stage it must be made clear that by education we do not mean mere classroom teaching and learning, although it is an important part of it. To educate, in its real sense, does not mean merely to transmit some skeletal information about one or the other subject from teacher to the students; it is neither merely learning from books, nor memorising some facts. Education must result in changing the inner person; every educational institution – if it is true to its primary task of advancing the humanity beyond distilled *anamnesis* via dynamic *poiéo* into actualization of wise possibilities – should bring forth a new humanity through every individual trained in it. The lessons imparted in any educative setting must enable the students to transform their own perspectives or viewpoints. This is creative advance of humanity initiated through education. Wrote Ellen Key in 1900: “Our age cries for personality, but

¹A statement by Pope John Paul II is pertinent here. He states: “Men and women have at their disposal an array of resources for generating greater knowledge of truth so that their lives may be ever more human. Among these is philosophy, which is directly concerned with asking the question of life’s meaning and sketching an answer to it. Philosophy emerges, then, as one of the noblest of human tasks.” Pope John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* (Encyclical Letter), §3.

it will ask in vain, until we allow them to have their own will, think their own thoughts, work out their own knowledge, form their own judgments..."¹ This calls for an extraordinarily critical mind and a capacity on the part of the students to observe, look, or listen for themselves, and thus to form their own judgments. Of course, this runs the risk of deviations and wrong judgments, and a consequent embracing of error instead of truth. Here we identify the relevance of teachers, who shall not only initiate the process of learning, but must be capable of guiding the students on the right path of judgment; it shall, however, not be carried out merely by resorting to age-old rules and readymade formulations of civil law and religious dogmas, but through an arduous process of critical and creative thinking that would enable each individual to tread on the right path through the light of his or her own intellect and will. "The Declaration on Christian Education," issued by Vatican Council II, envisages the same goal for school and collegiate education:

... children and young people must be helped, with the aid of the latest advances in psychology and the arts and science of teaching, to develop harmoniously their physical, moral and intellectual endowments so that they may gradually acquire a mature sense of responsibility in striving endlessly to form their own lives properly and in pursuing true freedom as they

¹Ellen Key, *The Century of the Child*, 232, cited in Thorbjorn Lengborn, "Ellen Key," in Zaghoul Morsy, ed., *Thinkers on Education*, Oxford: Oxford University, 1997, 2:833.

surmount the vicissitudes of life with courage and constancy.¹

From this perspective, education, especially the process of learning, becomes most effective when students live and learn in an atmosphere of freedom within which they are facilitated to discover truth for themselves, rather than being indoctrinated by the system, teachers being the last link in that structural chain.

6. Planning the Curriculum for Creativity

Education is not a system conceived to inculcate intellectual bondage. Whenever a system of education tends to imprison the human spirit by way of inflexible indoctrination, it does a disservice to humanity.

Our education must not do anything to break the human spirit. In the name of education, we spoil human creativeness, and choke up the springs of wisdom. The great teacher may explain to his pupil the best that has been thought and said, but must leave it to the pupil to think and decide for himself.²

It is the sad plight of our society that the curriculum and the method of teaching adopted by many institutions foster a

¹Vatican Council II, “Declaration on Christian Education,” §1.

²Radhakrishnan, *India and China*, 58; see also Radhakrishnan, *Kalki, or the Future of Civilization*, London: Kegan Paul, 1929, 36: “Our education has not freed us from intellectual bondage. It stimulates the mind without satisfying it. We read poetry, devour fiction, and attend the movies; and think we are cultured. Our rationality is a pretence. We use reason to bolster up our instincts. We invent excuses for what we want to do and set forth arguments for what we want to believe.”

spirit of inordinate uniformity in thinking disregarding the uniqueness of individual students to a great extent. It is high-time that the avenues of education, especially at the early stages, were open to the ingenuity and uniqueness of each student; this would necessarily call for flexibility in the possibilities of customizing the programme of studies. However, given the present scenario of most of the schools in India, especially with a low teacher ratio, making room for individual attention does not seem to be a possibility in any near future, let alone the provisions for student inventiveness in the classroom settings. Indeed, this situation necessitates the complementing mechanism between school and home. While the schools may not be in a position to cater to the individual differences among students, parents and other members at home do have a decisive role in providing for such differences, and in positively enabling them to perfect their talents and special interests. If such a procedure is adopted and cooperation between school and home is achieved, we will succeed in bringing forth many young persons who are harmonious in character, integral in values, and creative in spirit.

Human creativity should be catered to at every step of education. This is especially so because of the human vocation. According to Rabindranath Tagore, a great educationist with a noble vision for a transformed humanity, physical evolution and aggrandizement have

already come to its climax in human beings.¹ This, however, does not mean that evolution and further enhancements have come to an abrupt halt. Human beings, who are endowed with the unique faculty of imagination, have a noble task and an uncompromising responsibility to consciously involve in the further processes of growth by exercising their free choice. As freedom is the birthright of human beings – by virtue of the faculty of reason and imagination that enables them to soar to the highest levels of reality – they take it upon themselves to responsibly transform the very human existence: though partaking in matter their nature is self-conscious; though sharing in the characteristics of animals, they are endowed with the capacity to act against the instincts; though rational, they are enabled to *imagine* the supernatural and reach up to it through their relentless attempts. In fact, it is from this perspective that Immanuel Kant, a philosopher and educationist from the eighteenth century proposes that children must not be educated simply to achieve the present levels of intelligence, but should aim at the possible better future levels.² Such a higher level projected for realization in the educative process will certainly make a student invest the utmost of his or her energies, contributing to the growth and advancement of the individual and the humanity. As

¹Rabindranath Tagore, “Soul consciousness,” *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore: Plays, Stories, and Essays*, Sisir Kumar Das, ed., New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1996, 2: 291-92.

²Immanuel Kant, *Handbook of the Art of Education*, 14, cited in Heinrich Kanz, “Immanuel Kant,” in Zaghoul Morsy, ed., *Thinkers on Education*, Oxford: Oxford University, 1997, 2: 794.

Radhakrishnan puts it, "all the great achievements of man in art and architecture, in philosophy and religion, in science and technology, have been due not to the man who has been a slave of his environment but to one who has been a master of his environment and who has been able, therefore, to recast his environment in the manner that he has chosen."¹ This is a clarion call to everyone not to be the slave of the present standards or the victim of the given environment; each one must approach the horizons of life with ingenuity and farsightedness. For, the standard that we set in education will set the limits of human achievement for the individual, for the nation, and for the human race as a whole.²

¹S. Radhakrishnan, *President Radhakrishnan's Speeches and Writings*, New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India, 1969, 2: 260.

²This is a challenging situation for school and university education. Over the years, although the human race as a whole has advanced quite a lot in the acquisition of information and its application in multifaceted fields, in general, the standards of evaluation have remained the same. As the minimum for a pass grade in school finals and university examinations has been retained at 35% (or even less in certain cases), a good number of students have been contended to remain at the mediocre levels. Without disregarding the individual variations in human capabilities, on the one hand, and the excellence manifested in specialised fields of education, on the other, it is high-time that the responsible agencies involved in deciding the modalities of examination and evaluation took their job seriously, and make sufficient changes in terms of setting a higher standard as the minimum (or pass grade) so as to motivate our youngsters to invest their optimum and reap its fruits by way of an enriched personal life and an enhanced state of human species.

The programme of education must have provisions for self-knowledge and self-realization, initiation for which shall be given in the family setup itself. Primarily, this warrants that students must be led to objectively understand their own potentialities and the prospects. As Socrates has rightly put it, knowing oneself is the greatest learning that one can attain. Proper self-knowledge and objective assessment of oneself would convince a person of the need to learn unceasingly. A programme of education should, therefore, supplement the possible familial deficiencies in the bestowal of emotional intelligence in the student. J. Krishnamurti opines: “You can only learn when [you know that] you do not know.”¹ Of course, providing such an insight into oneself requires an arduous task on the part of each individual as well as on the part of all those who initiate him or her into the art of human living. A deeper understanding of oneself can be facilitated not merely through textbook learning or objective sciences. Without belittling their relevance, it must be emphasized that proper guidance – through personal prayer, meditation, yoga, counselling assistance, etc., and, in general, through magnanimous inquisitiveness and earnestness on the part of the educators – has to be made available to the students so that they will experience the inner dimensions of themselves, and enkindle their own hidden energies, thus, bringing forth their own selves which would otherwise remain latent and naïve forever. In fact, the right kind of education must have provisions for cultivating the whole

¹J. Krishnamurti, *On Education*, Madras: Krishnamurti Foundation India, 1989, 53.

person and the totality of the mind, both of which should take into account the inner dimensions of the person. What we shall look forward in education is not the mere mechanisation of the human mind, but letting the inner core of the person to blossom by providing the right ambience and incentives in order to peak and fruition even without facilitating agents.

7. Teacher as an Incessant Seeker and Open Animator

The role of teachers is unparalleled in the field of education and in the development of a civilization. The task entrusted with the teachers is a tremendous one, as they “have a great deal to do with the shaping of the minds and hearts of our youth.”¹ Teachers are not task masters; instead, they are the animators of human creativity, the facilitators of human spirit, and the instructors in the art and science of humanizing. Therefore, we are in need of a host of teachers who are committed to initiate others into the vast sea of knowledge and wisdom. They will be effective instruments of education only if their commitment to and faith in the future of humanity are affirmative and optimistic. Teachers, therefore, should cultivate a love for human creativity, coupled with a critical attitude on the past, dynamically creative response to the present, and an optimistic outlook on the future.

¹Radhakrishnan, *Speeches and Writings*, 2: 202. Radhakrishnan has stated elsewhere: “Magnificent buildings and equipment are no substitute for a great teacher.” *Speeches and Writings*, 2: 104.

In a world of “information explosion” it is impossible for anyone to keep track of or to cope with the inflow of information. This is applicable in the case of teachers as well. Today no teacher will be capable of being informed about every development that takes place in different parts of the world. Indeed, every teacher must try his or her level best to get personally equipped with the advances in the field of specialisation. However, far more important on the part of the teachers is to keep themselves open to the ever new and ever widening horizons of human knowledge – even from among their students – so that they will never be redundant and obstructive in disseminating knowledge and wisdom among the students who are ever in search of them. Therefore, it is not the depth and breadth of the content of education handled by the teachers that become most important, but the methodologies that they adopt in reaching out to the students at different levels in their development and specialisation.

It must also be stated that the information inflow in every field calls for continued specialisation (i.e., regarding the content) and a professional approach (i.e., regarding the methodology) in dealing with the needs of students and issues emerging from teaching or student research: they have to remain incessant seekers for ever. Moreover, in order to re-tune and re-equip the teaching faculty in any institutional setup, crucially important are the highly qualitative training programmes for the future teachers, and in-service programmes for the ongoing updating and development of those who are already teachers. The updating programmes will naturally enhance teachers’

ability to respond and contribute to the proper development of an educational strategy, which has to be constantly revised taking into account the tremendous and fast-paced changes that take place in our society.

It is the need of the society that the best minds are attracted to the teaching profession, as they are the key resources in developing personalities and cultures. As a World Bank study has stated, “the terms and conditions of teachers’ employment are important because they determine, to a large extent, the quality of candidates attracted to the profession.”¹ Our societies have been highly motivated by monetary or economic benefits, and there is high demand for highly talented persons in many high-profile industries. In such a context, it is saddening to note that there is great difficulty to get the best minds in the field of education. Given this situation, it shall be a concern of every society, especially of the state, to evolve strategies to encourage and build up an excellent teaching force for the nation; if not, the future will be very bleak. At this juncture, it shall also be noted that we should not be unmindful of the present economic scenario. The state has a responsibility to see to it that the remuneration paid to the teachers – both in the public and private sectors – is on par with, or even better than, the payments received by other professionals. It will additionally motivate highly talented persons to remain in

¹Cathy Gaynor, *Decentralization of Education: Teacher Management*, Washington, DC: The World Bank, 1998, 25. The same study notes elsewhere: “Low salaries discourage qualified people from entering the teaching profession and give those who do little incentive to improve their teaching.” Gaynor, *Decentralization of Education*, 25.

the field of education and train the younger generations along the line of greater intellectual and cultural achievements, thus enhancing the prospects of our human society at large.

8. New Avenues and Responsibilities in a Market-Driven Education

In this context, when we take stock of the present educational institutional scenario everything does not fit into the ideal. Although education has to aim at the attainment of a culture or the evolution of a civilization by nurturing the latent potentialities among the students, most of the agencies and participants involved in education seem to be driven by free market economy. The triumph of capitalism in the form of globalization and its mesmerising powers, have made tremendous impact on the modern human psyche to such an extent that right and wrong are largely determined in terms of the profit or the advantage one draws from any activity, including education. From this perspective, education is also treated as one of the commodities sold in the market, and the relationship between teacher and student, or among the various agencies involved, is understood in terms of business. That is, those who impart education – both the institutions and the service personnel – become part of the selling mechanism, and the students who benefit through the entire gamut of services are the customers.¹ Indeed, of late, the tendency is to locate

¹The following passage from an international study is revealing:
“Educational decentralization usually implies a shift in the way in which

the active involvement of the “free market” theory even in education, making it much more vulnerable to the market forces, and degrading and dethroning it from the nobler status that education enjoyed in the hitherto history of humanity. Positively, this understanding of education would bring about better accountability to students (as consumers) and an understanding of reward based on merit and performance. Furthermore, the involvement of parents in education becomes a key factor, as for most of the education parents/guardians take upon themselves the burden of payment – either in the form of direct payment of fees or as taxpayers to the government. Parents, thus, become the stakeholders in the system of education, and rightly demand better results from their wards.

Another development along this line is the dominance of career orientation both among parents and students, and hence, naturally within the educational institutions. There is no argument against training every student to be a productive person in the society. Indeed, educational programme should have such orientations as well. However, the sad plight of the present education system is that it orientates exclusively in enabling the youngsters to meet one or other need of the industry. Development is

teachers and parents relate to each other. Many countries are still struggling to cope with the new role of parents as active stakeholders in education. Parent-teacher relations are most profoundly affected in decentralization programs that have a strong market focus. In Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom, parents are now seen as consumers, and teachers are held accountable to them as providers of education...” Gaynor, *Decentralization of Education*, 47-48.

understood in a very narrow sense, where the ultimate aim is the enhancement of certain capabilities with which one person would be able to perform a particular task, of course, in its best possible manner. In this process of enabling them for such a specialised task, unfortunately, the basic vision of education as the development of the total person is lost sight of.

When the entire programme of education is tuned to meet the needs of the market, students tend to miss one or the other vital dimension of life, a serious lapse that will adversely affect the humanity with dreadful and lasting consequences. For example, the Information Technology (IT) which is the most lucrative field of employment today looks for youngsters who are excellent and innovative in IT-related applications. In order to excel in such fields many a student tends to be glued to the computers and related machines, as a result of which even familial relations and socialisation are affected to a psychologically and socially debilitating extent. The same is true with regard to other professions associated with high social status, such as medicine and engineering. As the education field has turned out to be very competitive, both students and parents are desperately trying to get into those specialised training institutes that can assure a definite entry into the well-placed higher education institutions. Indeed, as the available seats are very limited, what happens is, at a very early stage in the development, these youngsters are force-fed with selected information, so that they are equipped to come through the competitive examinations. It is, indeed, commendable that many do it extremely well, but at a very

high cost. It is not the monetary cost that I am referring to, but the shortcomings incurred by the training programme itself. By and large, it is being observed that an overstress on career-related subjects at a very early stage withholds different vital aspects of life, usually covered by the humanities (i.e., philosophy, theology, literature, history, etc.) and other value inculcating subjects, which are essential for the *humane* development of these youngsters.¹

9. Educating for Humane Sensibilities

In fact, culture or civilization that evolves from human living is not a onetime product; it is created anew by different generations through their creative involvement. Such a process can be triggered only by educating the youth for creative involvement in the society by abiding to the value systems. In order to facilitate it, education must include history and classics. For, they are not merely guardians of the past; they are, in fact, the instruments to herald a bright future. Of late, however, many lament that a sense of values is being lost in the craze for professional education and money minting careers. Sharing in the riches

¹See how prophetic is the statement of S. Radhakrishnan: “Any satisfactory system of education should aim at a balanced growth of the individual and insist on both knowledge and wisdom... It should not only train the intellect but bring grace into the heart of man. Wisdom is more easily gained through the study of literature, philosophy, religion. They interpret the higher laws of the universe. If we do not have a general philosophy or attitude of life, our minds will be confused, and we will suffer from greed, pusillanimity, anxiety, and defeatism. Mental slums are more dangerous to mankind than material slums.” *Speeches and Writings*, 1: 102.

of globalization in the big Indian cities (which is reflected even in small towns), for example, does not seem to stop with the spiralling growth rate and economic boom, but greatly results in a moral decadence, although sufficient scientific data to back up a direct relationship between these two are still lacking.

Further, an unhealthy competitive spirit that is inculcated by the industry, the parents, and the educational institutions seems to be damaging the riches of childhood and the spirit of cooperation, both of which contribute towards humanizing and civilization. Ideally speaking, education shall not cater to egoism, but to promote and practise altruism. However, given the present situation of the market-driven educational endeavours, building up an altruistic society seems to be a mirage. Therefore, being realistic, what we shall strive for is the healthy development of a person in terms of a balance between such extremes, egoism and altruism. Although the ideal of harmony may not be realized in every case, the system of education, especially educators, must deliberately strive for the same in a realistic manner. As this cannot be facilitated merely by the setup of educational institutions, a holistic cooperation between the home and school/college is essential.

Another domain that can make lasting contributions on education, especially by way of imparting a creative outlook on life, is religion. As most religions impart a positive world view among their members by accompanying them at every stage in life, the gradual process of education and the outlook imparted by it on individuals can be influenced by

religion – both as a way of life and as an institution. The delicate balancing of egoism and altruism, for example, can be communicated by educators, but can be effectively facilitated and supported by religious ideals and proven methods practised by many faithful adherents of any particular religion. The religion-education combine will succeed in cultivating a sense of interdependence (a practice emerging from the value of altruism) among individuals. They have to be aware of the fact that society is not merely a collection of individuals, but a coming together of human persons who are ready to mutually share the powers and resources for the welfare of all; interdependence among human beings is the most inspiring form of mutuality. It is not an artificial addition to human nature, but an expression of the inherent structure of humanity itself. Humanity evolves not in individual isolation, but in the community of human beings, religion being its most sublime expression.

10. Religion as a Catalyst of Integral Education

It is interesting to note that both religion and education share a common goal of enabling and ennobling individual human beings in varied circumstances, especially in their vicissitudes of life, and in making the best out of them by employing all available means. Both have the goal of attaining fullness of human life, though the means employed are different. In fact, they are effective instruments in supporting and augmenting both nature and nurture, the given and the hoped for. The cooperative activity of these two domains, therefore, can positively contribute to the enhancement of human life at every stage

of its development. The ideal in this context is a constant exchange or dialogue between religion and education so as to constantly evolve effective methods in achieving their goals. Indeed, our society witnesses the constructive effects of merging religion and education in the case of a lot of institutions, and they have been the stalwarts in heralding a renewed humanity. From time immemorial, history testifies to the power of many a religious educational institution, from village schools to large universities, as they have been instrumental in dawning and sustaining civilizations.

In history, however, we come across with instances where either religion exploits education for its own vested interests, or education misuses religion for realizing certain unbecoming motives. In both cases, however, these abuses have been initiated and their results have been plundered by the institutional forms of religion and education. Just as they can be a massive force for positive action when they affirmatively involve in the affairs of humanity, they can be destructive forces with the same might, which would ultimately be dangerous to the cause of humanity. The best tie up resulting in creativity may turn out to be the worst, once the intentions are manipulated and the goals have been vitiated. If religion can be taken to stand for integration, and education for the attainment of knowledge, a statement by Samuel Johnson, implying the necessity of their coexistence and cooperation, is quite telling: “Integrity without

knowledge is weak and useless, and knowledge without integrity is dangerous and dreadful.”¹

Education, especially in the Indian context, has to adopt a trans-religious approach, where without denying religion or religious practice, space is made for knowing and appreciating other religions, with their diverse perspectives and practices. While making room for religion within education the latter must be freed from the clutches of unhealthy (institutionalized) ‘religious’ elements.

11. Religion as the Ambience for Educating in Justice

If education and religion should cooperate for the good of humanity, as I have claimed in the preceding paragraphs, one area that needs special attention is that of social justice. While every religion purports to practise and promote social justice and every educational institution instructs its wards in the principles of the same justice, they have to work hand-in-hand in order to achieve a lasting solution for the instances of injustice that prevail in our society. The tremendous potential of these institutions have to be employed in inculcating a right sense of justice (including an understanding of both equality and equity) in every individual person: this shall be the first step to build up a just society. As a Chinese proverb goes, “If there be righteousness in the heart, there will be beauty in the character; if there be beauty in character, there will be

¹Samuel Johnson, *Rasselas*, chapter 41 (1759), cited in W. Jay Wood, *Epistemology: Becoming Intellectually Virtuous*, Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1998, 58.

harmony in the home; if there be harmony in the home, there will be order in the nation; if there be order in the nation, there will be peace and harmony in the world.” This ideal, however, seems to be far removed from the contemporary educational scene in India. A critique on the recent pro- and anti-reservation agitation that had stirred up controversies among the educational institutions in India is indicative of the negative and counter-productive education imparted, at least as far as a sense of equity is concerned. It is unfortunate to note that, by and large, both the media and the educators are attempting to politicise the issue, thus scuttling the very idea of justice, and denying rightful opportunities to those deserving students from the underprivileged classes, whose present lot has resulted from the anti-social impacts of the practice of caste system over a period of thousands of years. The negative role played by the politicians, in particular, and some educators, in general, is still appalling: though they are expected to be standing for the uplift of the downtrodden – as a democratic society, at least in Gandhian understanding, should have equal opportunities for the poor and oppressed¹ – what we witness is a high-profiled drama for exploiting the sensitive vote banks of the nation. Are these politicians and educators interested in the betterment of the people of the adversely affected classes? Are they envisaging the development of the nation, and the uplift of its people? Or, are they merely concerned about the aggrandizement of their political clout and strategic manoeuvring as the pathway to justice?

¹M. K. Gandhi, *Harijan*, 17-11-1946, 404.

Further, can we consider the students who resort to violent means to stop every step in the direction of equity for the downtrodden properly educated?

The single issue of social justice that we have taken up for scrutiny is indicative of the direction that the contemporary education scene is heading for. It presents us with an alarming situation: if it cannot be checked, it can destabilise a nation which is already facing many other subversive elements. It is high-time that all the involved parties – especially educational institutions, heads of various religions, and the state and central governments – cooperate in evolving an effective strategy to properly educate the younger generations, so that we can be optimistic about a creatively emerging India which will not only boast about the bygone glorious epochs, but will consciously participate in creating a life affirmative, cooperative, and cosmopolitan civilization within which everybody else can join and participate.

12. Conclusion

Education is the right and duty of the human race: no one shall be left out of the avenues of education, so that everyone one will consciously partake in the process of humanizing and the development of mature and vibrant civilization: true education happens when that process is carried out in an atmosphere of freedom of mind. Further, no individual or movement shall try to subvert the educational processes for vested interests; not even a democratic government shall try to manipulate the

programme of education (by way of a politically motivated syllabus selection, or promoting only those who have allegiance to a particular ideology, for example) to serve its *vested* interests of the ruling political party. The same principle should be applicable to university or higher education, where in the curriculum planning, faculty selection, and appointments to high academic offices political pressures must be warded off. Scholars and scientists will be creatively contributing to the enhancement of human culture only when they function with immunity from the fluctuations of bureaucratic setup and mass influences. In fact, all universities, and other institutions of the same stature, should enjoy autonomy, so that quality education and cultural enhancement will be facilitated among the members of our society.

Education is the cornerstone of humanity and civilization. It must, therefore, receive the utmost attention from the society, especially from the authorities. Providing education for all is an inherent and uncompromising duty of the state; indeed, it is the birthright of every human being in order to augment the process of humanization. The content, the method, and the agencies in relation to the education imparted are to be given a proper vision in terms of leading all human beings to the fullness of life, by animating them to bring out their latent potentialities. As the human beings, the society, and the civilization continue to evolve, the process of education must also have a continual process of change at every level. Then, the educational institutions will be able to respond to the needs of the students in the best possible manner, responding to the needs of particular times

and particular peoples, without losing their universal perspective.

CHAPTER 3

Philosophy of Education and an Integral Outlook

'Dharmaram', translated as a 'garden of virtues' and symbolizing the Sacred Heart of Jesus, is a name the founding fathers of Dharmaram College have consciously and purposefully selected to lay the foundation of a noble legacy of integration that would mould a group of human beings and a set of institutions for the coming generations. It is an *aram*, a garden, where everything has its constitutive role, resulting in the very formation of the garden itself. The garden, in turn, sets the dynamic ambience where each person and each thing can find its rightful and meaningful place. Indeed, primarily, the garden that the Dharmaram is, as the Sacred Heart of Jesus, symbolises a nurturing ground of human beings who would blossom into persons endowed with virtues, i.e., with an integral outlook that would pave the way for oneself and others, along with the whole nature, to co-exist and pro-exist, and work for the establishment of a

just and dialogically vibrant society.

Dharmaram College, which celebrated its golden jubilee in 2007, was originally established to provide philosophical and theological education to Catholic men with the intention of training Catholic priests and Christian leaders.¹ The motto of Dharmaram College is “*Īśabhakti paramjñānam*,” which literally means “devotion to the Lord is Supreme Wisdom.” Dharmaram College, therefore, “pays constant attention to the spiritual values to be cultivated by the students, as well as to a thorough and profound intellectual discipline to be acquired by them through *Īśabhakti* (devotion to the Lord) and its ever flowing *paramjñānam* (knowledge par excellence), leading them to an integral transformation.”²

In the course of time, however, its horizons were opened up to the needs of the people of Bangalore, thus, initiating various educational endeavours on and off the campus, a move that has now become a mark of quality

¹The vision enshrined in the Gospels, and later articulated in the “Declaration on Christian Education,” has been very much part of the legacy of Dharmaram: “to make a more penetrating inquiry into the various aspects of the sacred science so that an ever deepening understanding of Sacred Revelation is obtained, the legacy of Christian wisdom handed down by our forefathers is more fully developed, the dialogue with our separated brethren and with non-Christians is fostered, and answers are given to questions arising from the development of doctrine.” Vatican Council II, “Declaration on Christian Education,” §11.

²Directory of Dharmaram College 2003-04, inside cover page.

education under the leadership of Christ University.¹ As per the statistics available this year, Dharmaram campus caters to more than 15,000 students on a daily basis, and the courses offered range from pre-primary education to doctoral studies in specialised subjects.

Dharmaram, through its constituent units and affiliated institutions, has moulded a myriad of good citizens, educators, scientists, social workers, etc., from the secular perspective, and a galaxy of well-motivated and dedicated Christian priests, religious, missionaries, and lay leaders who continue to stand in good stead in the multi-faceted fields of Christian service carried out both within and outside India. What is characteristic of the training imparted in this campus, which has become the ‘Dharmaram legacy’, is the successful insistence on the formation of an integral outlook. History will testify to the fact that the Dharmaram style of education stands in good stead in enabling her wards to meet the challenges of the changing times within India as well as outside.

In an attempt to take stock of the evolution of Dharmaram legacy, I shall briefly recall a few landmarks. The Sacred Heart Study House of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate, a Catholic religious seminary founded in 1918

¹It was with a view to achieve an integrated study of sacred sciences along with secular subjects that Dharmaram College started on its campus, in 1969, an arts, science, and commerce college, which has achieved “deemed to be university” status in 2008. This prestigious institution, Christ University, offers multi-faceted academic programmes, including research degrees, and operates now in its various on- and off-campus centres across India.

at Chethipuzha, Kerala, was shifted to Bangalore in 1957 and was given the name Dharmaram College. On 8 December 1965, Dharmaram College was affiliated to the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome, by a decree of the Congregation for Catholic Education. On 6 January 1976, by the decree *Nobilissimae Indiarum Gentes*, the Congregation for Catholic Education established in Dharmaram College a Faculty of Theology with the rights and powers to confer the Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Theology and Bachelor's degree in Philosophy.

In 1975, with a view to widen the scope of ecumenical activities, Dharmaram, under the auspices of its theology wing, worked out a programme of collaboration in the field of religion, philosophy, and culture with the United Theological College, Bangalore. A one-year diploma course in Spirituality and Counselling, started in 1992-93, was enhanced into a two-year master's degree programme in 1994. Apart from these developments, in 1994, an extension centre for the study of theology named *Samanvaya Theological College* was established with its headquarters in Bhopal in the state of Madhya Pradesh for a contextualized theological formation in view of the changing pastoral and missionary scenario and the corresponding theological reflection (Its other regional centres are in Jagdalpur, with its specific thrust on the Tribal cultures, and Rishikesh, with its unique ambience of multi-religious dynamism). Under the auspices of the Faculty of Theology there is a one-year diploma course in Theology and Religious Sciences, specially designed for the consecrated religious women, which is conducted at *Jnanodaya* (Bangalore). In 1999, an

Institute of Oriental Canon Law was established (aggregated to the Pontifical Oriental Institute, Rome), which offers a three-year licentiate programme in Oriental Canon Law. Further, in 2004, the Centre for Biblical Studies was reconstituted to become the Centre for Biblical and Theological Studies; this centre offers a one-year diploma course in Bible and Theology especially for the laity in and around Bangalore. In 2007, the Faculty of Theology started its bi-annual journal, *Asian Horizons*, indenting to avail the platform of Dharmaram integral theological deliberation to a wider audience through the publication of scholarly articles that would see to the blending of Christian vision and Oriental patrimony in the existential crucible of the Indian milieu.

Along with theological and secular university education, from its inception itself, Dharmaram had initiated her students into various philosophical streams of thought. It is a matter of pride that the founding fathers of this temple of learning made it a point that all her students are acquainted with the philosophical patrimony of the Indian thought along with other secular and Christian schools of thought. Taking into account the fact of religious pluralism in India and the need of equipping her students to positively respond to it, Dharmaram instituted, in 1971, Centre for the Study of World Religions (CSWR) with the noble intention of fostering better understanding of the various religious traditions; it continues to work for the promotion of research in the area of religious dialogue by imparting short term and long term regular programmes to national and international student groups. In 1975,

Dharmaram College also started the publication of *Journal of Dharma*, an international quarterly for the scientific study of religions and philosophies, with a commitment to enhance research in the fields of inter-religious dialogue, ecumenism, and philosophy, and, thus, to contribute to the development of indigenous philosophies and theologies. It was by the decree *Antiquissima Indorum*,¹ dated 8 December 1983, the Congregation for Catholic Education, Rome, created the Faculty of Philosophy in perpetuity. In the same year, an extension centre of philosophy, *Darsana Institute of Philosophy*, was established at Wardha in the state of Maharashtra.

Dharmaram has made a lasting and far reaching impact within the Indian Church through its existence over a period of fifty years. Her academic excellence is recognized and sought after by many other institutions; the lead given by Dharmaram has been carried over by many other scholars and institutions in India.² In an attempt to impart the

¹Interestingly, naming of the documents establishing faculties in Dharmaram – “*Nobilissimae Indiarum Gentes*” (1976, Faculty of Theology) and “*Antiquissima Indorum*” (1983, Faculty of Philosophy) – very clearly indicates the ‘Indian’ thrust that Dharmaram has to bear all through her existence. I believe that it was providential as well as intentional on the part of the Congregation for Catholic Education to word the documents in this manner so that the specific thrust and the goal of instituting these faculties in Dharmaram will have a bearing on its programme of learning and research. Indeed, to those who are familiar with the Indian view of life, there is no need to make any specific mention of the integral outlook: it is the quintessence of all that ‘Indian’ is.

²During the past years a number of institutions of ecclesiastical studies have been affiliated to DVK. Prominent among them are the Vidyadeep

integral vision to the people of other cultures and continents, Dharmaram has opened up its horizons to wider international audience at two international centres, one in Rome (Chavara Institute for Indian and Interreligious Studies) and the other in Sacramento, California, USA (Chavara International Centre for Indian and Inter-religious Studies).

At this juncture, as the Faculty of Philosophy celebrates its silver jubilee in 2008-2009, I am pleased to affirm that the professors as well as the students of this faculty have played a pivotal role in the development of an integral outlook that has become the characteristic feature of Dharmaram legacy over the years. The ground-breaking initiatives of the stalwarts like John Britto Chethimattam, Thomas Aykara, Francis Vineeth Vadakkethala, Thomas Kadankavil, Albert Nambiaparambil, Thomas Mampra, Thomas Manickam, Cyriac Kanichai, Gabriel Aranjaniiyil, etc., who had been the backbone of philosophical education in Dharmaram over a period of 30 years have opened up new avenues in Indian Christian thought. It must be respectfully acknowledged that the noble vision of Jonas Thaliath, Canisius Thekkekara, Januarius, Paulinus Jeerakath, Mathias Mundadan, Joseph Pathrapankal, etc., had the foundational role in the

Institute of Theology, Bangalore (1988), belonging to the Conference of Religious India, Carmelaram Theology College, Bangalore (1989), belonging to the Order of Discalced Carmelites, De Paul Institute of Religion and Philosophy, Bangalore (2001), belonging to the Vincentian Congregation, Pushparam Institute of Philosophy, Mysore (2003), belonging to the Order of Discalced Carmelites, and Ruhahaya Major Seminary, Ujjain, belonging to the Missionaries of Saint Thomas.

flourishing of the unique mode of philosophical programme at Dharmaram; moreover, their own innovative theological deliberations have had a catalyst effect in promoting the integral mode of philosophical education within Dharmaram and in many other institutions across India. The much acclaimed Indian theology, to my mind, had its roots in the pioneering work done by these talented and erudite philosophers and visionaries.

Just as everything has an integral place in a garden, the programme of philosophy that was designed by the visionaries of Dharmaram took care to make a blend of sacred and profane, religious and secular, East and West, Christian and Indian, without losing sight of the 'little' traditions (although it took a long time for their official recognition) and 'unorthodox' schools of thought. Addition of two important centres – Centre for the Dalit Studies and Centre for Women Studies – is hailed as important and insightful steps in the evolution of Dharmaram legacy.

The careful planning initiated by the teaching faculty insisted on an integral balance of the subjects taught in the curriculum. Without sacrificing the academic requirements stipulated by the Congregation for Catholic Education and the perennial philosophical patrimony of the Catholic tradition, a meticulously planned programme was put in place, with the intention that a student who passes through the portals of Dharmaram should have not only a deeper theoretical understanding of human thought evolved through various secular and religious traditions, but also should have a lasting respect for their vision of life and

ennobling practices. This was not a mere pious wish, but a definitive project, which also included equipping students to acquire the critical acumen to approach these same traditions with a view to engage in constructive dialogue as well as critical and creative appreciation. Of course, this goal amounted to additional working hours both for the teaching faculty and the students; however, as it is an outlook gravely in need, especially in the disturbed pluralistic contexts of India and the wider global horizons due to their too late realization and recognition of the plurality of religions and cultures, all at Dharmaram have taken to heart this noble responsibility and have invested the best of resources into it.

The integral outlook introduced in the academic programmes is creatively supported by two main organs of Dharmaram: the Centre for the Study of World Religions (CSWR) and the *Journal of Dharma*, the international quarterly of religions and philosophies. While the CSWR conducted regular wide-ranging programmes to equip the wider public of Bangalore city and others, especially in fostering better understanding among various religious, cultural, and ethnic traditions, *Journal of Dharma* made Dharmaram platform' available to the international audience through the publication of research articles and reviews on issues pertaining to religions and philosophies. While the former mainly catered to the local audience through discourses, dialogues, and experiential prayer/sharing sessions, the latter toiled in initiating mutual understanding and respect among various traditions and disseminating the same to international centres of higher learning, by bringing together the best minds around the

world through its quarterly publications. These two arms of the faculty of philosophy have been, therefore, instrumental in making the faculty very vibrant over the years, and making its vision and presence felt all over the world.

Further, the research programmes, both at the licentiate and doctoral levels, have been successful in eliciting interest among students to dwell deeper into the wisdom of wide ranging traditions. It is a matter of pride that some excellent theses at the licentiate and PhD levels have been published and are well acclaimed by experts as well as the erudite public. Moreover, the training imparted at the licentiate level has had a very successful catalyst effect, as most of the scholars trained at Dharmaram have assumed their responsibility of teaching philosophy or theology at various centres. They, in turn, carry forward the noble Dharmaram tradition of integral philosophical education in the institutions they have assumed their office.¹ In one of the editorials in *Journal of Dharma*, I wrote about the Dharmaram legacy of education as follows:

... Dharmaram has taken the lead in initiating positive steps in inculcating a healthy approach towards

¹Research in philosophy has assumed a new dimension with the opening of the Department of Philosophy at Christ University, which is practically constituted by the members of the Faculty of Philosophy, DVK. In 2006, the MA in Philosophy was introduced and, in 2008, the MPhil in Philosophy was also opened up. We expect that Christ University would begin its doctoral research programme in 2009, with more emphasis on inter-disciplinary research. As the research in philosophy is opened up to the wider 'secular' public, we earnestly hope that our goal of spreading the message of integral philosophy will get further boost and wider recognition.

different religions, cultures, and linguistic groups. Many who have passed out of this institute have changed batons with the succeeding generations in the field of ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue and harmony. The success of “Dharmaram-style education” could also be attributed to her ability to integrate nature with nurture, the human with the divine, the secular with the religious, and the profane with the sacred. It enables each of her wards to be human beings thoroughly rooted in their own culture and tradition, but at the same time transcending their bounds and boundaries to share the riches of our common human destiny and to reach out to the unseen and unexplored horizons, thus, constituting the supreme wisdom as the ultimate aim of education.¹

This noble and effective chain will set a new phase and face in inculcating positive outlook and approach among/toward various traditions, even if apparently they seem to be antagonistic in theory and practice.

The opening of Dharmaram Academy for Distance Education (DADE), in 2007, is a milestone in taking the integral vision of Dharmaram to a wider audience. In the age of information technology and information explosion, DADE could reach out to many who cannot come to the campus on a daily basis. In just one year, this Academy has successfully launched post-graduate diploma programmes in seven different areas, including philosophy. Here is a

¹Saju Chackalackal, “Religion and Education: A Philosophical Appraisal” (Editorial), *Journal of Dharma* 31, 2 (April-June 2006), 161-62.

laudable step that will have a lasting and effective impact in the years to come, especially in spreading the message of integral outlook far and wide.

Our philosophical engagements are not one of denying the existence of other traditions and schools of thought, but of recognizing the other/s, responding to the issues raised from such recognition, and of engaging in ongoing dialogues. That is, there is an existential realization that our life world is fundamentally plural, that there is the possibility of divergent viewpoints and life visions, without precluding one's own meaningful and dynamic existence. Yet, our programme does not leave all these discrete entities as mere parts of the plural, but enables every individual to evolve an integral viewpoint for oneself. In fact, Dharmaram does not serve a ready-made solution to the reality of plurality, but enables her scholars to weave and blend together their own view of life.

It might be emerging from the very Indian mindset that the training in philosophy was never restricted to secular philosophers and their philosophies. The fundamental religious outlook that Dharmaram has assumed always made room for recognizing and incorporating the religious wisdom bequeathed to humanity by renowned teachers and founders of religions. As their insights have been effective in moulding the outlook of generations, mostly for good, our philosophical programme has a significant focus on philosophies emerging from various religious traditions. The integral outlook that we facilitate in our scholars makes sure that no valid contribution as far as the human thought

is concerned is neglected; on the contrary, we make sure that due recognition is paid to religious as well as non-religious viewpoints so much so that the perspective of life that a scholar develops will have the possibility of recognizing contrary and even contradictory viewpoints. We insist that every scholar is enabled to balance the creative tensions existing among contrary and contradictory and opposing forces: indeed, here is the blending of the physical and the metaphysical, the rational and the mystic, the natural and the supernatural, the human and the divine.

As most of the students attending our programme of philosophy are Christians, specifically Catholics, the cornerstone of their philosophical endeavours fundamentally turns out to be the faith in the person of Jesus Christ. Here, I hold that such a point of view, having its centre in Jesus Christ, does not go against cultivating an open and integral attitude towards other traditions; instead, it provides the best ambience for lasting integration. In fact, it is the very catholic Christic life vision that takes us beyond the limiting horizons of one's self and all that is immediate. The Christic model of self-emptying for the sake of engendering life in the other is the most generous approach in life and philosophy that anybody can adopt. It begins with the integration of oneself with the others, one's interests with that of the others, which ultimately climaxes in harmonizing every stream of thought, strengthening the bonds, and widening the horizons in view of building up a new earth and new heaven, the *dharma rajya*, the kingdom of God.

This is an occasion to take stock of what Dharmaram and its constituent institutions have attained so far and, thus, to feel proud of it, which is indeed a justified sentiment. However, as twenty-five years is only a very short period as far as human achievements are concerned, this jubilee celebration shall be taken as an occasion to plan for the future so that the goal of an integral outlook could be better realized in the coming years, especially as the times are changing and the challenges are mounting. In the last twenty-five years, Faculty of Philosophy at Dharmaram, as a tree that has been offering shade and vital life to many seekers of wisdom, has got firmly rooted and has spread its branches far and wide; as a stream that has been flowing and nourishing everyone on its either banks continues to flow serenely, enriching and enhancing all who want to quench their thirst from her ever-flowing waters of wisdom. Now, the challenge is to let the tree grow taller and stronger to offer better shade and life to many more, and to flow more dynamically into the lives of many, so that the goal of integration not only remains intact but becomes all the more vibrant and life-enhancing.

As the needs and expectation of the society are changing, it is necessary that our programme is revamped in such way that all our scholars are equipped to respond to the existential situation more creatively. Apart from initiating scholars into the age-old wisdom of humanity, especially at the research levels, Dharmaram must chalk out plans to infuse in them a creatively critical and a critically creative approach to various traditions and schools of thought. Further, some important elements, which were

side-tracked by the elitist tendency, must be reinstated to the mainstream of philosophical endeavours. They would include further research and studies into the ecological concerns, the subaltern traditions, the feminist movements, post-modern trends in philosophy, etc. The new centres like Centre for Dalit Studies and Centre for Women Studies should assume active role in chalking out programmes for day-scholars as well as wider public, so that an effective conscientization could be initiated. Further, I wish that the Silver Jubilee celebrations also become an occasion to initiate processes to start a new Centre for Environmental Philosophy and Action under the auspices of the Faculty of Philosophy. As these centres become more vibrant and effective, I hope, Dharmaram legacy will regain some dimensions that were lost sight of and open up new vistas in its further philosophical sojourn. Moreover, centres of these stature should be capable of eliciting interest among research students so that more effective research programmes would evolve, thus, initiating more dynamism and broader ambience for integration into the life of Dharmaram itself.

As an integral outlook is never a finished product, Dharmaram has to delve deeper into the questions of ultimate interest, and bring in many more dimensions of life and reality into its philosophical scrutiny and synthesis. It is also high-time that new programmes are designed in such a way that they would respond to the needs of the new generation of information sciences and the emerging social problems. As philosophy could engage in these issues with a healthy distance, the solutions proposed could naturally

open up new and better avenues in social life. The faculty as well as the research scholars must become more integral in their outlook and proactive in responding to the current vexing issues of the Indian and international society, which I hope would give a better edge to our programmes, opening up wider horizons, and offering deeper meaning to the existence of the Faculty of Philosophy at Dharmaram.

CHAPTER 4

Religious Literacy and Secularism

Religion is a structured expression of the human quest to establish and maintain relationship with the divine along with the human and the cosmic without losing the perceived distinctive identity of any but at the same time enabling continued transformation of all in an integral manner. The foundational experience(s) around which a religion evolves becomes the spirit that would overwhelmingly pervade and permeate the lives of those who ultimately accept it/them as their point of view as well as way of life. A particular view of life and the way of life that emerges from the foundational experience in its pure form give shape to a spirituality, which would be characteristic of the life of all those who come under the banner of a particular religion.

The faith-kernel around which a religion comes into existence receives manifold expressions in the process of its evolution. A faithful expression of the faith is called forth,

and is usually understood and accepted in a uniform manner by those who come together and are united in one faith. Although it is not easy to accommodate alternative viewpoints at the very early stages, structural expansion and the intake of more members would naturally call for diversified understanding of any particular religion. Moreover, the individual perspectives in understanding and expressing the same faith content adopted by various believers necessitate a more dynamic and diversified expression of the religious tenets of any religion.

It is generally accepted that the augmenting of a religious point of view into a structured religion is facilitated and enhanced by the ability of those who share a faith vision by communicating it effectively to larger groups of human beings. The essential social dimension of religion, especially from its structured development, is catered to by various mechanisms employed by people subscribing to a religious point of view, among which the transmission of a religious tradition (centred around one or more foundational experiences) through oral and written media deserves special attention.

The necessity on the part of any religion to put across to an audience its central experience (in the form of teachings) with a view to bring them into its fold created an indispensable ambience that enhanced not only the literacy of those who were involved in communicating it, but also among most of the people whom they had to reach out. Thus, religion turned out to be a principal agency that contributed to the enhancement of literacy in the larger

society across the globe. Moreover, wherever religion was in close collaboration with the ruling class, their mutually enhancing collective operations gave rise to still better opportunities to augment the literacy of the people at large.

The advancement in the literacy level of the public, facilitated by a religious predicament, however, had turned out to be a powerful source of challenge as well as a source of inspiration to religion. That is, the advance in the religious as well as general literacy calls for a better or more coherent and consistent articulation of the religious experience and teachings. The initial stage in the development of any religion, considered to have ideally nurtured the foundational experience(s), is abundant in creativity in giving shape to the experience(s) in the form of rites and rituals, teachings and dogmas, traditions and structures, though this early stage is said to be lacking in critical perspective. Literacy facilitated by religious expansion is one of the important factors that later comes to aid critical acumen, at least, among some believers.

It is highly possible that those who wield power¹ within the precincts of a religion would try to suppress diversified understanding and interpretation of the basic tenets. In the normal circumstances, it is said to be resulting from the thrust of safeguarding the original faith content, which has to be protected if the new view of life and way of life are to be established as distinctive and decisive. Although

¹At this early stage in the development of a religion, it would be extremely difficult to distinguish between spiritual and temporal powers, though the claim would be made primarily based on the former.

historical records indicate that some of them end up in schisms and bitter divisions, sometimes even based on the challenges posed against the pseudo-spiritual powers assumed by the leaders, from a positive angle, they testify to the undeniable and unlimited sagacity and creativity present in human understanding. While, on the one side, it may cause fragmentation of the structural growth of a religion, on the other, it would obviously highlight the level of literacy enjoyed and the ability to proactively respond to the evolving traditions subscribed by the members of a particular religion.

Sometimes, however, the initial enthusiasm and unconditional acceptance among the followers make room for the religious leaders to spin absolutism into doctrinal formulations and ritualistic performances, leading to religious intolerance and even fundamentalist attitudes. This had been the case with some of the organised religions. It leads to another stage in its development whereby some of these religions lose their ability to further integrate emerging viewpoints from among the later generations. Although difference between the foundational experience of the first group of believers and the experience gained by later generations cannot be ignored, a total disregard of the uniqueness of the faith experience of the latter would only close down the possible novel avenues of intellectual openness and faith experience suitable to the times.

Definitive doctrinal formations, though try to provide intelligible formulation to the content of belief, turn out to be a point of contention; the consensus emerging at one

point in the historical development of a religion that finally crystallizes into dogmas points to cautious approaches that the authority would adopt later in protecting the authentic doctrinal foundation. In fact, most of the bitter internal conflicts that religions have faced in their evolution may be classified into this category; true, its intensity was augmented by political alliances of those who spun certain nuances and alternative interpretations to the already accepted dogmas.

Although the mainstream believers were all too happy to follow the dogmatic thrusts, there were always a sizable group of ‘enlightened’ believers who were not ready to accept the dogmas as final. While some of them would accept the dogmas as facilitating factors for the proper but progressive understanding of a religious faith, some others were totally against any definitive structural expression of the faith content. However, those who claimed authority always resisted the moves of the ‘enlightened’, claiming that any authentic interpretation could be provided only by those who are in authority, thus, in effect, rejecting the understanding and affirmations of the former.

One way of protecting a religion from the onslaught of the ‘enlightened’ was to brand them as secular¹ as against

¹Secular, deriving from the Latin word *saecularis* literally means worldly; in its modern use, the sphere of the secular is considered to be distinct from the religious. Although a secular thrust is said to have made the groundbreaking for modern scientific development in the West, it would be practically impossible to rule out the presence of the secular forces all through the history of religions and spiritual movements. In order to focus the thrust on the scientific and an ethos emerging from it, its

the spiritual. While the spiritual is the authentic (as it has its source in God/Divine/Reality), the secular comprised of all that is considered to be against it (as it is worldly and human in its nature). Or else, from another angle, anything that could not be accepted within the precincts of authentic spirit of a religion was branded as secular, though the use of the term is said to be very late in origin. Although the term was not in vogue, the reality was already there alongside the religious and the spiritual. As secular is generally understood against the spiritual, I propose that these two cannot be realized without the other; that is, there cannot be spiritual without secular, and there cannot be secular without the spiritual, as they assume more of a complementary nature than that of contradictories.

God's revelation is accepted as the source of the spiritual and the religious; human reason is considered to be the ultimate court of appeal in the secular. While the first asserted the need of responses from the human founded on divine authority, faith and the values derived there from, the latter insisted on reinstating the role of reason and human values.

Whatever be the height and depth of a religious experience, and whatever be the breadth and strength of a religious authority, any spiritual endeavour is basically a human endeavour. The moment we lose sight of the human

subscribers took an extreme position of contrasting it with the spiritual, thus further widening the gap between spiritual/religious and the secular/worldly, though such distinct realities remained only on conceptual levels.

dimension in any spiritual experience or religious tenet, it would lose its sagacity. Religion and spirituality have been of great appeal to the ruling class as well as the masses precisely because they have the human dynamics running through it. As the human is basically characterised by the endowments that human beings have acquired, primarily characterised by reason, any human enterprise – whether it is religious or spiritual or any other – it cannot but be fundamentally human. That is, anything religious is fundamentally secular at the same time. If the secular dimension is missing, secular being associated with all that is human including rational, a religious or spiritual thrust cannot be maintained.

Although universal rejection of secular by the religionists could be seen in many a religion, an unprejudiced analysis would show that an integral growth of any religion was facilitated not exclusively by the spiritual that shuns the secular, but only by those who have taken recourse to a balanced approach to the spiritual and the secular. In fact, the secular had a lot to contribute to make the spiritual or religious more appealing to the masses, as a ‘worldly’ dimension made the spirituality and religious ethos more akin to the world of believers. While aspiration for spiritual solace was a primary factor in the making of a religion, its ability to circumscribe the ‘worldly’ was equally a powerful element in enabling religion’s popularity.

It is true that, in the western model, the secular was found to be missing from the mainstream Christian religion

over a long period of its existence. It was one of the reasons why it turned out to be more authoritative and less capable of addressing the needs of the people. Unfortunately, various developments caused Christianity to drift away from the people: a lot of believers failed to find meaning and relevance in following the doctrines that were issued by the authorities from time to time. Moreover, there were cases in which some people who wrongly assumed authority in such contexts started exercising it in opposition to what the masses had expected: they miserably failed in delivering the spiritual; at the same time, they were equally stunted in addressing the secular needs of the believers. In effect, such a religion caused the spiritual and the secular to drift away from each other.

In the modern world we see the net result of all these dynamics: while religious authority continued to claim its own ability to address the needs of the people, many kept away from it as they believed that religion is incapable of delivering the goods for which it claims to exist. Further, as the latter group claimed the failure of religion in addressing the needs of the people, they asserted that all those goods can be redeemed and established by forces that are outside religion, thus affirming the might of the secular against the religious. In fact, it is here that we come across with the western academia insisting on a wide gap between the spiritual/religious and the secular.

As it is clear from history that such a gap has resulted from the lack of due consideration for the essential dimensions of religion proper, any attempt to re-establish

the proper role of religion and spirituality in the lives of human beings should harness the aspects that have already been lost sight of. Principally, religion should take the initiative to assert that the secular is not at all an extrinsic aspect, but an intrinsic dimension to religion, a dimension which would make it more integral and holistic, a dimension that enables it to be a catalyst in human development and social ethos.

In order to redeem this lost dimension within the precincts of religion, a new identity is to be developed. As this has to be an all pervasive process, covering the whole range of believers, it has to start at the level of religious literacy. In the twenty-first century, a kind of re-catechising is called for among all religions. While retaining the sacred literature and the value of traditional interpretation of these texts, an innovative approach is to be initiated in dealing with the sources and their ability to address the issues that believers confront today.

What we need today is not merely a lot more of religious literature, but religious literacy proper, which will enable the believers to develop an integral perspective on the sources that make up the kernel of a religion. It has to be deeply religious as well as human, implying that religious literacy cannot be enhanced without the dimensions contributed also by reason-related capacities.

The much hyped antithetical nature of spiritual/religious and secular is only a misnomer. Some people who want to deny or at least counter the value of the spiritual/religious within the human realm are trying to

muster power by themselves claiming that all that is religious is against human; according to them, redeeming the human cannot be a reality as long as the religious reality is affirmed. However, given the fact that denial after denial of the religious reality by intellectual stalwarts over the centuries has not been successful to kill the religious spirit; instead, it is coming out more powerfully, though in more dynamic and diversified forms addressing the variegated needs of the emerging humanity.

Then, in view of redeeming and catering to this fundamental aspiration of humanity, it is essential that we reinstate the integral balance between the spiritual and the secular, though it would continue to be denied and opposed by some, including some world-renowned intellectuals, especially from the West. Each society and its religions need to address the distancing that had come about between them in the given historical contexts, and bring about a more coherent and amicable settlement for good so that the spiritual aspirations of our human community will not be exclusively constrained to the private spheres, but would permeate every sphere that is characteristically human.

Secularism, in this context, is not at all a threat to the religiosity and spirituality. The 'worldly' and the 'rational' are not antithetical to the spiritual; they certainly constitute its integral dimensions that would enhance its dynamics and make it more at home with the believers who are thoroughly human. Bringing the secular to the spiritual, to my mind, is not like floating water and oil together; although the natures of these two do not seem to share any

similarity, in my opinion, they both stem from the human craving for meaningfulness and commitment to the supernatural which, again, is not to be seen as contradictory to the natural.

Facilitating such an attitude within the precincts of religions can be done only by a collaborative activity of the religious authorities who claim to be the authentic stewards of original revelation as well as the tradition and patrimony that have developed around the original faith content and those who claim that secularism is the only cure for all social and religious woes. When these two camps come together and share a common platform, humanity can be assured of ushering in a new era. As they begin to function hand in hand, and invest their energies in a mutually enhancing manner, it would pave the way for the success of human spirit, positively opening up the avenues and assuring an incessant reaping of the fruits of spirituality and secularism as it was before they were wrongly bifurcated due to historical accidents or purposeful manoeuvring of vested interests.

Enhancement of religious literacy is the need of the hour all through the world of believers, especially against the background of the increasing number of conflicts among religious believers. Just as the believers are increasingly uninterested in grasping the nuances of their own religious literature, there is an alarming decline in the mutual understanding and appreciation among believers of different religions. Although this has resulted in many irreligious activities, and religion itself has apparently lost

its relevance, sheer secularism (purporting to reject everything religious/spiritual) is not the solution to all these problems. Religious literacy – that inculcates respect for one’s own religion as well as that of others – will only augment the true religious/spiritual aspirations without being detrimental to the social existence and development of humanity. As religion caters to a fundamental aspiration of human beings, it needs to be brought to its true stature where the values inculcated by the modern secularism could also be integrated. Since these two seemingly contradictory entities are basically human, their integration will only pave the way for the enhancement of human existence, both as individuals and as societies.

CHAPTER 5

Education for Gender Justice

Justice is a catchword insofar as we are at the receiving end, forming part of the group to which justice is being denied or whose rights are being violated. The normal dynamics of the justice machinery imply that those who deny justice would also be capable of withholding its reinstatement indefinitely, as many a time those violators sit at the helm of power centres. A counteraction, therefore, is possible only when the violated individuals (sometimes, along with a few from among the group identified as the violators themselves, they being not actively involved in such violations), after having realized the extent of what is being denied to them, could involve in a concerted effort to pave the way for the realization of justice, but always at a cost. This is true of every sphere where justice is challenged or denied, especially in the case of gender-related issues of justice-denial.

Although it is clear that sexual difference does not entail an unequal treatment of any person, history abounds

with cases of justice-denial to a large section of humanity because they were (and are being) born females on the face of this earth. It is surprising that a half of the whole human population, the women, were thoroughly and systematically denied the rights and benefits due to them. This was made possible by the theories, practices and traditions that were developed – almost always by men – to prove that women had no natural or acquired right to be their own mistresses; instead, men, by the manipulative moves that were mostly backed up by religious sanctions the promulgation and enforcement of which were enacted and controlled by these men with vested interests, assumed the position of masters, relegating most of the womenfolk to a subservient and insignificant role in the society. Some theorists and religious traditions even went to the extreme by claiming that nature and the divine will have made the humanity into superior and inferior classes and, hence, this division is to be accepted unquestioned; strangely enough, these practices – some of them bizarre and cruel, and some others apparently just *normal* due to their continued practice over a long period of time – were even scrupulously made to be virtuous for its eternal perpetuation! The strange aspect of this situation is that, except a few known matriarchal cultures, most of which are extinct today, men in general succeeded in perpetuating this unjust system of meting out injustice to women as a group not only for a few centuries but for millennia.

To a great extent, almost all religions are also culpable in this regard, especially in providing an additional powerful backup for the maintenance of the status quo that

imprisons the creative spirit of the women in particular. Even though the genuine core of any religion never advocates degradation of anybody or meting out injustice to its members on any count, some of the religious practitioners and leaders – in almost all cases, men exclusively controlling the affairs of the religious group in question – took it upon themselves in manipulating the religious tenets in such a way that women were segregated against the rest of the male society, according the former only a degraded status in every sphere of life. Such manipulative strategies of some of these leaders have been wrongly accepted as foundational interpretative tools of those religions, which have resulted in furthering the injustice admitted, supported and propagated by apparently valid religious tenets.

It is this injustice that is being perpetuated even in the twenty-first century, of course, in more subtle forms than in the past, and it calls for corrective measures. The extent of the damage that is being caused is colossal, although the amount of responsibility in this regard on the part of the perpetrators seems to be too diminutive, which, in turn, results in worsening the situation of justice as far as the women of our society are concerned. As everybody's business turns out to be nobody's business, ultimately, it is very seldom anybody feels culpable for the subtle forms of gender injustice that are being practised in the family, society in general, and within religions or religious institutions, in particular. Humanity as a whole has to be enlightened, as a result of which individuals would be in a position to feel the responsibility for all their actions,

whether unconsciously inherited or autonomously decided and carried out in their particular and commonly shared spheres of life. This enlightenment can come about only by the persistent attempts to educate the women as well as men, which, in turn, will enhance the human consciousness to the practical dimensions of practising gender justice. It is this thought that prompts us to repeatedly come back on deeper research on the issue of gender justice. Although this theme was discussed at length by various scholars and on various platforms, the slow progress that has been made in this regard, and the subtle complications involved in the realization of gender justice in spite of the *technical* education that is being imparted in our present-day society make it all the more relevant to address it repeatedly.

The present society has to drive home that sex difference is natural, while gender difference is an acquired one having its source in culture and traditions. It is a tainted practice inherited by humanity from the ancestors. Having segregated the whole womenfolk unjustly for quite a long time in human history, it is high time for all of us to *unlearn* the acquired or artificially perpetrated gender differences, which are extended to every sphere of life as a result of which women are treated unjustly and unequally. In order to remedy this situation, which has resulted from injustice, we have first to unlearn all of the gender-related theories and practices. This will pave the way for a re-learning and remaking of a new society that engenders equality for all its members irrespective of sex or gender difference. Indeed, women too have the primary responsibility to unlearn the gender-ascribed status and the related roles in family and in

the larger society, and re-learn to mould their lives on an equal footing with every other member of the society.

Knowing the biological difference and their equal status in the society, women have to begin to reclaim their rightful place in the family as well as in the society. They have to demand equity and justice in sharing the social goods; in case of neglect in this regard, especially if it were wrongly founded upon any culturally ascribed gender-related role, women should initiate a concerted effort so that justice can be claimed and realized.

The men in the contemporary era, too, have a great responsibility to re-establish a gender-just society. Biological or sexual difference between man and woman does not entail a disparity in social relations, professional achievements and promotions, sharing of other social goods, etc. This can be brought about only by having a non-discriminatory attitude towards all, especially women, who have been segregated in our society in the past and in the present. Having had the privilege of the reigning (and exploiting) group men today have a greater responsibility to initiate equality of men and women in concrete terms. This, to my mind, also involves adopting a preferential option to support and enhance the cause of women, as they were consistently and systematically segregated against men for quite a long time in the history of the humankind. Indeed, reinstating justice demands reparation!

Moreover, in the context of rights violation based on gender differences, justice demands legislation to protect the rights of women, who are the equal partners within the

social order. Enactment of civil laws is a necessity to make provisions for a fair deal for women. The preferential option for the causes of women and the much-needed enactment of civil laws – at regional, national and international levels – are the responsibility of the whole human race as women have been subjected to justice-violation for an incalculable period of time.

Education and emancipation go hand in hand. Although education has the potency to erroneously brainwash a person or a group of persons with wrong instruction and mould their lives accordingly, positively it has tremendous power to initiate change and transformation in the society as a whole. Although education can train personnel to found and maintain certain patterns of institutionalised living, it also has the potency to germinate and sustain a properly civilized society that stands for justice and equality. A civilization proper can come about only by the creative interaction of all its members, having an open attitude of supporting the growth and development of every individual member without any disparity based on natural or ascribed differences. In fact, in the context of the gender-based injustice in our society, what we need is the emergence of a new generation of women who are firm, assertive and confident, not only to be what they are but also to reclaim their lost or denied status in the society as well as in the families, social or religious groups and associations. It may require that these women take a stand that is ever stronger, firmer and tougher in order that they succeed in this struggle for justice, which is due to them as members of the human community. Such a

situation can come about only by the creative involvement of women as well as men who are educated and enlightened: we need creative educators and an open system of education, which can provide the nurturing ambience for the enhancement of individual human persons.

We should become acutely aware of the disheartening and snail-paced progress that gender justice issues have made in the past. The arrival of a gender-just society is the need of the hour, which also calls for an involvement in creative and concrete action programmes. Indeed, it is commonly accepted that the culturally and socially acquired gender difference does not in any way entail an unequal treatment in social responsibilities and privileges, as it would continue to be diametrically opposed to the dynamics of justice.

Each human being is not only born human, but has *to become* human by the creative commitment in developing and enhancing one's own personality in relation to others; a human being is not born into isolation, but into a community of persons. The communion that is at the foundation of any community demands that each member exists for the other, that each one is available to the other, that each one is capable of enhancing the life of the other. This positive approach does not involve segregation and exploitation of the other, as it has happened in the long history of mankind; instead, it involves only a creative self-gift of oneself to the other. Reinstating gender justice requires that we consciously cultivate a healthy vision of the

society within which every existence becomes a co-existence; every instance of co-existence turns out to be an invitation to a pro-existence: human existence is an existence in communion, and existence in a community becomes creative only when each one exists for the other. It is this readiness to be available to the other that we badly need to redeem humanity from the clutches of the unjust practices that have been prevalent in our society in the name of gender difference.

Difference, plurality, or multiplicity is neither a problem, nor a curse on humanity; instead within the nature, especially among human beings, it is a unique blessing with which the richness of the entire creation can be grasped and lived out. Let the sexual difference and the culturally and socially designed gender difference we have among human persons be a prospective matrix to respond to the opportunities offered to us and, thus, *to become human* in the complete sense. Human persons bloom in the context of a human community within which both women and men are equal partners and creative contributors in building up justice-sensitive personalities, families, communities, and the society at large.

CHAPTER 6

Dharmaram in the Vision of Blessed Chavara¹

1. Introduction

Dharmaram, a great centre of philosophical and theological formation, situated in the Garden City of India, is the central Study House of the CMI Congregation. A great architect was there behind this multi-dimensional project, and he lived a century ago leaving to his successors the task of realizing his cherished dreams. He is none other than Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara, the co-founder of the CMI and CMC Congregations.

The progress of the people of God, in the words of Vatican Council II, largely depends on priests (see *Decree on the Training of Priests*) who not only officiate in the cultic celebration of the Sacraments, but also animate and guide

¹Originally published in *Herald of the East* 3, 2 (October 1993), 44-49.

them in all facets of their Christian life. This naturally demands self formation and transformation so as to enable themselves to carry out the arduous task entrusted to them. Therefore, down through the centuries, the Church considered the proper formation of priests as one of her most important and supreme tasks. Many institutions have been erected for the formation of priests throughout the Catholic world. The concerned people in these institutions give proper and updated training to the candidates, as the signs of the times change and the new challenges are met with.

In India, the early *Gurukula* training system was followed for the formation of priests, till the beginning of the nineteenth century. We could rightly say that Blessed Chavara is the one who understood the need and necessity of proper training of priestly candidates. He exerted his utmost effort to en flesh this ideal in the Indian situation. He had the vision and sagacity to envisage an adequate training centre for priestly candidates of his time in the clime and culture of our country, which is worthy of praise even today. In the following paragraphs, an attempt is made to analyse the dream of Blessed Chavara in the field of priestly formation, and how this dream has come true in the blossoming of Dharmaram.

2. Chavara's Dream of Gurukula in Kerala

In Kerala, when young Chavara was a seminarian, there were many local centres where scholarly priests gave training to the candidates to priesthood. The style and

programmes of this system were differing from person to person depending on personal disposition and taste. Fr. Chavara, who was conscious of the pitfalls of this system, became all the more conscious and considerate of his cherished dream of training seminarians in a proper and systematic manner, as he was raised to the status of Vicar General of the Syro-Malabar Christians.

The future priests, he held, must first of all be rooted in the culture and language of the people. They should also have sufficient mastery in other languages necessary for the study of the sacred sciences and the oncoming pastoral and missionary care. Accordingly, in the plan envisaged, he gave great importance for the study of culture and language. In fact, that was the first stage of priestly formation. He was sure that a well-thought-out training programme for the seminarians will help them transform themselves to be men of God who would be effective in reaching out to the people.

With this goal in mind he issued a circular to various parishes under his jurisdiction, laying great stress on the necessity of proper training of priests, and the need of erecting a “Central Seminary” for the same purpose. The main intention of the circular, however, was to raise funds for the building up of such a seminary. Nevertheless, it was a piece of exhortation as well as an instrument of conscientizing the parish priests and the laity about the necessity of such a central training institute for the formation of Catholic priests in Kerala. Drawing inspiration from St. Ephrem, and combining it with the signs of the

time, he masterfully drafted this circular with great vision and pastoral enthusiasm. The content of the circular, which is valid even for our times, is as follows:

St. Ephrem teaches that the second light is learning... We may not be able to see the Kingdom and our Lord residing there, without this second light... Since the priests are responsible to teach their people, and the parents their children, and since this is not carried out properly due to the lack of resources, both monetary and personnel, we should build a big seminary with two parts, in a place which is accessible to the people and the bishop.

The languages, Malayalam, Tamil, Latin, Syriac, etc., shall be taught at the first part of the seminary. After completing it, those students who feel themselves called to study for priesthood shall be taught the sacred sciences and ordained priests in the course of time. If we make this a reality and send our students to such a seminary they will certainly be able to perform the duties of their divine 'call' in a much better way.¹

In envisaging and drafting the circular, Blessed Chavara had at the same time anticipated what Vatican II later said on priestly formation, and also fulfilled one of the conditions laid down for the study of sacred sciences in the Indian tradition. Interpreting the word 'then' in the first Sutra of *Brahma Sutra*, "then, therefore, the enquiry into Brahman" (*Athato Brahmajijnasa*), Sankaracharya says that the word 'then' is to be understood as referring to the proper time

¹K. E. Chavara, *Complete Works* (Mal), 4:129-130.

when the sacred study has to be commenced: that is, after the study of secular subjects and sciences, and after fulfilling all duties of life. Similarly, Chavara suggests that the study of sacred sciences should begin only after having mastered the languages and other secular sciences. So also Vatican II, speaking specifically ecclesiastical studies, insists that the candidates for priesthood “should have received that literary and scientific education which is a pre-requisite to higher studies in their country...”¹ Thus, the first stage of formation done in the first part of the seminary was actually the preparation for the real beginning of the study of the sacred sciences by the deserving students.

Fr. Chavara was not simply a visionary; he was a practical man as well with concrete and creative suggestions. In the same circular, he had also suggested methods to raise funds for purpose. Yet, for him and his colleagues, the idea of a Central Seminary remained only a dream, a vision and an ambition! Due to unprecedented circumstances and pressures from within and outside the Church, which made great demands on him, and in all of which his saintly mind always saw the will of God, he had to drop the idea of the Central Seminary, and had to be contented with the establishment of two minor seminaries one at Elthuruth and the other at Vazhakulam.

3. Dharmaram: The Realization of Chavara’s Cherished Dream

As years passed by, the vision of Blessed Chavara attained

¹*Decree on the Training of Priests*, §3.

new forms of expression. The spreading of the CMI Congregation to different parts of India put pressure on her members to think new ways and means to give more effective and contextualized training to the future missionaries in a cross-cultural milieu. In this process, another visionary and architect, Rt. Rev. Dr. Jonas Thaliath CMI, late bishop of Rajkot diocese, had to come to give shape to the novel and noble vision of Blessed Chavara by shouldering the challenge to shift the CMI scholasticate to Bangalore. Thus, the new *Gurukula*, Dharmaram, a garden of virtues, an *aram* of dharma, was founded. Its growth and flourishing were in every way unfolding the aspirations of Blessed Chavara, contained in his vision of the Central Seminary.

We have already seen that the idea of this centre of learning sprouted in the mind of Blessed Chavara from his very student days. Though he fostered it and longed for its realization, he could not achieve it in his lifetime. However, his successors, who were very much eager to keep up the spirit and aims of the founders, accepted and retained¹ the idea of the Central Seminary, and started a seminary at Chethipuzha in 1918, which was moved to Bangalore in 1957. At that time, though unknown to many, an ardent desire of Blessed Chavara was being realized. As it helped to be more central than parochial, this shifting of the Central Seminary to Bangalore was in accordance with the mind of Blessed Chavara, the unknown architect of the Central Seminary in Bangalore.

¹See *Decree on the Up-to-Date Renewal of Religious Life*, §2.

4. Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram: The Academic Wing

Today Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, the Pontifical Athenaeum of Philosophy, Theology, and Canon Law, imparts knowledge of sacred sciences to many, seminarians, priests, and religious. “In cultivating, promoting, and propagating the sacred sciences, the [DVK] Institute aims at the total doctrinal formation and its proclamation to be adapted wisely and prudently to the Indian culture.”¹ The whole study programme at this institute is arranged so as to effect real personal formation and more than that the transformation of the students through study and reflection, meditation as well as service and daily life of witnessing. As regards pastoral formation, DVK has ample potentialities as it situated in a multi-linguistic, multi-cultural, and multi-ritual milieu. The needs of both the down-trodden of the village and the spiritually handicapped of the modern city life can be meted out if proper and timely guidance is offered. Thrust is given to a life-oriented, situation-bound, community-committed, and culture-centred training since it aims at the integral formation of the students with a view to serving the people of India, and the world at large.²

At present, more than 700 students³ are studying in this Athenaeum, attending various courses, of which the majority is preparing to avail themselves at various mission stations of both southern and northern India, and even

¹*DVK Handbook 1993-'94*, 11.

²See *Statutes of DVK*, §54.1.

³Additional note: in 2012-2013, DVK had a total student strength of over 1000, with its four Extension Centres and four affiliated colleges.

beyond the boundaries of our own homeland. From the east and the west, north and south of Bangalore, students of theology and philosophy flow to Dharmaram, and this *Kshetram* of *Vidya* endeavours to impart wisdom to all of them. It has already given shape to many who could efficiently carry out the ministry that has been entrusted to us by Jesus Christ, our *Guru*. As the central study house of the first and the largest indigenous congregation of India, and as the reservoir of several cultural trends, and as a living architect who attempts to mould a true Indian-Christian cultural and theological tradition, it could rightly be said that, to a certain extent, the future growth and flourishing of the Indian Church depend on Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram.

Blessed Chavara, in the original plan envisaged, did not think of compartmentalizing secular and sacred sciences. Already a century ago he thought of the Central Seminary attached to centre of learning of languages and cultures. The blossoming of this initial ideal is now seen in the realization of another project, the Christ College, which is situated on the Dharmaram Campus, with a view to giving enough and proper training to the students in the field of language and other secular sciences.¹ Various other centres like the Centre for the Study of World Religions (CSWR), Darsana Institute of Philosophy, Samanvaya, and

¹Additional note: Christ College has now become Christ (Deemed) University, which caters to about 15,000 students on its various campuses in different parts of India. More details on Christ University were given in the first chapter.

Jnanodaya, attached to DVK, and other allied institutions under Dharmaram College add to its beauty and purpose. We must be proud to understand that Vidya Deep College, the CRI Brother’s Institute of Theology, Ulsoor (Bangalore) and the Carmelaram Theology College, Bangalore, have already been affiliated to DVK.¹ Today, DVK has a separate campus, of course, within Dharmaram College Campus, and many separate elegant buildings: some for administrative and residential purposes and other for lectures and other academic activities.

5. Conclusion

We can rightly expect that the future projects of DVK will explore new dimensions and that its endeavours will help to realize many untold aspirations implied in the vision of its Prime Architect, Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara. In future, if it were raised to the status of a pontifical or ecclesiastical university, I hope, Dharmaram could contribute very much for the growth of the Indian Church, by helping her students to realize their *Dharma*, in themselves and in the larger world, and more specifically in the Indian soil.

As a *Gurukula*, it helps the realization of one’s *dharma*; as a *Tabore*, it stands for the transformation of the individual and the social order; named *Dharmaram*, it is a beautiful garden full of virtuous flowers; as a temple of

¹Additional note: Two more institutes were, later, affiliated to DVK, namely, De Paul Institute of Philosophy, Bangalore, and Pushpashrama Institute of Philosophy and Religion, Mysore.

knowledge (*Vidya Kshetram*), it is a great source of knowledge quenching the spiritual thirst of all who resort to her. Emerging from the Oriental cultures, both in terms of place and the Rite, it places special emphasis in the Eastern and Indian spirituality and, as a centre of learning, it gives birth to many philosophers and theologians for the Indian and Universal Church.

Seeing the blossoming of a long cherished desire, may Blessed Chavara bless this endeavour, originally envisaged by himself and now being carried out by his successors!

APPENDIX

Golden Jubilee of Dharmaram College: A Pioneering Institution of Quality Education (2006-2007) ♦

Dharmaram College, under the patronage of which functions Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, a Pontifical Athenaeum of Philosophy, Theology, Canon Law, and Spirituality and Counselling, celebrates its golden jubilee in the year 2006-2007. Dharmaram College was originally established to provide theological education to young Catholic men with the intention of training Catholic priests and Christian leaders.¹ In the course of time, however, its

♦Originally published in *DVK Newsletter 2007*.

¹The vision enshrined in the Gospels, and later articulated in the “Declaration on Christian Education,” has been very much part of the legacy of Dharmaram: “to make a more penetrating inquiry into the various aspects of the sacred science so that an ever deepening understanding of Sacred Revelation is obtained, the legacy of Christian wisdom handed down by our forefathers is more fully developed, the dialogue with our separated brethren and with non-Christians is fostered, and answers are given to questions arising from the

horizons were opened up to the needs of the people of Bangalore, thus, initiating various educational endeavours on and off the campus, a move that has now become a mark of quality education under the leadership of Christ College (Autonomous). As per the statistics available this year, Dharmaram College reaches out to more than 15000 students on a daily basis, and the courses offered range from pre-primary education to doctoral studies in specialised subjects. It shall be a matter of pride for Christians in India, in general, and the members of the religious congregation Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI), in particular, that over last 50 years, Dharmaram College, in and through all its allied and affiliated institutions, has moulded a myriad of good citizens, educators, scientists, social workers, etc., from the secular perspective, and a galaxy of well-motivated Christian priests, religious, and missionaries who continue to stand in good stead in the multi-faceted fields of Christian service carried out both within and outside India. It must also be said that Dharmaram has taken the lead in initiating positive steps in inculcating a healthy approach towards different religions, cultures, and linguistic groups. Many who have passed out of this institute have changed batons with the succeeding generations in the field of ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue and harmony. The success of "Dharmaram-style education" could also be attributed to her ability to integrate nature with nurture, the human with the divine, the secular with the religious, and the profane with the sacred. It enables each of her wards to

development of doctrine." Vatican Council II, "Declaration on Christian Education," §11.

be human beings, thoroughly rooted in their own culture and tradition, but at the same time transcending their bounds and boundaries to share the riches of our common human destiny and to reach out to the unseen and unexplored horizons, thus, constituting the supreme wisdom as the ultimate aim of education.¹

¹The motto of Dharmaram College is “*Īśabhakti paramjñānam*,” literally meaning “devotion to the Lord is Supreme Wisdom.” According to this noble vision, Dharmaram College “pays constant attention to the spiritual values to be cultivated by the students, as well as to a thorough and profound intellectual discipline to be acquired by them through *īśabhakti* (devotion to the Lord) and its ever flowing *paramjñānam* (knowledge par excellence), leading them to an integral transformation.” *Directory of Dharmaram College 2003-2004*, inside cover page.

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INDEX

A

Ahimsa 51

Anamnesis 63, 65

Anasthāsyāyude

Rekthasākṣitwam 31

Animator and teacher 72-75

Asian Horizons 42, 91

Association of Christian

Philosophers of India 42

Ātmānuthāpam 31

Ayyamkali 3

B

Beccaro Leopold 24n, 35,
55n

British colonial rule 10

C

Caring the sick and old 5,
16-18, 18n

Caste 5, 9, 11, 15, 20-21,
25n, 26-29, 30, 54, 83

Catechism 111

Cāturvarṇya 28n

Centre for Dalit Solidarity
41, 44, 94, 102

Centre for the Study of
World Religions 40-41,
43, 50, 91, 95, 130

Chattampi Swamikal 2

Chavara and Dharmaram
39-40, 42-43, 123-132,
133-135

Chavara Cultural Centre 50

Chavara, a man of faith 4

Chavara, a mystic 4

Chavara, educationist 10,
34

- Chavara, Vicar General of the Syrian Catholic community 9, 12, 45-46, 125
- Chavara's writings 29-32
- Christ experience 31
- Christ University 43-44, 47-49, 57, 89, 96n, 134
- CMC 5, 6, 24, 25n, 55, 123
- CMI 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 18n, 19, 33, 34-53, 55, 123, 128, 134
- CMI ecclesiastical education 35-45
- CMI public education 45-53
- CMI Vision of Education 34, 52-53
- Common good and CMI 6-9, 16, 56
- Conscientization 16, 44, 101, 125
- Convent, foundation 21-26
- CTC 24
- Curriculum for creativity 38, 43, 47, 52, 67-72, 85, 94
- D**
- Dalit 11, 20, 26-29, 44, 58
- Darsana Cultural Centre 50
- Darsana Institute of Philosophy 40, 92, 130
- Darśanaveedu* 8
- Declaration on Christian Education 66, 88n, 133n
- Deepika* (Malayalam daily) 33n
- Deepika Children's League (DCL) 50
- Dharma rajya* 99
- Dharmaram 39-40, 42-43, 87-102, 123-132, 133-135
- Dharmaram Academy for Distance Education (DADE) 43, 97
- Dharmaram and ecumenical thrust 40, 90, 92, 97, 134
- Dharmaram and Indian philosophy 38, 42-43
- Dharmaram and Indian thrust 92n
- Dharmaram and interreligious thrust 41
- Dharmaram and women 44, 94
- Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram (DVK) 39-41,

- 43, 57, 129-131, 132,
133-134
- Divyodaya 50
- Doctrinal formulations 106-
107
- E**
- Education and charity 16-18
- Education and
emancipation 120-121
- Education and freedom 14-
15, 84-85
- Education and free-market
75-76
- Education and industry 76-
77
- Education and justice 82-84
- Education and parents 14-
15
- Education and
responsibilities 75-78
- Education and stakeholders
76
- Education as a civilizing
process 61-62, 75, 79
- Education as formation of
goodwill 16, 18-19
- Education as humanizing
process 16, 60-61, 79, 85
- Education for enhanced
humanity 59-86
- Education for gender
justice 27, 115-122
- Education for resource
development 62
- Education for the
subalterns 25, 26-29, 101
- Education for
transformation 59-60, 63-
64, 65, 69, 121-122
- Education for values 53,
61-62, 64, 78, 88, 108,
114
- Education in human
sensibilities 78-80
- Education of backward
classes 20, 25-26
- Education of women 21-26,
58
- Education to liberate 67-68
- Education, a process to
ignite minds 5
- Education, English 10-11,
11n
- Education, holistic 10-15,
49n
- Education, importance of
13-14
- Education, inclusive 19-21
- Education, innovative and
inclusive 1-58,

- Education, integral 20, 51, 59-86
- Education, market-driven 75-78
- Education, non-formal 15-19, 51
- Education, philosophy of 64-67, 87-102
- Education, public partnership 15-16
- Education, religious 18-19, 79-80, 99, 103-114
- Education, social face 14, 26-29, 48n
- Educational institutions (CMI) 6, 8, 11n, 27-29, 34-53, 55-57
- Emancipation and education 120-121
- English education 10-11
- Evaluation of studies 70n
- Examination system 70n, 77-78
- F**
- Fellowship in Religious Experience (FIRE) 41
- Foundational religious experience 103-106, 117
- Freedom and education 14-15, 84-85
- Free-market and education 75-76
- G**
- Gandhian understanding 83
- Gender justice 27, 115-122
- Gender justice to be reinstated 119-120
- Globalization 75, 79
- God experience 4
- Gurukulam* 10n, 35, 124, 128, 131
- H**
- Harijans 25n
- Homilies 18-19
- I**
- Inclusive education 19-21
- Indian and Christian thought 8, 42, 130
- Indian Constitution 20, 21
- Indian Theological Association 42
- Industry and education 76-77
- Information explosion 73
- Information Technology (IT) 77
- Integral education 59-86
- Interdependence 79-80

Iustitia 42

J

John Paul II, Pope 65n

Journal of Dharma 40-43, 92,
95, 96

Justice and education 82-84

Justice and sexual
difference 115-119

Justice violators 115

Justice, gender 27, 115-122

K

Kalabhavan 50

Kalam, Abdul 5

Kalari 2n, 10n

Kant, Immanuel 69

Kenosis (self-giving) 4, 99

Krishnamurti, J. 71

L

Latin Church in India 44

Literacy 103-114

M

Mahesh Yogi, Maharishi 60

Malayalam 10, 29, 31, 33n,
42, 126

Male chauvinism 23-24

Malpan 35-36

Manalel, Constantine 42

Mannanam 2, 3n, 10, 12n,
16, 29, 32, 34, 36, 42

Maranaveettil Pāduvānulla

Pāna 31

Marginalized 7, 10, 11, 16,
18n, 19, 45, 48n, 55

Market-driven education
75-78, 118

Menon, Shankara 9

Midday meal 11-12

Monastic life 7, 19, 53

Moral decadence 79

Mundadan, A. M. 7, 93

Muslim community 25

N

Nambiaparampil, Albert 42

Narayana Guru, Sri 2

Niṣkāmakarma 4

Non-formal education 6,
15-19, 32, 42, 51

O

Outcaste 20, 26-29

P

Palackal Thomas 2n, 6, 7,
33, 35-36

Pallikudam 12-13

Philosophy of education 64-
67, 87-102

Porukara Thomas 2n, 6, 7,
Carmelites of Mary

Immaculate 2n, 19, 46, 89

- Print and CMI
 Congregation 33n
 Print media 5, 16, 29, 32-34
 Professional education 78-79
 Prophetic vision 3, 19, 26, 30, 32
 Protestant missionaries 10
 Public education (CMI) 45-53
 Public partnership in education 15-16
- R**
- Radhakrishnan, S. 60, 63n, 70, 78n
 Religion 9, 18, 40-41, 79-80, 103-114
 Religion and degradation of women 117
 Religion and spirituality 108-113
 Religion and the ruling class 106-109
 Religion, culpability of 116-117
 Religion, plurality 95, 97, 134
 Religious doctrines 106-107
 Religious education, critical 80-84, 103-114
 Religious literacy 103-114
 Religious literature 114-115
 Reservation 16, 20, 83
 Revelation 88n, 108, 113
 Rsi 2, 3, 52
- S**
- Sādhana* 4, 8
 Samanvaya Theology
 College 40, 90, 130
 Sanskrit 10, 20, 31, 37-38
 Sanskrit school in
 Mannanam 10-11, 20, 37-38, 53
 Secular 107-112
 Secularism and literacy 103-114
 Secularism, not a threat to religion and spirituality 112-113
 Seeker and teacher 72-75
 Self-knowledge 71
 Seminary, Pallippuram 2n, 35-36
 Sexual difference and denial of justice 115-116
 Social structures and religion 2, 5

Socrates 71
 Spirituality and religion
 108-111
 Stakeholders and education
 76
 Śūdra 20
 Syro-Malabar Church 5,
 10n, 19, 22, 24, 36, 40, 44,
 53, 125
 Syro-Malankara Church 44
T
 Tagore, Rabindranath 68-69
 Tamil 10, 31, 126
 Teacher as a seeker 72-5
 Teacher as animator 72-75
 Testament of a Loving
 Father (Chavara) 14, 30
 Textbook learning 71
 Thaliath, Jonas 39, 93, 128
Third Millennium 42
 Trust in God 4, 54
 Truth 1, 51, 53, 66
U
 United Theological College
 40, 90
 Untouchability 11
 Upasana 50
Upaviśāla 17-18

Uplift of society 3-4, 6, 8,
 11, 16, 19, 22, 25, 26-29,
 36, 45, 52, 54, 83

V

Valiyaparampil, Maurus 39
Vasudhaiva kudumbakam 8
 Vatican Council II 38, 66,
 88n, 123, 126-127
 Venkataraman, R. 4
 Verapoly, diocese of 10n
Vinayasadhana 42
 Vivekananda, Swamy 27n
 Voluntary acts 18

W

Women and Dharmaram
 44, 94
 Women empowerment 21-
 26, 28-29
 Women, economic
 independence 23-24
 World Bank 74
 Writings of Chavara 29-32

Dharmaram Chavara Studies: 1

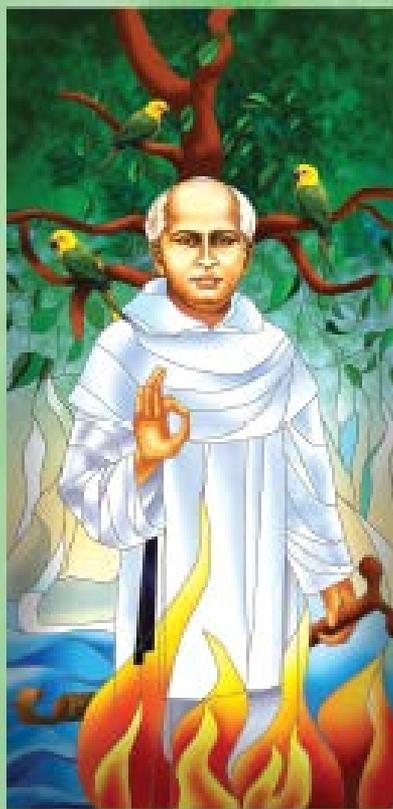
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