Theological Studies on Saint Chavara 18

KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA

Pastoral Perceptions and Catechetical Initiatives

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Naiju Jose Kalambukattu CMI

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THEOLOGICAL STUDIES ON SAINT CHAVARA

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

Canonised on 23 November 2014, Chavara's personal sanctity and Christian wisdom have been identified as unique. While secular society admires his contributions to uplifting those existing on the margins and who were socially ostracised through educa-tional and social initiatives, the fundamental core of all his achievements is solidly established in his filial discipleship to Jesus Christ, whom he addressed 'ente nalla appa' (my beloved father).

Chavara had a firm foundation in Christian faith, which is clearly visible throughout his life and is testified by those who knew him. He articulated his views and perspectives primarily based on his personal encounter with Jesus and only secondarily based on his readings and theological reflections. They are available to us through his extant writings, which are published in the four volumes of the Complete Works of Kuriakose Elias Chavara. Some of these works, recognized as efforts hitherto unprecedented in Indian literature, offer us

a goldmine of rich and sound theological insights. Although his access to scientific Christian literature was minimal (if not completely absent), his writings draw from the biblical as well as other Christian traditions, which he had faithfully and creatively interpreted for the enhancement of the faith of the Christian community that he had catered to throughout his life.

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

Naiju Jose Kalambukattu CMI
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General Editor

FOREWORD

Pastoral Acumen of Chavara

A solid pastoral vision for the Church should focus on personal sanctity of the pastor and wisdom to guide God's people through teaching, preaching, and example. The objective of a pastor is to make the members of the Church forge a close relationship with God and a more fulfilling personal life in Christ. Nearly the entire second half of the New Testament places before us various paradigms of the pastoral life in the early Christian Church and the kind of pastoral leadership that the Christian disciples gave their congregations.

Most of the New Testament epistles were written to address contextual demands and challenges in various cities and towns. However, there are at least two texts that reflect Paul's *pastoral vision* that he applied to his own ministry and that of his disciples like Timothy and Titus who were in ecclesial leadership. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul refers to the provision of the leaders to the local church. The purpose of such leaders, according to him, was to facilitate "the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Eph 4:12). Speaking of the aim of any pastoral ministry in the Church, he notes that the ministry is in view of enabling the believers to work for and attain "the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:13). Any healthy pastoral vision inspires the congregation to righteous living, faithful worship, and loving service, both within the Church and in the wider community. This, according to Paul, can only accomplished by means of a personal transformation effected in the pastor himself along with the acquisition of the soft

skills to proclaim Jesus: "Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone *mature in Christ*" (Col 1:28-29).

The times have changed, and the people have changed. The modern pasture is different and so are the modern sheep. The answers to the pastoral questions asked in the Middle Ages are not any more adequate today. The pastors today are called to be equipped with answers for the pastoral questions that have to be rooted in biblical foundations, sound theology, based on reason, which will have the implications for the future.

Two centuries back, there was a pastor who lived and breathed for the Church and the people. His name was Kuriakose Elias Chavara. He, in his pastoral engagement, would not leave any pebble unturned when it came to the service of the people of God. The pastoral acumen that he exhibited involved, first of all, spiritual leadership. In his pastoral capacity, he guided the community that was entrusted to his care with unmatched wisdom, human compassion, and pastoral integrity. As he served, he demonstrated great empathy and care for the people. Secondly, his pastoral leadership was rooted in biblical foundation. He learned, practiced and preached faithfully interpreting and applying the Scripture to everyday life. He applied biblical principles to complex contextual situations. Thirdly, the shepherding ministry that he undertook was marked with commitment. His prime focus was in caring for the spiritual well-being of members of the ecclesial community. His pastoral engagement included counselling the weak, encouragement of the hesitant, and reconciliation of the factions. Finally, in the area of community building, he fostered a sense of concord in the Church, between the various dissident factions driven apart

from each other for ritual, regional and ideological reasons. He forged and fostered relationships and partnerships within and outside the ecclesial community.

Chavara was a pastor worth emulating at all times. His multifaceted personality as a pastor is a pastoral paradigm for the Church today. He invites the modern pastors to embrace the pastoral life that he lived, the biblical foundation that he was rooted in, the essential pastoral qualities that he exhibited, and the best spiritual and pastoral practices that he bequeathed. In this way, pastors can cultivate effective pastoral acumen, serving their congregations and advancing God's kingdom.

It is with the sole objective of the dissemination of the pastoral acumen of Kuriakose Elias Chavara in mind that Naiju Kalambukattu, a great devotee and admirer of the saint that brings this volume out. He has brought together some of the scholars who were fascinated by the pastoral life of Chavara. They have dwelt, in their own ways, on the pastoral life of Chavara looking at it from various angles. Together, they have contributed to the making of a memorable and scholarly volume. I admire the vision of Naiju Kalambukattu and the effort of the contributors to the volume. I also pray for the blessings of the Lord through the intercession of the saint on the readers that they might also be, in their own ways, inspired by the saint.

Benny Thettayil
Director, Samanvaya Theology College

PREFACE

Kuriakose Elias Chavara enriched the pastoral and catechetical landscape of the Indian Church in a significant manner and bequeathed to us a lasting legacy that continues to inspire us to follow his footsteps in pastoral and catechetical fields. Chavara's fidelity to the past and responsibility for the present prompted him to carry out the ministry of pastoral care and catechesis as a mission of the Church in the world. As a good pastor and creative catechist, Chavara made outstanding and indispensable contribution to the spread of the faith and the growth of the Church in the 19th century, and urged the believers to be joyful witnesses of the Gospel. The present volume titled *Kuriakose Elias Chavara: Pastoral Perceptions and Catechetical Initiatives* in the Theological Studies on Saint Chavara (TSSC) attempts to shed light on how Kuriakose Elias Chavara with his varying pastoral and catechetical ministries in the Church played a very significant role in defending and nurturing the faith of the people in line with the Fathers of the Church. The volume is divided into two parts, and part one is a collection of five articles by various authors who delve deep into the pastoral vision of Chavara and part two deals with his catechetical initiatives.

Paulachan Kochappilly in his article explores the sense of Mystery and the divine experience of Kuriakose Elias Chavara, who treaded the path of the Fathers of the Church. As excellent catechists with a strong base of liturgical texts, the Fathers had imbibed the sense of Mystery and were imbued with the divine experience. Chavara's writings attest to his outstanding reach of the Mystery in his spiritual experience. The experience of the ineffable Mystery of the Eucharist shaped the vision and mission of Chavara. Devotion to

the Eucharistic Lord springing from the celebration of the Holy Eucharist was unparalleled in his life. According to Kochappilly, Chavara's writing, *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father,* is flecked with the incredible experience of the Mystery and his unworthiness to approach the Eucharistic Lord. In the present article, Kochappilly discusses the sense of Mystery and the divine experience of Chavara under three headings mutually interrelated: Sense of Mystery and Sense of Ministry; Experience of the Divine and Empowering of the Human, and Sense of Mercy and the Pastoral Ministry.

Mathew Maniampra in his article makes a portrayal of the pastoral personality of Kuriakose Elias Chavara and how he continued the mission of Jesus. Chavara was a good pastor and his ministries were the expressions and overflow of his relationship with God. Maniampra delineates the holistic reformations that Chavara had undertaken to bring renewal and revitalization in the Church and the society from within. As a rich depository of compassion and forgiveness, Chavara was a blessing to the Church and the society, and he challenges us to enhance the pastoral attitude and continue the mission of Jesus.

Susmitha reflects on the testimony of the sisters at Koonammavu Convent and expounds how Chavara became the pillar that supported the Church, mirrored the face of Christ and became the lamp in Kerala of the 19th century. The personality, contributions and vision and mission of this illustrious son of the Church are grouped into three titles, i.e., the pillar, the mirror and the lamp. Susmitha underscores that it was Chavara's commitment to radical following of Christ which strengthened him to make substantial changes in view of genuine growth of the Church and society.

Jossy Maria discusses the special situation of the Kerala church at the time of Chavara who believed that the society would become prosperous only when the families are integrated and women's welfare has been assured and those at the periphery are brought to the center. Chavara had been a true son of the mother Church, for his love and ministries revealed his genuine love for the Church that he had cherished in his heart. Jossy reflects on the social and ecclesial situation of Kerala in the 19th century, Chavara's contributions as the Vicar General of Saint Thomas Christians, and his ecclesial vision. She also discusses the role of Chavara as a social reformer of Kerala and his various contributions for the transformation of the society, especially in the field of education. With the initiatives of Chavara a new awareness had been created among the faithful that the church is a servant of the humanity, irrespective of caste, creed or colour. His instructions had contributed much to the families to become well-knit units of the society.

Jeff Shawn Jose Kaippettiyil and Paul Kunnampally Pallathucherry examine the life of Kuriakose Elias Chavara through the lens of Charles Taylor's dweller-seeker framework. In the context of the declining influence of traditional religion in the West, they explore Charles Taylor's conceptualisation of the contemporary spiritual landscape using the framework of "dwellers" (those deeply committed to their established faith) and "seekers" (those actively searching for truth). Kaippettiyil and Kunnampally then apply Taylor's framework to the life and mission of Chavara, arguing that he exemplified both dwelling and seeking while grounding firmly in the Church. Finally, they highlight the outcome of applying the dweller-seeker framework to Chavara's life and its relevance to the

Church in addressing the multifaceted challenges posed by dwellers and seekers in contemporary times.

Revisiting the Roccos episode, Benny Thettayil expounds the pastoral prophetism of Chavara. The hypothetical reflection that he makes is what if Chavara had joined hands with Roccos? What if Chavara had sailed with the wind, taking advantage of the favourable circumstances and moved forward, basking in the glory that was given to him on a platter? Thettayil looks at the *would-have-been* from various angles. How the Church would have looked without the intervention of Chavara and his confreres, how would the religious congregation that Chavara founded would have looked if he had the episcopal authority to call the shots, would he have been favoured and backed by the people, and how would he have personally benefitted from such a move. The author projects the hypothetical picture of the Church in Kerala from the ecclesial, personal and monastic perspectives; and highlights the pastoral courage, prophetic fortitude and the selfless dedication Chavara made for the sake of the ecclesial community.

The second part is on the catechetical initiatives of Kuriakose Elias Chavara. It contains five articles by different authors who discuss on varying dimensions of catechesis. Jacob Marangatt in his article observes that the world of catechesis has undergone much change in the understanding of its content and method. Delineating various catechetical methods, he affirms the aim of catechesis as to reach the people to the maturity of faith. Presenting Chavara as a catechist who lived ahead of his time, Marangatt remarks that at the time of Chavara, the World Catechetical Movement had not taken birth, but we see Chavara adopting catechetical methods which will be endorsed much later by the World

Catechetical Movement. It shows his prophetic vision and catechetical wisdom. The article attempts to highlight how Chavara proposed a catechetical pedagogy that comprises all the essential elements of Catechetics.

Maryann Madhavathu in her article underscores catechesis as one of the primary tasks of the Church and liturgical catechesis as mystagogy. The article unfolds Chavara's efforts to make the faithful involve in the living mystery of Christ. Liturgical catechesis strives to lead the people of God to maturity of faith through full and active participation in the liturgy. Catechists not only teach but also share their faith and guide the students to live their faith. Chavara was a great catechist who taught the Church in Kerala the essence of faith, the paschal mystery of Christ through his life and ministry. Maryann discusses Chavara's life in the paschal rhythm of dying and rising, the way he spread the divine wisdom he had obtained from the mystery of Christ, how he prepared the faithful for mystagogical catechesis and how he became an exemplary catechist.

Ann Mary Madavanakkad in her article delineates the Family Catechesis as a dynamic and transformative approach to religious education that places the family at the centre of faith formation. As the family is the cradle of the formation of children and the best catechesis is done in the family ambience, Family Catechesis recognizes the vital role the parents and guardians play as the primary educators of their children in matters of faith. According to Ann Mary, the *Chavarul* of Kuriakose Elias Chavara is one of the significant catechetical tools, for it assists the families to lead a Theo-centric life following a love-centred ethics. The present article explores the various dimensions of the definition of family

given in the *Chavarul* which embraces all the aspects required for a harmonious family life.

Alex Sebastian Kollamkalam makes a close evaluation of the life and ministries of Chavara and presents him as a saintly Father and Orthodox teacher. He observes that Chavara was very much saddened by the absence of saints among the Thomas Christians in India. As a man of God and man of the Church, he fostered holiness, and even the purpose of the religious congregations he founded was to foster holiness. Kollamkalam affirms that Chavara with his sanctity, orthodox teaching and catechetical endeavours could be counted as a Father of the Church.

Jipson Joseph Edappulavan examines the theology of marriage presented in the *Chavarul*, one of the most inspiring literary contributions of Kuriakose Elias Chavara. It is his last testament particularly addressed to the people of Kainakari symbolising the entire Thomas Christians of Kerala. Against the context of most of the researchers identifying it in connection with the family life in general, Edappulavan proposes it to be a practical manual for married persons than addressing family in general. *Chavarul*, a 19th century work is still relevant due to its in-depth scriptural foundation, theological articulation, and practical framework. It invites the spouses to focus on mutuality for a meaningful marital life.

As the work is in print, we have a few words of appreciation to all those who generously supported the project. We are indebted to Benny Thettayil CMI, the Director of Samanvaya Theology College, Bhopal for the beautiful and meaningful Foreword to the book, and to Paulachan Kochappilly, Mathew Maniampra, Susmitha Jossy Maria, Jeff Shawn Jose Kaippettiyil, Paul Kunnampally Pallathucherry,

Benny Thettayil, Jacob Marangatt, Maryann Madhavathu, Ann Mary Madavanakkad, Alex Sebastian Kollamkalam and Jipson Joseph Edappulavan, the contributors of the articles that were originally published in the *Herald of the East*, Sebeesh Vettiyadan CMI for the design of the cover page and the sketches, Jesto for the necessary assistance, and Samanvaya-Poornodaya community for the support and encouragement.

Naiju Jose Kalambukattu CMI

Editor

INTRODUCTION

KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA
Pastoral Perceptions and Catechetical Initiatives

Naiju Jose Kalambukattu CMI

The Fathers of the Church were the early Christian theologians who were mostly known by their saintly lives and faithfulness in receiving and imparting the deposit of the living faith to the generations. They lived under the guidance of the Holy Spirit who directed the Church to the truth. Saint John Paul II in his Apostolic Letter *Patres Ecclesiae* wrote: "Those saints are rightly called Fathers of the Church, who with the power of their faith and the depth and richness of their teachings, engendered and formed her during her early centuries."[1] He further stated that "the Church never ceases returning to the writings of the Fathers, with their deep wisdom and perennial youth, and continually renewing their memory."[2] Their lives and writings are treasures of immense spiritual value, and they are the vital source of inspiration. They wrote for pastoral purposes, and their writings were either catechesis and homilies or rebuttals of heresy, responses to inquiries, or spiritual exhortations for instructing the faithful. The Fathers exercised their office as pastors and sought to keep the people of God united in faith, worship, morals and discipline. At their vigilant and tireless service, they strengthened, nourished and defended the faith of the Church by their teachings, and

1 John Paul II, *Patres Ecclesiae*, 1; https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/la/apost_letters/1980/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_02011980_patres-ecclesiae.html; accessed on 13.03.2025.

2 John Paul II, *Patres Ecclesiae*, 1.

the Christian practices have been shaped and the Church has been able to grow.

The Fathers lived between the 1st and 6th centuries, and contributed in a decisive way to a deeper understanding of Christian doctrine. Still as relevant and active paradigms, they inspire the disciples of the later periods; and the Church looks into the four major characteristic features in their life and works to be regarded and recognized as a Father of the Church, and they are antiquity, doctrinal orthodoxy, personal sanctity and ecclesiastical approval.[3] In ancient times, the word "Father" was used for a teacher, and in both Scripture and in the life of the early Church, teachers were viewed as fathers of their students. Since the teaching of the faith was entrusted to bishops, many of them came to be called "Fathers," a title extended to other ecclesiastical writers during the first six centuries of Christianity. According to Irenaeus, "For when any person has been taught from the mouth of another he is termed the son of him who instructs him, and the latter is called his father."[4] The Fathers of the Church were teachers who strengthened Christians in their faith in Christ. Their theological insights and pastoral vision played a significant role in shaping and guarding the faith of the early Church. Their insights and vision were nourished by Sacred Scripture, the letters of the first Christians, and the tradition of the nascent Church; and "it is the ecclesiastical doctrine of Tradition as a

3 For the process of declaring the Fathers of the Church see, Thomas Kollamparampil, "Father of the Universal Church," *Herald of the East* 14, 2 (July-December 2022), 136-139.

4 Irenaeus, Adv. Haer. 4, 41,2; Johannes Quastern, *Patrology* I, Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics, Inc., 1986, 9.

source of faith which makes the writings and opinions of the Fathers so important."[5]

The Fathers of the Church played a very significant role in nourishing and defending the faith against the theological controversies and heretical teachings. Through their profound prayer life, resolute commitment to the orthodoxy of faith, they have laid foundations for theological development, for as the immediate inheritors of the deposit of faith from the apostles, the Fathers of the Church had exposed and expounded the truth hidden in the Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. Their works are genuine sources of Christian faith and doctrine, and hence, they deepen our faith. The study of the Fathers and their writings helps us to grow in prayer life and delve more deeply into the spiritual riches of the first centuries of the Church and draw inspirations for the life and mission in the present context.

As catechesis is one of the most significant pastoral activities and responsibilities of the Church, and is intrinsically and integrally related to all the aspects of the life of the Church, the Fathers, as champions of catechesis, played a crucial role ensuring the correct teaching and transmission of the deposit of faith. Catechesis is basically a ministry of the Word of God and therefore Sacred Scripture is its soul, source, and inspiration. Sacred Tradition, Sacred Liturgy, and the Magisterium also are the principal sources of catechesis. It has rich resource from the martyrs, blesseds and saints who were catechists, the life of the faith formator or the catechist lived in accordance with the Gospel, and the whole creation that manifests God's glory. Catechesis is a gift and a task to build up the Church.

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5 J. Quastern, *Patrology* I, 11.

In the early Church, catechesis meant the instruction given to the catechumens who were preparing themselves to receive the sacraments of initiation. In the second and third centuries, the word catechesis became identified with the preparation of the adult candidate for baptism and eucharist and with the post-baptismal instruction of the neophyte in the mysteries of faith. The greatest catechetical homilies and treatises of the prominent Fathers of the Church like Cyril of Jerusalem, Theodore of Mopsuestia, John Chrysostom, Ambrose of Milan and Augustine of Hippo are brilliant illustrations of mystagogical reflection on the sacramental experience; and they guided the neophytes to the mystery of Christ and led them to transformation in and through the participation in the Sacred Liturgy, for Liturgy initiates the participants into a living faith and lead them to the maturity of faith through full and actual participation. Experience as its keynote, mystagogy leads the newcomer into the experience of the mystery of Christ, especially to the paschal mystery. With the decline of the catechumenate in the 4th and 5th centuries, the catechetical situation shifted from adult initiation to the baptism of infants, from pre-baptismal to post-baptismal instruction, and from a catechesis out of a biblical and liturgical context to a formation derived primarily from a Christian environment.

Pope Pius X initiated the Modern Catechetical Movement, and he restored catechesis to an important position in the pastoral life of the Church. The Second Vatican Council defined catechesis as a ministry of the Word.[6] Catechesis is understood as instruction in the way of the Lord or oral instruction to hand on the deposit of faith. Pope Paul VI

6 *Dei Verbum*, 24. https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html; accessed on 19.09.2023.

stated that the purpose of catechesis is to develop in believers a living, explicit and active faith enlightened by instruction.[7] Church's pastoral concern for catechesis has been expressed time and again. There has been catechetical renewal since Second Vatican Council, and they are General Catechetical Directory to systematize the teachings of Second Vatican Council for catechesis (1971), *Catechesi Tradendae* (1979), the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992), *General Directory for Catechesis* (1997), *Directory for Catechesis in response to the New Evangelization, disaffiliation, globalization, digital culture* (2020), and the publication of other national, regional and diocesan catechisms.

Pope John Paul II indicates the primary object of catechesis as the mystery of Christ and exhorts all catechists to transmit the teaching and life of Jesus by their instructions, not as a body of abstract truths but as the "communication of the living mystery of God."[8] The basic objective of catechesis according to *Catechesi Tradendae* is to initiate the hearers to the fullness of Christian life, and therefore catechesis is life oriented than mere understanding oriented.[9] The catechesis must lead the faithful to the fullness of Christian life or must be life-oriented, concerned with the process of growth in faith. Therefore, the catechists must be enchanted by Christ and their mission

7 Paul VI, *Christus Dominus*, 14. https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651028_christus-dominus_en.html; accessed on 20.09.2023.

8 John Paul II *Catechesi Tradendae*, 7. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_16101979_catechesi-tradendae.html; accessed on 19.09.2023.

9 John Paul II *Catechesi Tradendae*, 21.

is to present Christ to others by faith-filled life-witness, for the conformity of their lives completely to Christ is their authenticity and authority to transmit the faith.[10] As Pope Francis affirms, "Every catechist must be a witness to the faith, a teacher and mystagogue, a companion and pedagogue, who teaches for the Church."[11] The vocation to catechesis springs from the sacrament of Baptism and hence every baptized one is a catechist and has to employ his or her God given talents to edify the Church, and the task is to proclaim the message of faith, to inspire and to lead to worship and prayer, and to foster community.

In line with the Fathers of the Church who were the irrigators, builders and feeders of the Church, Chavara with his apostolic zeal and pastoral vision was vigilant and prudent to nurture the faith and traditions of the Church in general and the Syro-Malabar Church in particular. As a 'Pastoral Theologian'[12], his zeal and integral vision were evident as the founder of religious congregations, formator of priests, pioneer of Catholic print media, champion of education, social reformer, multi linguist, literary contributor, collaborator of women empowerment, guiding light to the families, defender of church unity, apostle of eucharist and Holy Family and

10 Merlin R. Ambrose, "Lay Ministry of Catechist in Light of the Apostolic Letter *Antiquum Ministerium*," *VJTR* 87, 6 (June 2023), 448.

11 Francis, *Antiquuam Ministerium*, 6. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20210510_antiquum-ministerium.html; accessed on 19.09.2023.

12 Sophy Rose, *A Pillar and Guiding Light: Kuriakose Elias Chavara, a Theologian of the Church*, Kochi: Chavara Central Secretariat & Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2020, 61-80.

above all a man of union with God who exemplified sanctity through his life.

The pastoral vision of Chavara was centered on holistic spiritual growth and social transformation. To phrase it differently, his pastoral approach was deeply rooted in spiritual renewal, family values, education, social justice and community development. Therefore, he engaged in various spiritual and welfare activities, like renewing the Order of the Liturgy, popularising Sunday sermons and organizing annual retreats in parishes to facilitate the spiritual renewal of the people, and starting a Sanskrit school at Mannanam for the educational development of the area, and establishing the first wooden press in Kerala to nourish and defend the faith of the Church through printing and publications. Chavara walked on unbeaten paths to sustain the faith of the people, was successful in responding creatively to the crisis of his time and turning it to a cradle of new initiatives.

As the author of many spiritual and liturgical works, Chavara's life and writings are priceless treasures of immense spiritual value for the generations. Through the volumes written, he ventured to reimagine and reinterpret the bond between the divine and the human in convincing narratives and metaphors. A closer and critical study of Chavara's writings underscores that he was a great defender of true and genuine faith of the Church, for in his writings we find sound theological vision and insights. He firmly believed that the Church as a beacon of light should guide the people in spiritual, moral and social matters. His writings further substantiate his pastoral concern, a significant character that urges us to place him alongside the great Fathers of the Church. As the Chronicles that Chavara kept give the details of the contemporary historical details of the Church and the

society, he could be compared to Eusebius of 4th century whose writings supplies the details of the writers and writings of the early centuries. Like Ephrem, the poet-theologian of 4th century, Chavara defended the orthodox faith through his poems; and he had written from an inner urge to build up the communities he founded and the Church at large.[13] Hence, Chavara could be compared to St Paul who wrote letters to the fledgling congregations as a mechanism for further instructing and strengthening them in Christian faith.

With deep faith, Chavara took refuge in the providence of God, and he figured out God as the *appan*, and always maintained a childlike relationship with God addressing him *appan*, for it textured in a profound faith and trust in the Lord of mercy and compassion. It enabled him to be creative in responding to the needs of the times with the intention of handing over the 'flame of faith' to the coming generations and thus attaining the, "sanctification of self and salvation of all". In his address before the thanksgiving Holy Qurbana at St Peter's Basilica on the following day of the canonization of Kuriakose Elias Chavara and Euphrasia, Pope Francis said, "Kuriakose Elias was a religious, both active and contemplative, who generously gave his life for the Syro-Malabar Church, putting into action the maxim 'sanctification of oneself and the salvation of others.'"[14] Chavara who walked

13 Benny Thettayil, "Kuriakose Elias Chavara: Antiquity in His Ecclesial Contributions," *Herald of the East* 15, 1 (January-June 2023), 63-65.

14 *Footprints of Holiness, Souvenir of the Canonization of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara & St Euphrasia Eluvathingal (23 November 2014)*, Kakkanad: CMI Prior General House & Thaikkattukara: Mount Carmel Generalate, 2015, 10.

ahead of his time, in great generosity of heart and with a spirit of love, gave his life for the Syro-Malabar Church.

With a comprehensive pastoral vision and zeal, he was totally committed to revamp and transform the Church and the society, and he could involve in every aspect of Christian life, and the light he lit continues to shine through and beyond the ages. In all these, he gave top priority to obedience to and communion with Rome and cherished a filial attachment and great devotion to the Church as mother. In the words of Pope John Paul II, "Today the Church solemnly recalls with love and gratitude all his efforts to resist threats of disunity and to encourage the clergy and faithful to maintain unity with the See of Peter and the universal Church."[15] His fidelity to the Lord, for sure, commensurate with his love for the Church, the mystical body of Christ.

Chavara was faithful to the mission conferred on him in the Church and was committed to it to build up the people of God. With a firm sense of duty towards his mother Church, without ceding to any compromise to her faith and traditions, Chavara with deep prayer and apostolic zeal brought in renewal and revitalization in her. Chavara was called up and anointed by the Holy Spirit with specific charisms to build up, mould and reform the Church with his orthodox teaching and orthopraxis. As the Vicar General of the Catholic Thomas Christians, at the time of Roccos Schism that caused the disunity of the community, Chavara could re-establish the lost unity and instil a sense of identity in them and promote and deepen their spirituality. Chavara who laid a firm

15 https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1986/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19860208_stadio-kattayam.html; accessed on 02.03.2023.

foundation for the Syro-Malabar Church, which was still in its evolving phase, has a unique position in the history of the Syro-Malabar Church, and he continues to be an inspirational model for all the generations, for his contributions are vital and outstanding. He not only renewed the Church by many spiritual pursuits and enhanced the status of the society of his time by various humanitarian projects, but also could shape and give right direction to both by his many innovative ways and activities for the times to come.

Chavara was one among the founders and the first Prior General of the first indigenous religious congregation for men in the Syro-Malabar Church known as Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI) dedicated to evangelization, education and pastoral care; and a religious congregation for women known as Congregation of the Mother of Carmel (CMC) to empower women and catechesis, focusing on faith formation. As a pioneer in many fields and true shepherd of souls after the model and example of Jesus Christ (Jn 10:11, 14), Chavara's life and ministry were expressions of the love of the Church he cherished, for he coordinated various ministries with pastoral care of the souls in view. In all these and throughout his life time, the passion that Jesus felt to do the will of his Father (Mt 26:39; Jn 4:34) and for the humanity (Jn 3:14ff; 10:18) was evident. His leadership was not power but service as in the case of Jesus of Nazareth; not goal oriented but God and His people oriented.

Chavara as a catechetical scion made sure that the catechesis was based on the Sacred Scripture, Tradition, Liturgy and the Magisterium or the teaching authority and life of the Church. As a genuine pastor and an authentic and responsible catechist, Chavara left no stone unturned in catechetical initiatives, and he dedicated his entire life as a

continuous sacrifice to inspire, motivate and assist the faithful in every way possible to know, love and serve God. Chavara kept the memory of God alive in him and was able to revive and revamp it in the people of God. He cherished a burning desire to form Christ (Gal 4:19) in the people of God in general and in the new Christians in particular. His zeal for the Lord enabled him to be passionate to strive better in multifaced ministry and never to give up regardless of how hopeless a situation appeared to be. As the Vicar General, he shouldered the responsibility of the spiritual renewal and pastoral care of the people, and he insisted that churches should maintain proper liturgical discipline. He toiled to strengthen the priestly formation to have good and well-equipped pastors to teach and guide the people. He emphasised faith formation for both children and adults, promoted family prayer, encouraging Christian families to become 'Domestic Churches' where faith was nurtured,[16] for he was convinced that "a good Christian family is the image of heaven."[17]

Kuriakose Elias Chavara, a versatile genius, authentic pastor and creative catechist of great merit, made remarkable contributions in the fields of pastoral care and catechesis to build up the Church and to proclaim and transmit the faith

16 Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Chavarul: Testament of a Loving Father*, revised and updated edition, Kochi: Chavara Central Secretariat, 2018.

17 Chavara, *Chavarul*, 9; Josin Kaithakulam & Thomas Parayil, "St Kuriakose Elias Chavara's Vision of the Family in *Chavarul*," in Shaji George Kochuthara, ed., *Vocation and Mission of the Family: Reflections on Chavarul and Amoris Laetitia*, Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2020, 85-87; Ann Mary Madavanakkad, *"A Good Christian Family is the Image of Heaven": Family Ethics in the Chavarul of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, & Kochi: Chavara Central Secretariat, 2023, 109-120.

keeping it inviolate. As a champion of pastoral care and catechesis, his vision ensured that faith was not just taught but lived in families, schools and parishes. Now that Chavara invites and inspires us to continue the work, it entails a profound personal experience of Christ, attentiveness to the voice of the Spirit and growth in faith-relation to God to share the experience to others, which in turn demands the incessant nurturing of the aptitude and ability to communicate the Gospel in the most effective way by credible life-witness. Chavara with the quest to love God and neighbour in Christ and his Spirit, dedicated his entire life for the same and bequeathed to us a tremendously rich patrimony of evangelical vitality, spiritual profundity and uncompromising love of God.

PART I

Chavara's Pastoral Perceptions

KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA
A Pastor with the Sense of Mystery and the Experience of the Divine

Paulachan Kochappilly CMI

Introduction:

Saint Kuriakose in the Footsteps of the Fathers of the Church

Instruction on the Study of the Fathers of the Church observes the importance of the sense of Mystery and the divine experience. "In their attitudes as theologians and pastors, they showed to a marked degree their deep sense of mystery and their experience of the divine."[1] Kuriakose Elias Chavara of the Holy Family was immersed in the Trinitarian Mystery and intimately experienced the Divine—his life and ministry vouch for them, which we shall examine in this brief account.

Imbibed by the sense of Mystery and imbued with the divine experience, the hallmark of the Fathers of the Church, Kuriakose's *Colloquies with Heavenly Father* vouches for his outstanding reach of the Mystery in his spiritual experience. He writes, "O my Father, how graceful is your face! David's rapturous song praising your face's beauty rings in my ears. I have heard and come to believe that your face is a source of joy and consolation to those who look at it."[2] Kuriakose raises his eyes to God's countenance, lifts his heart, and converses

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1 *Instruction on the Study of the Fathers of the Church*, Congregation for Catholic Education, published in *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition (English), 15 January 1990: 8-15.

2 Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father* in *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara, Vol. III*, trans. Jose Chittilappilly, The Committee for the Cause of Bl. Chavara, Mannanam, 1990, 6.

with the Lord, "O my soul, hasten to Him and thank Him for His great mercy."[3] He locks himself with the Lord of the Eucharist in the Tabernacle and keeps gazing at the beauty and glory of God's presence, "O Let me have a closer look at the holy face of my creator. This holy face is the source – the light that brightens the angels and the lives of those in misery."[4] These excerpts give us a taste of Saint Kuriakose's *guru parampara* and the *guru mantra* of the master regarding the divine Mystery.

In shepherding the people of God, the Fathers of the Church used a more experiential and mystical method, congenial to biblical style and substance, rendering in the cultural ethos. They were good pastors after the image of Jesus Christ, the good shepherd. Naturally, they took up the biblical imageries and types to interpret the faith as reasonable and relating to the faithful. Saint Ephrem took up the clothing imagery from the Pauline corpus of "put on Christ" (Rom 13:14; Gal 3:27). The whole theology of "robe of glory" is typical and topical to convey the Mystery of Baptism – the narrative of putting on Christ – tangibly.

> Saint Ephrem employs this imagery as a means of linking together in a dynamic fashion the whole of salvation history; it is a means of indicating the interrelatedness between every stage in this continuing working out of divine providence. Basically, there are four main episodes which go to make up this cosmic drama: at the Fall, Adam and Eve lose the "Robe of Glory" with which they had originally been clothed in Paradise; in order to re-clothe the naked Adam and Eve (in other words, humanity), God

3 *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father,* 10.

4 *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father,* 11.

> himself "puts on the body" from Mary, and at the Baptism Christ laid the Robe of Glory in the river Jordan, making it available once again for humanity to put on at baptism; then, at his or her baptism, the individual Christian, in "putting on Christ," puts on the Robe of Glory, thus re-entering the terrestrial anticipation of the eschatological Paradise, in other words, the Church; finally, at the Resurrection of the Dead, the just will in all reality re-enter the celestial Paradise, clothed in their Robe of Glory.[5]

Seen from this backdrop of Saint Ephrem, there is a likelihood to imagine Kuriakose was deeply immersed in the divine Mystery celebrated in the Eucharistic Liturgy of the catholic wing of the Thomas Christians of India,[6] for the Liturgy is an elaborate experiential ambience of the Mystery of the Trinity unfolding the Mystery of human beings springing from the Mystery of the Holy Trinity. A concise illustration of it is found in the celebration of the Qurbana:

> God the Father, You are holy. You alone are the true Father! All Fatherhood in heaven and on earth comes from you. Eternal Son, You are holy. Everything is created through You. Holy Spirit, You are Holy. Everything is sanctified through you.[7]

It is confessional in style and the summary of the economy of salvation. All pastors and ministers of the mysteries of salvation share this foundational experience, the roadmap of

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5 Sebastian Brock, *Hymns on Paradise*, Vladimir's Seminary Press, New York, 1990, 66.

6 The naming of the Catholic church of the Thomas Christians of India as "Syro-Malabar Church" is of later origin.

7 *The Order of the Syro-Malabar Qurbana*, Syro-Malabar Bishop's Synod, Commission for Liturgy, Kakkanad, 2005, 51.

the revelation and faith of every Christian. Accordingly, all pastors participate in the fundamental experience of Jesus Christ, the Master and Saviour of the world. For instance, we encounter Jesus experiencing this Mystery during his ministry. Jesus said:

> I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father and no one knows the Son except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him (Mt 11:25-27).

We are called to inherit the vision of Jesus, and Kuriakose was blessed to share the same. The editors of the book *The Lord of Heaven and Earth* comment on the above passage, "Every human being is called to be blessed with Jesus' vision. They are to enter in union with the new Adam to celebrate the new creation."[8] Disciples are challenged to imbibe the spirit of their master. They observe, "Chavara was blessed with the vision of his Guru. Thus, he could see God's cosmic faces and hear the creator's cosmic voices in the entire creation. He dedicated his life to make every face the divine face, every voice the heavenly voice."[9] The experience of the Mystery is agreeable to all his followers, and the pastors have been following the path of the master in their life and ministry. Beautiful illustrations of the immersive experience of God's

8 Paul Kalluveettil & Paulachan Kochappilly, ed., *The Lord of Heaven and Earth. Chavara Studies in Honour of Fr Lucas Vithuvattickal, CMI,* Dharmaram Publications, Bangalore, 2004, 9.

9 P. Kalluveettil & P. Kochappilly, *The Lord of Heaven and Earth*, 9.

Mystery and the ministers' unworthiness are celebrated in the Liturgy.

Well-versed in the Liturgy of Addai and Mari, Kuriakose might have picked up the disposition natural to a pastor from the Qurbana and deepened it through his mystic and poetic writings. In the Qurbana, the priest prays the following prayer during the singing of Sanctus:

> Woe to me! I am dismayed! For my lips are unclean. And I live in the midst of people with unclean lips. My eyes have seen the King, the almighty Lord. How awe-inspiring is this place where today I have seen the Lord face to face! This is none other than the House of God! Lord, may Your mercy be on us. Clean us who are unclean and sanctify our lips. Lord, enjoin the hymns of us, who are feeble, with the praises of the Seraphim and Archangels. Praise be to Your mercy that has unified the inhabitants of heaven and earth."[10]

The experience of the ineffable Mystery of the Eucharist shaped the vision and mission of Kuriakose. Devotion to the Eucharistic Lord springing from the celebration of the Qurbana is unparalleled in the life of Kuriakose. His writing, *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father,* is studded with the incredible experience of the Mystery and his unworthiness to approach the Eucharistic Lord.

Sense of reality and significance of Mystery stand or fall together, for one reveals or conceals the other. Either truth and Mystery exist together, or none. Reality is the ground and meaning of the Mystery. There is no mystery without

10 *The Order of the Syro-Malabar Qurbana*, 52.

the reality. Mystery makes reality more experiential and comprehensive, providing an aura of sacredness and reverence to what is beheld. Reality shrouded in Mystery becomes more attractive and appealing to human senses and, consequently, to human reason.

Celebrations make events and moments more inspiring and motivating. So the ministers and pastors in the Church discerned the Mystery from reality and helped the folk navigate their lives in the context of shepherding to the green pastures and calm waters. The pastors knew well how to balance Mystery and reality to give them a sense of purpose and significance in people's lives. Kuriakose was no exception.

A mystery takes us closer to reality, with all its diversity and plurality. It is equally valid that reality brings us to the realm of Mystery, for everything is a riddle when approached closely and intimately. For instance, a person is a reality, but at close examination, we realise they are a bundle of mysteries, seeking further explanations and investigations. In this connection, we appreciate the insight of Soeren Kierkegaard, "Life is not a problem to be solved, but is a reality to be experienced." Later, Gabriel Marcel improved the statement by articulating, "Life is a mystery to be lived, not a problem to be solved." Approaching things and persons as mysteries rather than problems helps people to anchor their relationships concerning realities, and such a disposition will nurture and foster an ambience of overall sacredness, which is fast disappearing from human interactions and involvements. The mentality of commodification, cut-throat competition, and the attitude of use, misuse, and abuse are rampant in our present-day scenario. Sacredness and sacramentality of creation should be reclaimed at the earliest, which alone leads us to a prosperous future.

Pastors always try their best to draw the folk to the mysteries of God in the context of their everyday lives. As a result of an encounter with the Lord, pastors share their joy, peace, and bliss with their people, leading them to the awe-inspiring presence of God as the Samaritan woman evangelises the dwellers of her city. Jesus, during his conversation with the Samaritan woman, was giving a tour of the mysteries of God in light of the turn of events in history and her personal life. As she encountered the Messiah in Jesus at the well of Jacob, the city dwellers, in turn, experienced the Saviour of the world in Jesus and said, "It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world" (Jn 4:42). Whether it is the case of the Samaritan woman or with the people of the city, turning to the Saviour is gradual, respectful, and dramatic. It gives us a beautiful pattern of drawing people to the glory of God.

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, while involved in the manifold things, was taking the people step by step to the mysteries of God and enabling them to participate in eternal life. For example, Jesus taught about the question of God's creation and providence in the world through simple narratives. Jesus taught the people, "Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. . . . Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these" (Mt 6:26, 28-29). He invites his disciples to see the beauty of the created realities. Then, he alludes to the glory and wisdom of God, leading us to the new earth and heaven, a world vision perfectly blended with cosmic and eschatological.

As a good shepherd to the newly established religious congregation, Kuriakose shares his paternal and fraternal thoughts with his confreres in a letter addressed to members in different communities:

> Beloved brethren, this humble community of ours is not founded by humans but by God Himself. He has founded it miraculously; you are all witnesses to the truth that God has nurtured and brought it up. Hence, persecution by humans rejection or obstructions by creatures cannot destroy it. But one thing can annihilate it, that is, if we forget the meaning of our call, forsake the responsibilities of our religious life and fail in humility, obedience, charity, religious discipline and genuine devotion and are satisfied with appreciating them in words and not in deeds.[11]

These words of Kuriakose come from a heart absorbed in the sense of Mystery and deep personal divine experience. Further, in the same circular, he admonishes, "The strength of the monasteries is not the thickness of the walls, but the zealous and devout life of its members."[12] Being the first Prior of the Monastery, Kuriakose reminds his friends to anchor their lives on divine providence and humble obedience.

In what follows, I would like to discuss the sense of Mystery and the divine experience of Kuriakose Elias Chavara of the Holy Family under three headings mutually interrelated: 1)

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11 Kuriakose Elias Chavara and Leopold Missionary, "A Circular Letter Addressed to All Members of the Congregation Written on 1 July 1869" quoted from *Complete Works of Kuriakose Elias Chavara. Letters.* Vol. IV, trans. Augustine Keemattam, Chavara Central Secretariat, Kochi, 2000, 102.

12 K. E. Chavara and L. Missionary, "A Circular Letter Addressed to All Members," 107.

Sense of Mystery and Sense of Ministry; 2) Experience of the Divine and Empowering of the Human, and 3) Sense of Mercy and the Pastoral Ministry.

1. Sense of Mystery and Sense of Ministry

A sense of Mystery surrounds the realities of life; all relationships illustrate a mystery of some sort, which evokes a kind of sacredness and fascination. A hallow of indescribable nature encompasses persons and things that attract us to them but with awe and reverence. Kuriakose expresses his sense of vision and mission:

> Nourishing his soul, he was tutored in paths
> Of virtue; to assist at the Holy Qurbana
> Gently taught to tread the ways of holiness;
> To shun all evils that'd retard his onward march
> (*Compunction* I, 137-140).

Such attraction to reality coupled with Mystery represents ineffable beauty. This incredible experience leads to imagination and serves as successive inspiration for action in the real world. This invisible, mysterious hallowing is the knot of Mystery and ministry, encircling the beholder simultaneously to transcendence and immanence. The greater the experience of Mystery around reality, the larger the expression of it in terms of translation and transformation.

> The Lord of mercy in His great compassion
> To His blessed mother did enslave me
> And while on nectar, Mother on earth fed me
> At her feet, Mary kept me safe hourly
> (Compunction, II, 1-4).

People who glimpse the Mystery will show great enthusiasm and energy to walk the path of darśan. Such darśan

in the religious realm gives added impetus and momentum to commit wholeheartedly to facing challenges squarely. The life of Kuriakose was an ode to the Lord encircled by divine Mystery and divine mercy. He vents his foundational experience on different occasions:

> God almighty, who was in the beginning
> You created me, a son of Adam
> O God, wherefore this grace, reveal to me
> O Lord eternal, your infinite mercy.[13]
>
> A worm creeping on the face of the earth
> You created me from the dust of dust
> Granted me a guardian spirit so pure
> That I may dwell on earth in grace and ease.[14]
>
> What shall I render you, my Lord, my God,
> For all your wondrous gifts of mercy and love
> For cleansing my soul, so holy, spotless and fair
> At the very start of my journey of life?[15]

The mystical experience of the Mystery takes one to the terrain of ministry, an overflow of the vision or darśan. To have a *darśan veedu* for the religious communitarian life may be seen from this angle. *Bethrauma*, the house on the hilltop, tells volumes on the sense of Mystery, irradiating the biblical and Indian spiritual and religious traditions manifesting the thirst and hunger for divine Mystery.

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13 Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Compunction of the Soul,* I, 1-4, trans. Mary Leo, CMC, The Committee for the Cause of Blessed Chavara, Mannanam, 1989.

14 *Compunction of the Soul,* I, 17-20.

15 *Compunction of the Soul,* I, 37-40.

As the Mystery, so the ministry. The mystery dimension of the experience envelops and empowers the agents to enlighten and enhance the people, leading them to the realisation of the darśan in their own lives. There is an energy welling up in the heart of the one who beheld the reality, always overflowing with Mystery. The religious experience of God is not an exception to this phenomenon. Devotees who behold the darśan of the Lord God will feel compelled from within to communicate communion with others who also seek the same darśan of the Mystery of God.

> The Lord of mercy, the Son of God
> His glorious splendour, I long to see.[16]

The whole mission of Kuriakose was to help people experience the same Mystery in their life contexts. When the pastors encounter the Lord of Glory and Mystery daily, a blessing bestowed on them intermittently becomes a game-changer in their ministry to the people of God. All desire to have a glimpse of the Lord, the sense of Mystery which accompanies as usual, and those who have witnessed the significance of Mystery, in turn, will pass this memorable character of the glory beheld by the ministers.

> The Good Shepherd, seeking his flock
> That had gone astray, I long to see.
> The Lord of goodness, proclaiming Himself
> As our loving friend, I long to see.[17]

Seeing the characteristics of the Good Shepherd in Jesus Christ, Kuriakose puts the robe of a good shepherd on to make others experience the goodness and friendliness of God

16 *Compunction of the Soul,* III, 1-2.

17 *Compunction of the Soul,* III, 97-100.

to those who have gone astray from the fold. His ministry resembles the ministry of Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, seeking the flock of his time, a Church in deep slumber sans religious leadership and saintly pastors.

The sense of Mystery is coupled with an experience of the divine and never in a vacuum. Kuriakose's sense of Mystery is founded on the Mystery of the Holy Trinity and everything that belongs to the Lord of all. The experience of the Divine empowered Kuriakose to carry out the mission of the Lord in the world.

2. Experience of the Divine and Empowering the Human

The encounter with the Divine transforms people. They possess a holistic perspective, charged and shaped by the spiritual outlook. Kuriakose was blessed to have the vision of the Lord, and through it, he gained a mission for the world:

> When your bright visage, I see
> My gloom effaced, love glows
> In your look of mercy, I behold
> A gentle saviour, not a judge.[18]

Kuriokose finds himself rooted in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the experience in him a gentle saviour instead of a judge. His friendship with Jesus and ecstatic experience of the Eucharistic Lord transformed his image of God. The sacred knowledge empowers and overpowers his outlook and, consequently, his commitment. His vision of the Lord becomes his mission for the world.

> O Lady, clad in the rays of the Sun
> Holding the moon at your feet

18 *Compunction of the Soul,* V, 163-166.

Forgive the sins of sinful me
And fold me to your feet![19]

Beholding a compassionate image of Mother Mary raises concurrent feelings in the saint and takes refuge at her feet. Human beings begin to see things through the luminous eyes of their faith experience. He is enlightened by the divine mysteries and empowered by the spirit to translate his darśan with greater involvement and interest.

Merciful Lord, Son of Almighty God
O, that I may see!
Sea of Mercy, seat of compassion
Who effaced the stain of sin.[20]

The experience of the Divine is deep-seated in the saint. His experience is fundamental to the biblical revelation of God; it is founded on mercy and compassion, the very nature of God. A gaze at the sacred mysteries leaves lasting impressions on the contemplative, expanding the horizon of vision and mission. The experience of the Divine is an anointing to undertake a particular ministry to accomplish the task of God for our times.

My Lord the Blessed Babe Emmanuel
Did choose to make his dwelling in my heart.[21]

Rightly, our saint sees God as Immanuel, God-with-us and enjoys his indwelling presence in his heart, making it the temple of the Holy Spirit. The cave of the heart is a celebrated spiritual imagery in India, to which Kuriakose

19 *Compunction of the Soul,* III Contd., 65-68.

20 *Compunction of the Soul,* III Contd., 1-4.

21 *Compunction of the Soul,* IV, 189-190.

attests importance in his spiritual journey. Seeing things from the perspective of the Lord God, people become prophets and pastors of outstanding command to execute the will of God in their daily lives. These people feel the urgency and advocacy.

> Under his [Kuriakose] leadership or inspiration, a good number of apostolic initiatives were undertaken: the establishment of seminaries for the education and formation of the clergy, the introduction of annual retreats, a publishing house for Catholic works, a house to care for the destitute and dying, schools for general education and programs for the training of catechumens. He contributed to the Syro-Malabar liturgy and spread devotion to the Holy Eucharist and the Holy Family. In particular, he dedicated himself to encouraging and counselling Christian families, convinced as he was of the fundamental role of the family in the life of society and the Church.[22]

We get a glimpse of the various apostolates Kuriakose undertook to empower society and the Church through his eventful religious priestly missionary zeal. P. Ramachandran, Governor of Kerala, said, "Fr. Chavara's life is an inspiring and edifying saga. From the day he was ordained as a priest of the Catholic Church, the Father dedicated himself wholly to God and worked piously for the social, cultural and educational uplift of his fellow beings."[23]

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22 John Paul II, Address at the Beatification of Kuriakose Elias Chavara and Alphonsa Muttathupadath at Kottayam, on 8 February 1986. Quoted from Z.M. Moozhoor, *Blessed Chavara: The Star of the East,* Current Publications, Kottayam, 1993, 128.

23 P. Ramachandran, "Blessed Chavara a Man of Deep Vision," in his welcome address at Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara Stamp Release Function, Trivandrum, December 20, 1987, quoted from

R. Venkataraman, former President of India, acknowledges and acclaims the yeomen contribution of Kuriakose to humanity, a testimony to the human development and empowerment of people:

> It is well over a hundred years since Father Chavara left us. And yet, he is a living inspiration for thousands and thousands of persons. He is gratefully remembered as a profound scholar, an educationist, and a builder of institutions for the underprivileged, the illiterate, the destitute and the needy.
>
> Few people have been able to combine the contemplation of God with the service of man as naturally and creatively as between the world of faith and the world of action. Father Chavara represented both. A mystic, he could also be an engine of activity. Capable of withdrawing into his innermost being, Father 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.[24]

People from all walks of life acknowledge the towering personality of Kuriakose and his leadership in society, including the head of the state. The President made an emphatic statement on the contribution of our saint and the source of his strength to carry out the good news to people.

Z.M. Moozhoor, *Blessed Chavara: The Star of the East,* Current Publications, Kottayam, 1993, 132.

24 R. Venkataraman, "Father Chavara Represents Indian Community at its Best" (his address at Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara Stamp Release Function, Trivandrum, December 20, 1987), quoted from Z.M. Moozhoor, *Blessed Chavara: The Star of the East,* Current Publications, Kottayam, 1993, 128.

Through the encounter with the Lord in the context of his life, Kuriakose puts on Christ and commences living in Christ. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is the supreme example in this regard. He lifts his eyes to God in praise and thanksgiving, and, in turn, Jesus goes down the lane doing great ministry regardless of caste and creed. For instance, Jesus said,"I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants" (Mt 11:25). Immersed in the divine experience, Jesus invites all to the loving and comforting presence, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Mt 11:28-30). Anyone who experiences the divine presence in life will go forth to reach out with a healing touch and deliver peace and prosperity. Blessing the Lord follows the blessing of the people, bringing down the joy and peace of God to all. The prayer of Our Father is a typical example in this regard: the first part of the prayer celebrates the divine presence of God – heaven on earth – and as a result of this experience, there is the presentation of the human need for daily bread and a life of forgiveness, to hasten the dawn of the reign of God in the community.

On his way to Damascus, Paul had an extraordinary dramatic encounter with the Lord, a turning point in his life and mission. "Now, as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly, a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying, "Saul, why do you persecute me?" He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But

get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." The men who were travelling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing" (Acts 9:3-8). This episode shows a typical example of religious experience and concurrent commitment. Saint Paul recalls this foundational religious experience repeatedly, for it transformed his life and mission. A man of divine experience cannot but empower humans in their spiritual or material necessities. The faith experience of Saint Paul throws light on the fruitfulness and fearlessness one gathers through the knowledge of the Lord. He confesses his stance for Jesus Christ, "No, in all these things, we are more than victorious through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:37-39). We see the dynamics of the spiritual experience empowering human agents to share the conviction of their hearts in following Jesus Christ, the foundational understanding of Saint Paul.

There has been a concerted effort from different quarters to establish Kuriakose as a social reformer. He deserves to be adorned as a forerunner of nineteenth-century Malabar's social, economic, religious, and cultural reform. Mathias Mundadan points out some of the salient features of his ministry in the Church for the world's welfare. "The activities the Blessed undertook for the renewal, reform and all-round development of the Church were many and varied: his close association and his exemplary cooperation with the vicars apostolic and the missionaries, his services as vicar general, his pioneering actions in the fields of education, social service

and liturgical reform."[25] Nevertheless, it is to be acknowledged and orchestrated sufficiently that he could empower people because of his overarching spiritual encounter with the Lord. Silently yet eloquently, Kuriakose is a message for those who are engaged in empowering people in different fields of human life to have a sound spiritual experience, ecclesial belongingness, and concomitant vision to accomplish the mission of Jesus for our times. The oneness with the Lord gives the activists the energy and enthusiasm necessary to empower human beings, rendering human dignity, gender equality, and the bounty of creation towards a prosperous and, harmonious, happy life on earth. God's love experienced in the cave of the heart urges us to work to empower people.

Aptly said, "St Kuriakose Elias Chavara is revered today as a spirit-filled person who contributed towards rejuvenating the Christian life and initiating reform in the social life of the people of Kerala."[26] Thomas Chathamparampil captures the dynamics found in the founder, who was an outstanding spiritual and social leader, in his words:

> He was a leader and activist who could give direction to the Church and the society of his time. He is the co-founder of a Congregation for men and women. But at the same time, his saintly life shows categorically how a saintly person like him can, also going through the sufferings and agonies of life, remain firm and solid in his faith, turning every such moment as a moment of blessings and grace

25 A. M. Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara,* Dharmaram Publications, Bangalore, 2008, 224.

26 Thomas Chathamparampil, "Word of Blessings," in *Agonies and Ecstasies. Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara,* Thomas Panthaplackal, (Theological Studies on Saint Chavara 9), Chavara Central Secretariat, Kakkanad, 2022, 7.

> and to declaring with confidence finally with a sense of gratitude to God that he has never lost the baptismal grace which he has received.[27]

Here is a beautiful blend of spiritual depth and active commitment in its zenith. Faith in the Lord confers the impetus to carry out the mission despite troubles and tribulations.

Sense of Mystery and experience of the Divine leads to the act of mercy through pastoral ministry. Kuriakose, having had the divine touch, is a champion of pastoral ministry.

3. Sense of Mercy and the Sense of Pastoral Ministry

As stated earlier, the spiritual experience takes the agent on the path of transformation, both oneself and others with whom the agent works.

> Grant, O Mercy, that with sanctity my soul may flood;
> Forgiveness of sins through your precious Blood.[28]

This engagement for change is the field of pastoral ministry. Equipped with the experience of the Divine, the pastor moves smoothly and enthusiastically in bringing God's dream come true in the given context.

Kuriakose, immersed in the sense of Mystery, is imbued with a sense of mercy, for God's nature, name, and face is mercy. Mercy is the synonym for God. Wherever there is mercy, there is God. Mercy is divine. When showing mercy, human beings become divine in human form. Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, emphatically teaches, "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven;

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27 T. Chathamparampil, "Word of Blessings," 7.

28 *Compunction of the Soul,* VI, 353-354.

for he makes his sun rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Mt 5:44-45). Luke calls the perfection of God as mercifulness. "Be merciful, just as your heavenly father is merciful" (Lk 6:36). We are called to imitate the mercy of God. Mercifulness is tangible, but the mercy of God is invisible. At the moment of acts of mercy, two things happen: one, the mercifulness of God is made credible; two, the divine in humans is made visible.

The Mystery of God takes us to the sense of mercy, for the Mystery of God is essentially mercy or compassion. Whoever experiences the Mystery of God experiences the Mercy of God, for it is the grace of God which bestows the gift of the divine encounter full of mercy and compassion. The sense of God is interwoven with the feeling of mercy, for God is mercy in nature; God cannot be but merciful. Mercy or compassion is the litmus test for a human person. To be compassionate is to be natural and normal for a human being, for everyone bears the image of God, and every time someone displays mercy through thoughts, words, and actions, they assume the original nature of a human being. Kuriakose was a replica of God's heart.

Kuriakose was found on his kneels, asking for God's mercy. "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" (Lk 18:38) is a cry for mercy and healing. People attracted to the person of Jesus and convinced of the healing power of Jesus repeated the plea for help. A sense of Mystery and the gift of mercy complement each other in healing and well-being.

The story of Zacchaeus in the Gospel of Luke gives us a typical pattern of Mystery leading ministry. Filled with awe and reverence for Jesus, Zacchaeus wanted to have a gaze of him. He takes the trouble to climb a sycamore-fig tree to

see Jesus from afar. Zacchaeus is attracted to the personality of Jesus, and his surprise, having seen him on the tree, Jesus asks him, "Come down immediately. I must stay at your house today" (Lk 19:5). So Zacchaeus came down at once and welcomed him gladly. He does not attend to people's complaints on their way to his home. The encounter with the Lord had raised mixed feelings in Zacchaeus. He feels a sinner and is honoured to welcome Jesus in his house. As a result of the experience of the Mystery of Jesus, Zacchaeus publically declares, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount" (Lk 19:8). Communion with the Lord transforms Zacchaeus and enables and empowers him to continue the ministry of conversion. Kuriakose Elias Chavara, though he maintained baptismal innocence to the end of his life, often expressed his sinfulness and God's mercifulness in one go:

> I deem not myself worthy of reaching high degrees of prayer and sanctity. I am a great sinner with a heart impure and opaque without virtues of cleanliness and modesty. I realise that I am not worthy to receive the spirit of contemplation and attain perfection.[29]

In all humility, Kuriakose counts the blessings from God, all as a gratuitous gift from the Lord:

> For is it because of my power and skill that I did things whatsoever? How is it that you came hither? Who called me from home? How did I become a Priest? How could I join the community and become so come by the present status? Do you think I deserve any one of these favours?

29 *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 1.

> Not at all, to be sure. If so, remember that God's will is being accomplished.[30]

Having accomplished numerous things in his eventful life and ministry, Kuriakose enjoins God's mercy as the rationale for his magnificent missions. He further recounts his experience of the glorious Mystery and proposes putting on the robe of glory. He muses, "So if you are humble enough to ask Him who brought you hither, you will certainly be gifted with the royal robe, i.e., higher degrees of prayer and sanctity."[31] The Mystery of God not only helps persons to experience divine mercy but also moves by it to do the ministry, the work of mercy, which Chavara was well known for.

The monastery Chapel was the central stage of Kuriakose's life and ministry; it was the wellspring of his immersing mystery experience and the powerhouse for dispensing his all-round holistic ministry, taking religious, social, economic, educational, and above all, spiritual dimensions of human life. Time and again, Kuriakose underscores and exults mercy, the character of God:

> Behold! My bounteous heavenly Father is seated on His Throne of mercy in the Chapel. On His right and left stand the Blessed Mother and our Patron, St Joseph. Close to them is St. Theresa in genuflection to intercede for her children, particularly for me, the sinner.[32]

Kuriakose's contemplation focussed on the throne of divine mercy. An array of heavenly accompaniments is more than a comforting and encouraging experience to Kuriakose.

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30 *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 1.

31 *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 1.

32 *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 3.

He takes the courage to step into the heavenly Father's Mystery field, "So here I am on my feet to make a move to my Father's house with my country cap and walking stick."[33] Interestingly, he walks into the throne of God's glory without any fears and artificiality but fully armed with natural and cultural identity. A homely experience of the Father's glory empowers Kuriakose to ministry. Meditating on the parable of the Prodigal son, Kuriakose confesses, "Oh, it is a long time since I saw my heavenly Father's face! Like the prodigal son, I have squandered all the nice things you benignly bestowed on me."[34] As enjoyable, so is it attractive to see the swift change in the dispositions of Kuriakose, shifting back and forth from sinfulness to empowerment through God's mercy.

Notice the sudden surprise in the interior movement of Kuriakose, "My Father is out to embrace me! Oh, No, be off. I am not worthy to be touched by Him. So let me fall prostrate at His feet."[35] Soon, he changes the scene to a filial clinging to God the Father, "O my Father dear! I cast myself on my knees before your throne of mercy. I am bent on clinging to your pierced but live feet until you speak to me words of forgiveness."[36] The experience of the ineffable God's Mystery, Kuriakose captures the beauty of mercy through friendly conversation or sheer gazing at a friend's face. In his *Colloquies*, Kuriakose comes into the monastery chapel, the focal point of his immersive encounter with the Lord and utters:

33 *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 4.

34 *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 4.

35 *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 5.

36 *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 5.

> This Chapel which is filled with your presence, is dreadful so far as a sinner is concerned. But I know you are present here not as a frightening judge but as a friendly Father. Great is your majesty and power. So also is your generosity and kindness. As you have said, there is a time of justice and salvation. I must seek it.[37]

He is not tired of waiting. Instead, Kuriakose spends long hours before the Eucharistic Lord with zeal in oblation:

> From atop your altars, let me offer
> Myself as a gift of love and reparation
> O, how long have I been waiting in love
> With zeal have I tarried, oh, how long.[38]

Conclusion

The Divine Mystery encircled Kuriakose throughout his vision and mission, and everything came from the mines of his deep divine experience characterised by the Lord's mercy. Kuriakose's darśan of the Holy defined his pastoral ministry as flooded with joy and compassion. Schooled in the Eastern Liturgy of the Thomas Christians of India, Kuriakose picked up the mystery dimension of the Qurbana and, guided by the Holy Spirit, animated his ministries with the sense of Mystery and Mercy of God, the hallmarks of the Eastern Liturgical tradition.

Kuriakose breathed in and breathed out the Eucharistic Lord as his food and drink and tried to impart a mystic and poetic touch to the Christian life, marked by the intimacy with the Lord and the joy of the Gospel:

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37 *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 9.

38 *Compunction of the Soul,* VIII, 17-20.

You, my love, my joy and all my good fortune
If not with you, how could I live my life
My very breath, my food, my drink
What solace have I save in you![39]

Along with breathing Jesus, Kuriakose developed a deep-seated desire to behold the Lord in his life. The caption, "God's will always and everywhere," a slightly modified version of his text to the contemporary audience from *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, leaves an image of a *yogi*, one in union with God in thought, word, and deed. The contemplation of the divine face took Kuriakose to action on the ground, inviting everyone to glorify God, establishing peace on earth and hope for human beings. Thomas Mampra sketches Kuriakose as:

> A contemplative in action. Drawing deeply from India's cultural and religious traditions, he lived his cherished gift of Christian faith in single-minded commitment and ardent devotion to the Lord on the one hand and in deep communion with and selfless service to his fellow humans on the other. In his life and that of his community, the good news of Jesus of Nazareth found a new and refreshing expression, spreading its splendour and fragrance far beyond the confines of his neighbourhood.[40]

I want to conclude this reflection with a passage from the Qurbana, which Kuriakose celebrated with great devotion, diligence and pure heart, and I am inclined to think that the Eucharistic Mystery shaped his sense of Mystery and the overarching divine experience:

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39 *Compunction of the Soul,* II, 143-146.

40 Thomas Mampra, "Words of Appreciation" quoted from Z.M. Moozhoor, *Blessed Chavara: The Star of the East,* Current Publications, Kottayam, 1993, xiii.

Merciful God! Bless us. Grant that all of us, as one body, may properly please You throughout our lives by works of justice that reconcile us with You. Make us worthy to offer You never-ending praise, homage, thanksgiving, and adoration. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Lord of all, forever.[41]

41 *The Order of the Syro-Malabar Qurbana*, 39.

CHAVARA
A Reformist with a Pastoral Heart

Mathew Maniampra CMI

1. Introduction

In the latter part of the 20th century, there emerged a renewed interest in the field of pastoral ministry in the Church. The pastoral ministry became more and more accompaniment and care for the faithful after the model of Jesus' way of compassion and servant leadership that emphasized human dignity. Jesus, taking the scriptural imagery of a shepherd, pointed out the characteristic features of a good shepherd (Jn 10:11-18). The image of the good shepherd provides the perfect model for pastoral ministry and the self-giving love, guidance, protection and care of the flock presented in the image are to be imitated by the pastors. Feeding and protecting the sheep of the flock and leading them to greener pastures are vital part of pastoral ministry.

Traditionally, in the life of the Church, a shepherd/pastor had the role of preaching and teaching. In this changed time, the Body of Christ needs to be built up by a holistic leadership and service that have far ranging implications in the true care of the faithful. Gifts natural or charismatic are given to individuals to build up the body of Christ. As a member of the community and as a disciple of Jesus, Kuriakose Elias Chavara saw so much good all-around even when there had been gloom occasionally. He maintained an optimistic outlook all through, which enabled him to be an active reformist with a pastoral heart.

2. Pastoral Personality of Chavara

Pastoral ministry calls for a pastoral personality. Not all are equally endowed with a pastoral personality but all can develop a personality that can enhance the pastoral attitude and continue the mission of Jesus. Priests, by virtue of their call, and religious by virtue of their commitment to the Church and by the profession of evangelical counsels, are bound to develop a pastoral personality so that the ministry and mission of Jesus are continued in a more meaningful way in the given socio-cultural context. Although, pastoral ministry is shared by all in the Church, in the priest/pastor who is anointed by the Holy Spirit, there is an abiding sense of Jesus as the word-made-flesh who invites all to come and see.[1]

A pastor is someone who is engaged in the mission of Jesus, continuing it here and now through a personal commitment announced publicly. Chavara was a pastor in this sense. While an action may be good, it need not be a ministry unless it is an expression and overflow of one's relationship with God. Commitment to ministry and mission warrants the skills to accompany people. Chavara, in his pastoral leadership and ministry, realized something that is similar to the Jungian position: "Condemnation does not liberate, it oppresses, and I am the oppressor of the person I condemn not his friend and fellow traveller."[2] Pastors and ministers shall first accept their own flaws in the love of Christ that they may know that they are loved at a deeper level, and with this knowledge, they may listen to others in a non-judgmental manner. To accept oneself

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1 Ronald Bowlby, "*Parish: Pastoral Care*", in Alastair V. Campbell (ed.), *Dictionary of Pastoral Care,* New York: Crossroad, 1987, 183.

2 C.G. Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, (trans. Cary F. Baynes), Marrickville, Australia: Imprint Harcourt Publishers, 1955.

with all wretchedness is the hardest of all human tasks and almost impossible to fulfil. Owning one's own shadow is the primary task of all pastors before they set out to help. Chavara accepted and owned even his own minor shortcomings. He never projected the unwanted part of his personality on to others. A failure to honour and integrate the negative experiences of life creates dissonance and disharmony.

Chavara was a man totally engaged in ministering to his people in many and creative ways. All the while, he was not obsessed with doing. He found time for prayer, manual work, learning, developing friendships, etc. Chavara's pastoral skills and ministries were such that they led people to *metanoia*, changing their attitude and mind to meet the greater plans of God as demanded by the gospel. In settling the conflicts among various groups and the way in which he solved the Roccos schism, we see this power in action. The power to change our understanding is a gift of the Holy Spirit that we are called to cooperate with and appropriate. For example, the Johannine Jesus emphasizes the gift dimension by informing the disciples that the Spirit would teach them everything and guide them into all truth (Jn 14:25; 16:13). Similarly, Paul exhorts the Christians to cooperate and appropriate: "Be transformed by the renewing of your minds" (Rom 12:2) and "Be renewed in the spirit of your minds" (Eph 4:23). This tension between change as a gift and change as something we have to work at is illustrated by the Pentecost story in Acts 2.

A pastor is a caring person and his personality is a central factor in the caring ministry. Psychotherapeutic literature gives immense significance to the personality of the therapist. Likewise, a pastor's personality is vital in the church ministries. A high degree of self-awareness and an insight into the dynamics of one's own personality is

essential. Chavara's pastoral personality is characterized by empathy, authentic respect for others, firmness and an ability to respond with genuineness and openness. Because a pastor's personality 'is a helping personality', usually motivated by high self-expectations and an altruistic desire to be helpful and to care for others accompanied by a strong sense of responsibility, and they are likely to feel more guilt.[3] Chavara became an example of integrating the traditional and modern in the ecclesial and social life. He was well aware of the precious apostolic traditions of the Kerala Church. It did not prevent him from adapting duly from other cultures, and traditions. He widened his own ministry by adapting many things from Latin rite traditions. He wanted to have greater exposure for the Syro-Malabar community and wanted to bring it out of its confines. This good intention of Chavara has been misinterpreted in some quarters as *Latinisation*. At a time when the Syro-Malabar Church was in decline due to the lack of proper leadership, God raised a holy man to ward off the spiritual and theological bankruptcy.

3. Reform of the Clergy

An urgent need of the Church in Kerala was the reform of the clergy. Chavara realized that if the priests were renewed in the model of Christ and are properly informed in the spiritual and theological disciplines, many of the problems in the Church could be solved. What Chavara says in the biography of *malpan* Palackal is indicative of the deficiencies in the system:

3 A growing body of research suggests a distinctive helping personality is commonly found in the caring professions. Helping persons driven by idealistic expectations any, also deprive themselves of opportunities for pleasure and relaxation. These tendencies can be a source of tension unless properly looked into.

The *malpan*s of the time did not bother about this because they taught all that they knew only to their nephews or to a few others in whom they were interested in and taught the other students only how to offer the Holy Eucharist and recite the canonical prayers. Chavara and his colleagues felt that this situation could be redressed and much good could have been done if some form of consecrated/vowed life existed in this Church. They wanted to have such an opportunity in their land of apostolic tradition.

With his sense of history, Chavara knew that the religious orders in the west used to be centres of holiness, learning and social transformation. As a lover of God, Church and people, Chavara wanted to make up for this deficit. However, he did not wait for a redeemer to come. He set himself on the path with a definitive purpose and vision and strenuously worked at the realization of religious life in the land. The religious communities that Chavara founded became models for many religious institutes for men and women and gave a boost to varied apostolic activities that energized the society and the Church.[4] John Wesley, the protestant reformer had a motto: 'Do all good you can, by all the means you can, in all the places you can at all the times you can to all the people you can, as long as you ever can.' 'Do as much good by all means' was the guiding principle of Chavara. As in many champion saints of the Church, Chavara had fire in his heart to do something good and beautiful for God and his people.

The seminaries that were set up under the initiative of Palakkal, Porukara and Chavara brought about a new era and

4 Joseph Pathrapankal, "The Prophetic Ministry of St. Chavara in the Society during 19th Century", Key Note Address in the Workshop on Theological Studies on St. Chavara, Kakkanad: Chavara Central Secretariat, 2017, 13.

a paradigm shift in theological education among Saint Thomas Christians.[5] The visionary *malpans* formed a collaborative team as they felt the need of recasting seminary formation to revitalize the Church. They realized the importance of preparing new leaders in the Church with an enlightened mind and sound spiritual and theological outlook. They began to impart quality training for pastors and teachers. If there is any foundation for theological education in the New Testament, it is Jesus himself who trained his disciples in personal discussion, counselling, preaching, dialoguing and listening.[6]

Generally, people imitate and follow other people. This is the basis of social learning theory, which proposes that new behaviours can be acquired by observing and imitating others. People learn by observing, imitating and modelling. Researchers have observed that children treat dolls exactly the way the seniors treated them. The theory of learning is what Jesus had employed when he taught his disciples. Paul instructed the believers that they might follow his example, just as he followed Christ. Peter urged the Church leaders to be example to the flock. For Chavara verbal teaching was secondary because he himself was an embodiment of all that he taught and preached. What is lacking in the system of seminary formation in our times is adequate number of models who inspire and teach by their life.

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5 Gratian Mundadan, "CMI Legacy of Theological Education", in Thomas Kollamparampil (ed.), *Christian Leadership and Integration,* Bangalore: Dharmaram, 2007: 44-46, 45.

6 Paul Achandy, Inaugural speech in the CMI Philosophers and Theologians Forum, 2017.

4. Media for Christian Formation

The centrality of the media in today's life in social, political, economic and personal realms is beyond dispute. Media, whether audio or video, print or electronics is a powerful instrument to create networks of relationships and communication. The universality and the presence of media in different forms and shapes radically influence the life style of people whether they want it or not. As a writer, organizer, social reformer and above all, a spiritual guide, Chavara realized the significance of media and thought ahead of time and utilized it in the best possible ways. He turned his attention to the print media, which was the only main mass communication facility of the time. Pope Pius X in his encyclical *Divini illius Magistri* (1930), pointed out the need for healthy principles in the media. Chavara, with his farsightedness and visionary nature, sensed that the pastoral care of the people and the evangelization would be incomplete without exploiting the potentialities of print media.

Modernity was introduced to the Church in Kerala by the endeavours of Chavara. Printing technology was strictly the monopoly of the foreign evangelical missionaries and the government. It was a rare and expensive technology unavailable to the general populace. Its trade was controlled by the colonial powers. Because of the political and economic interests of colonial powers, who did not want it to get into the hands of the commoners and the rival missionaries, it was a herculean task to avail it for indigenous purposes. Chavara, like the Prometheus of the Greek epic, who stole the fire from the gods for humanity's sake, made it happen. He foresaw the good it could bring to his community and the people at large. In dealing with the people of all kinds, he displayed so much of sensitivity and inclusiveness that he did not alienate

anyone in the planning and execution of his project. He was a catalyst of social reformation because of his spiritual outlook that encompassed everything that brought good to humanity.

The books of the divine office for clerical use were not available in print. This was a real concern for Chavara. To a great extent, the new press that he established helped to make up for the lack of books on the Bible, liturgy and spirituality. Many Malayalam and Tamil books came out from the press that Chavara established. These attempts changed the spiritual and intellectual climate of Kerala at a critical time in the history.[7] Although he was involved in promoting modernity in the society and the Church, he was never oblivious of the primacy of the spirituality of his people. The first book he printed in the press in 1846 was *Jnanapiyusham*. This is the first book that was made available to the Christians in Kerala in their mother tongue. It was a translation of a Tamil Christian book. It is in the same press that the first Malayalam daily *Nasrani Deepika* was printed. It is interesting to note that Chavara did not print any of his own literary works. The year after his demise, Fr Leopold printed *Atmanuthapam* of Chavara at the Immaculate Mother Press at Koonammavu. By using the print media to bring out books on faith and life, Chavara announced the good news from the 'house top.'

5. Liturgical Innovations

Chavara knew the significance of liturgy in the life of the faithful. He composed no less than ten books for liturgical use in the Malabar Church. Prior to this composition, the liturgical texts of the time contained various errors and the Synod of Diamper had effected radical changes in the liturgy.

7 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara,* Mumbai: St Paul's, 2014, 112.

Many East Syrian and Indian usages were replaced by the missionaries with those of the western Church, especially those sanctioned by the Council of Trent. This produced an unhappy admixture of Latin, East Syrian and Indian practices. The intention of Chavara in attempting to reform the liturgy was that the public worship should be performed with decorum and dignity. He borrowed from Latin sources wherever it was found appropriate. His close associations with the western missionaries and the Latin practices prompted him to draw whatever was good for enhancing the piety and devotion among his people.

Chavara was anxious to preserve all that was good in the traditional liturgy of the time. One also needs to take into account the fact that he was the Vicar General of the faithful of the Malabar Church under the Latin Vicar Apostolic. Prompted by the pastoral concern for his people, whatever he found helpful in other traditions, he brought into the devotional practices of the Malabar Church. Pastoral concerns sometimes demand some amount of flexibility in matters of worship. As long as the essential characteristics of the liturgy are retained and the purpose of the liturgy is maintained, adaptations are welcome. Liturgical formulas and expressions shall be conducive to enhance the spirit of worship.

6. Renewal of Parishes

The Church, religious life and its various forms have no existence in itself apart from the mission of Christ. The mission of the Church is to enlighten the world by the gospel truth, bringing the gospel message of God's love and salvation to all. In this mission naturally humans will be able to enjoy greater sense of dignity and belongingness to the family God. The Church in Kerala was in need of a reform. Other than

keeping traditions blindly, there were not much scriptural and theological wisdom disseminated in the community. Chavara and his group of religious took it upon themselves to preach the Word of God and challenged the faithful to be real vehicles of the gospel. Through preaching, teaching and publishing, Chavara let some fresh air into the rigidly conservative mindset of Saint Thomas Christians.

Chavara realized that in the formation of the Christian community, it should be properly fed with the Divine word, for the Church is built upon the Word of God; she is born from and lives by that Word. "We declare to you what we have always seen and heard so that you may also have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his son Jesus Christ" (1 Jn 1:3). We believe all that exists came into being by God's word. The existence and identity of the Christian community are derived fully from God's word, spoken in history.

Listening to God's word is one of the fundamental principles of Catholic theology.[8] Chavara was a motivational speaker. With the style and substance, he influenced the faithful and led them to the desired destination. Immediately after his ordination, Chavara began undertaking the ministry of preaching. He launched into parish retreats for the renewal of the parish and encouraged his colleagues to do it and made it a feature of parish life. Again, he was deputed to preach and bring back people who strayed to the schismatic bishop. In his last testament to his parish family, Chavara wrote how to face and live through difficult times. His paternal heart

8 Paul Achandy, "Inaugural Address," in *Contextual Ecclesial Education, and the Evangelizing Mission of the Church*, Bangalore: Dharmaram, 2017, 14-20, 16.

and pastoral mind are seen vividly in the testament. He never preached anything that he did not practice. Since he walked his talk, his words enjoyed the power of authenticity.

7. Reforms for Suffering Humanity

Chavara wanted everyone to enjoy the human dignity conferred by the creator. Being created in the image of God, the final and critical stage of human life shall have loftiness despite any physical illness. Dying people shall have an inner joy and peace that comes from the spiritual resources available to them. Chavara felt that the Church has an immediate and urgent responsibility to confer the spiritual joy and peace that come from the hope of eternal life. The sacraments of the Church designed to help the dying, especially sacraments of reconciliation and anointing of the sick shall be available to all. In his pastoral openness, he took special care in this regard.

Chavara himself went to the people who were dying of epidemic to console and to administer the anointing of the sick and to impart blessings despite the warning that it would be dangerous to his health. Although he was dissuaded, he acted courageously and set an example for the whole community that he was pasturing. He witnessed the peace and joy of many people as they received the sacraments and blessings of the Church. He nursed his own colleagues Valliara and Nellissery who fell sick. Chavara saw the difference in the dying people as they are surrounded by loving and caring people who represent the Church. He made sure that no Christian shall die without the necessary spiritual care and assistance s/he needed in the last minutes of their life, because the whole life will lose its lustre, if human beings die like animals. This prompted him to make a *Confraternity for Happy Death*. He asked the people of Kainakary to keep a charity box to collect

enough money to meet the expenses of the dying people.[9] He pointed out to the parishioners how important it is to prepare ourselves and others for a salutary death. In response to his request the parishioners wrote:

> We shall not only pray for all those who were instrumental in establishing this confraternity in our chapel so that all may be blessed with happy death, but we also pray for the poor folk who have none to take care of them so that they also may be given a happy death, and we propose to open here a hospice for the poor and the destitute and to take care of all their needs. Hoping to get from our Christian brethren small gifts by way of charity to aid us in this venture, we have placed here a charity box.[10]

As a man of compassion and Christian charity, Chavara desired that the poor and the destitute feel wanted and loved and to be taken care of in their helpless situations. When he asked his parishioners to constitute the *Confraternity for Happy Death,* he proved himself to be a father to all in their spiritual and material needs. Palliative care for the terminally ill is deemed as a modern concept. In fact, Chavara began it in his humble settings. He knew that by experiencing personal love and care in distressed time, people are more naturally disposed to be recipient of God's love and grace. Now palliative care units are founded all over Kerala and are supported by numerous welfare agencies. It is deemed as a specialized medical care to improve the quality of life even when the disease is incurable.

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9 Thomas Panthaplackal, *Athisahanangalum Athyandadangalum*, Kakkanad: CMI Department of Research and Documentation, Chavara Hills, 2017, 135.

10 CWC IV *Letters*: *Testament*, 127-28.

When a person's health cannot be restored, it is time to focus on the other dimension of life, namely spiritual. Towards the end of life, naturally people have a greater opening towards the spiritual realities. But they need help and guidance, especially for people who have been away from the religious practices, to take steps towards further growth. In fact, human spiritual consciousness is expanded through suffering and struggles. We see that even great spiritual giants had lot of suffering, physical and mental by which they further rose in their spiritual consciousness and were seen at their best.

In 1843, Chavara sent a circular letter to all priests to establish more of such confraternities. What Mother Teresa did in the streets of Calcutta, he had done in a different context; that is helping people to die with dignity receiving human love and warmth thus helping them to open up to the grace of salvation, if they lacked it. As sons and daughters, they should be able to have a glimpse of the future in the wake of their death. Most people are able to have some glimpse of their future at these moments and could prepare themselves in a more radical way. Chavara who helped and witnessed the happy death of his predecessors Thomas Palackkal and Thomas Porukkara and many others whom he personally assisted in their illness, felt the need of more facilities to care for the sick in order to help them towards a happy death.

The desire to save souls was the motivational fire behind all such activities that Chavara initiated. What you give away with love, you are likely to receive, perhaps in manifold ways as the Lord himself said: "And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life" (Mt 19:29). Chavara was blessed with a happy death in the company of all who loved him, of course, with

the Holy Family and hosts of saints invisibly present with him. Fr Leopold wrote in his diary: "Today on 3 January 1871, Tuesday at 7.15 am, Fr Cyriac Elias of Holy family, the first Prior died after a life of great innocence. He could declare before his death that he had never lost the baptismal innocence."[11]

8. Rendering Wholeness to the Mourners

Death in Christian life cannot be overlooked, for Christian life is orchestrated from the very beginning to the end for a happy death. A happy death means dying in full human dignity knowing one's status as the son/daughter of God. To modern man, death is an unpleasant topic that is to be avoided as much as possible. But mortality is part of being human. Human beings will not be human without having the mortality built into his being. It gives the sense of urgency to make life beautiful. The art of good living involves the art of dying well. Death is related to life and life is related to death; they mutually enrich each other. Life and soul surpass the body, for body did not create it. Body has been an aid for the soul to evolve, grow and reach its destination. Body is the mediator we could see, feel and interact easily; therefore, the loss of it is painful for the survivors. This pain is real. This pain needs to be addressed. All religions and cultures have many rituals in the wake of death. It is often presented as helping the soul departed: in fact, it is all for the grieving people. Rituals help them to grieve properly taking time, revisiting the traumatic times and incidents. Recalling and verbalizing

11 Leopold Beccaro, *A Biography of the Venerable Person,* published at Koonammavu in 1871 as part of *Atmanuthapam* and later published by Lucas Vithuvattikkal in 2003, 17.

our loss giving it spiritual vibrations help people to reconnect with lives after traumatic experiences of death.

Faith gives immense hope in crisis time. Faith in a loving God who brings the deceased to a new life is consoling. The scriptures, rituals, prayers all help grieving people to grieve well so that life may be restored. Today psychologists are sent to people who experience heavy losses in catastrophic incidents. They are often desensitized by slow exposure to the sad episodes by means of different therapies. People who grieve well can easily return to normal life. Fortyone-day commemorative gathering in memory of the diseased is a wakeup call to leave behind the episode after the sadness for a span of time. Sadness frozen into the humans without grieving leads to depression for a lifetime unless it is addressed. Hence, we have a tradition of mourning for forty days or a similar period of grieving time.

Religions in their wisdom, had found different rituals of mourning so that after its completion, one can get along with life. The Book of Lamentations and the Book of Job have this kind of significance too. Chavara who had insight into the human nature, felt the need of an elegy, which he couched in a religious language filled with hope. We have a better appreciation of his poetic work titled *Pana* (Dirge) as we view it from this angle. One of the common messages that runs through such religious elegies is the evanescence of life and the need to reconstruct one's own life in the light of its brevity and its unexpected termination. By composing *Maranaveetil padunnathinulla pana,* Chavara was fulfilling the need of a Christian elegy or dirge in the best tradition of Christian faith. Collective public display of emotions of sadness and loss has been part of all cultures. We see such images in Greek mythologies and in the Indian epic of Mahabharata. In some

locales this kind of mourning was organized and performed by traditional mourners. Rather than gritting the teeth and face it, it makes more sense to feel one's pain and sadness so that we are not alienated from real self.

The *pana* begins with the parable of a man who had three friends. They had promised to each other that each will be alert to come to the other to rescue him in the wake of any tragedy. In spite of the assurance, the King sentenced one of them to death. The parable unravels the nature and identity of each companion and why they could not help. The first companion is the world. All the powers of the world, medicine, money and magic cannot help the one who is dying. All human means are obviously powerless in the event of death. The second friend represents the kith and kin. Their love and good will are not enough. They are helpless like anyone else at this critical moment. And the third is one's own ego, which perceives that it has no prospect of survival. When all friends failed and were helpless, the real friend enters the scene namely 'Virtue.' The only friend who could help at this critical moment was his own virtues he had earned in life. The fourth friend was invisible and had refrained from making any promises. This last friend was the only helpful friend in the journey to heaven. The chant is powerful enough to evoke a sober mood in the sad and disheartened people mourning around the deceased. The personal emotions are raised to a universal and supernatural sphere.[12]

In a culture, where mortality was very high on account of epidemics like small pox, cholera, malaria etc., Chavara

12 N. Gopinath "An Ode to Inner Engineering" in John Mannarathara (ed.), *The Life and Legacy of St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara,* New Delhi, Viva Books Pvt Ltd, 2015, 149-158, 152.

felt the need of the people to deal with these exigencies of life in a religiously mature manner making use of faith in the eternal life and the redemptive love of Christ. He himself was a victim of such a calamity as he lost his whole family early in his life. Bible and Christian theology are the obvious sources of his inspiration and his immediate purpose was spiritual consolation. In the Christian perspective, life is like a journey to one's heavenly abode. For, here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city, which is to come (Heb 13:14). John Bunyan's monumental work *Pilgrim's Progress* tells the story of a pilgrim Christian who makes his way from the city of destruction (the world) to the celestial city (heaven). We are pilgrims here on earth, naturally this pilgrimage comes to an end when it reaches the pilgrims destination. This and similar messages are seen in many classic Christian literary works.

9. A Holistic Reformer of all Times

As a reformer in the Church, Chavara is more akin to Saints Francis Assisi, Benedict and Ignatius Loyola. Unlike Martin Luther, he tried to effect changes in the Church from within. There were several divisions in the Church. As an astute visionary, Chavara sensed that one more division in the Church would make no good to anyone. He wanted to keep the unity in faith and fellowship in the Church that he belonged to. He could inspire his people by his humility and sanctity, so much so that when he spoke, it was received as the voice of a father who always intended the good of the children. The true Christian discipleship involves the call to become the father of all needy and all people of good will. Church and society in Kerala were not free from the feudalistic remnants in the administrative and social set up. There were always different classes of people, i.e., the protectors and the protected. The protected was not always really protected but were at the

mercy of the protector's discretions. Socially, economically and religiously there were untouchables who maintained life away and apart from the normal stream of life. Chavara realized that education was the only way to effect changes in the society.

In the religious sphere, Chavara wanted to have more *darsanaveedu* and *thapasu bhavanam* to promote authentic spiritual life. He himself was an epitome of integrated life with his simplicity, asceticism service and love for all humans without boundaries and segregations. He imbibed the Indian spiritual genius of Buddha and Mahavira in his compassion and charity.[13] Seeing the poor state of women in religion as well as in the socio-economic realms, he wanted to start a religious congregation for women by means of which women could be empowered. He wanted the religious women to become effective agents to reform the society.

Chavara was a man of reformations in the Church. However, unlike many others, he did it through his humble and meek style. He felt the need of more organized formation and greater scholarship for priests in theology, languages and all socially relevant themes. He sensed the need of proper seminaries after the model of the western countries in his land. Hence, new seminaries were founded. Just as the Society of Jesuit was a tool and competent weapon during the Reformation to fight against the opponents who were negatively inspired by the corruption and unenlightened religious practices of the 16th century, so with the help of his newly founded congregation, Chavara brought about some

13 Govinda Pilla, *Sukrutham Smara*, Kakkanad: Chavara Central Secretariat, 1998, 43.

meaningful reforms first in the Church and subsequently in the society at large.

All great *acharyas* who had a special vision and purpose in their life, after imparting it, always wanted it to be continued without fail for the greater good of humanity. In order to consolidate the gains, they started new movements defining the nature of the new institution or the principles and values to be adhered to while following the ideals envisaged. Chavara felt the need of such institution from the very beginning. Hence, he nurtured and maintained two religious congregations based on his initial ideals and reformatory acts. Even though in the initial periods, they faced hurdles of different kinds, sustained by the virtue and vision of the founder, today they are innovatively in the forefront with multiple ministries. Chavara was basically a religious without any masks. Though he was a multifaceted genius, he kept his humanness without being corrupted by any pomp.

Chavara creatively planned many remedial programmes to strengthen his apostolic community. The reforms he started found its fruition by bringing up many to the path of holiness. He lamented that his mother Church with so much spiritual patrimony had been barren and had not produced saints. And today in this apostolic community, a few are beatified and canonized, and others are in line to be raised to the honour. He himself set the best example so much so that the Church raised him to the altar for the veneration. Authentic people start reforms with themselves. Chavara's reforms in the Church of Kerala were successful in every respect, for he himself was their starting point. He did not blame the socio-political and ecclesial milieu of the 19th century and wait for the opportune time to arrive. The monastery he initiated at Mannanam became a reserve bank of spiritual currency and

guidance that could refashion the ecclesial and social life of the 19th century and thereafter. However, an important characteristic feature of the society is that it is very slow in understanding and appreciating the significance of the role played by its great personalities.

10. Fundamentals of Wholesome Ministry

Chavara, through his spiritual leadership, attempted to reform the body of Christ. It was the love for the Church and Christ that stirred him to act untiringly. It is said that Christianity is not a do-it-yourself religion. All Christians by their baptism are called to be in the body of Christ acknowledging Jesus the head. Each one is given the gifts and abilities to build and perfect the Church, the body of Christ so that many may experience the gift of salvation in a more comprehensive manner. All have varying degrees of responsibilities for spiritual formation based on their unique vocation in the Church. Christian formation includes all attempts, means, instructions and discipline intended towards deepening the faith and the furtherance of spiritual growth. By introducing retreats and homilies and ensuring greater participation of the faithful in the liturgical worship, Chavara reformed and rebuilt the Church.

The Church desires that the personality of a priest is to be a bridge and not a hindrance for others in their reaching out to God in Jesus Christ. The value of communion is one of the most eloquent signs and one of the most effective ways of transmitting the gospel message.[14] The capacity for communion presupposes an adequate level of affective maturity in a person. As the humanity of the word-made-

14 John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* # 43.

flesh was the channel of salvation, so the humanity of a priest is instrumental in mediating the redemptive gifts of Christ to the people.[15] Pastoral ministry in the Church becomes a reality when priests involved in the projects have human maturity. The personality of the priest should be formed in such a way that it is acceptable to the community that he serves as well as to his team of ministers. The human formation that we emphasize today has been the need of all times in the ministry of the Church. Human qualities are to be fostered in oneself. Authorities in offices of the Church shall endeavour to promote human qualities for collaborative ministry. All that Chavara achieved was the result of fostering such qualities in himself and others. Chavara was a good steward of the temporal assets. He was prudent and discerning in public life resembling Christ in the Church. The human foundations of a priest's personality shall be strong enough to allow the divine grace to flow through him.

Authentic pastoral ministry can be carried out only by a man of balanced integration of feelings and values, so that he may not be driven by raw feelings and needs, but be powered by proper affectivity. This kind of affective growth is evidenced in his ability to live well with authority and in an ability to take direction from others. A mature and integrated person can exercise authority over the peers and can productively deal with conflicts and stress, which are part of the ministry. As a sensitive, genuine and intuitive person, Jesus sensed what was part of humanity (Jn 2:25). Chavara, in his dealings with his peers as well as his authorities and faithful reveals how his integrated personality contributed to

15 Linus Neli, "Human Formation in the Documents of the Church," in Shaji Kochuthara *et al.* (eds.), *Human Formation in Major Seminaries,* Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2017: 80-98, 96.

the efficiency of his ministry. Therefore, everyone involved in the ministry must make an effort to know what is in the depth of human heart in order to create trust and cooperation. Those who engage in mission and ministry are invited to transform themselves, society and culture by being individuals of deep living faith, with God as the very heart and centre of their lives and as they maintain the stewardship given by Christ.

Pope Francis spoke about the concept of mission in the following words: "My mission of being in the heart of the people is not just a part of my life or a badge I can take off; it is not just an extra or just another moment in life. Instead, it is something which I cannot uproot from my being without destroying my very self. I am a mission on this earth; that is the reason why I am in the world."[16] Chavara embodied the mission in his personality and pastoral ministry and lived the life of a true missionary about which Pope Francis mentioned.

11. Conclusion

Chavara was a charismatic personality. He employed the talents and gifts he was endowed with for the good of his fellow human beings without any reserve. He extended his wings fully and flew to the horizons touching the subsequent centuries. As we live in the 21st century, we still can feel and experience the waves that the fluttering of his wings made. He was not born immortal; rather he achieved immortality by his good works and virtues. He lived in the heart of God and God's people. He was a true blessing to Kerala society and the Universal Church at large. He had many feathers on his cap as a poet, writer, literary genius, educationist, social reformer, administrator, orator, spiritual guide and more. It seems that

16 Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* #273.

he was not really concerned about titles, name or fame. He was only concerned about the uplift of his fellow brethren in a holistic manner. Therefore, he explored different realms to bring about all that was good from all domains.

CHAVARA
A Pillar that Supported the Church

Susmitha CMC

1. Introduction

The grandeur and splendour of the person of Kuriakose Elias Chavara is best revealed in the following poignant and stirring remarks made by the sisters at Koonammavu Convent: "This father was a mirror and a lamp to all the Christians in Kerala. Moreover, he was a strong pillar that supported the Holy Church in protecting its faith. With great zeal, he worked for its growth and expansion."[1] The soul-stirring testimony of the sisters out of their close-knit collaboration and in-depth cooperation with Chavara stands as ever true and revealing, valid and authentic of the unique person of Chavara. His personality, contributions, and his vision and mission could be grouped into these three basic titles- *the pillar, the lamp and the mirror*- attributed by the sisters. Chavara, of course, realized the dream of God about him; to be the brave son of the Mother Church. In all that he did, his sole motive was that the Church should be the platform for every new beginning. She is to be flourished and spread out bearing the name of Christ, establishing his Kingdom. He was an epoch-making spiritual tower, a leading figure of his time.

The 19th century Kerala Church saw a new phase, for it was her re-birth, a new Pentecost through which the flag of the Mother Church flew high. Treading a novel path and

1 *The Chronicles of Koonammavu Convent* (CKC), Vol. II, 23.

inspiring many others to follow him, Chavara could become an initiator in several fields, bringing remarkable changes in the life and ministry of the Malabar Church. He could beautifully and systematically fulfil his role as the defender, builder and reformer of the Church, taking efforts and facing challenges in transforming her internal and external phases. Fighting tooth and nail against the storm that attacked her, he became the pillar of the Church that supported her. He became the light to enlighten all who were in the darkness of superstition, ignorance, false belief, etc. Mirroring the face of Christ, leading an exemplary life of complete obedience and profound love of God, Chavara became the fifth Gospel of his time. Thus, his every initiation has its far-reaching consequences that extent even today.

The present study is a humble attempt to introduce Chavara - as a pillar that supported the Church, a mirror and a lamp in the Church, unfolding his tremendous love and great zeal with which he worked for its growth and expansion.

2. The Phases of the Church

2.1. The Internal Phase

Among the two phases of the Catholic Church the internal phase contains the mystery of the Holy Trinity, Sacraments, Saints, Angels, Word of God, etc., which are holy in themselves; nothing can make them contaminated or spoiled; never they lose the holiness or purity, as a consequence of someone's failure to lead an authentic life, neither of an ordinary lay faithful nor of any priests or religious. This internal phase, which is holy in its very nature, forms the core of the Church. So, the Church by her very nature and existence is ever holy, as her core is holy.

2.2. The External Phase

The external phase of the Church contains the hierarchical and administrative set up, such as the pope, bishops, priests, religious, lay faithful, the institutions, the material and physical dimensions, etc. Unlike the internal phase which focuses on the spiritual, doctrinal and communal life with in the Church, the external phase focuses on the mission, outreach and the interaction with the world.

3. A Strong Pillar of the Church

When the sisters addressed Chavara as the pillar, they had a clear picture how he supported the Church through his life and mission. He became the pillar by strengthening the faith of the people of God and by fostering their unity. He protected the people in unity from the attack of the intruder bishop Thomas Roccos. Introducing various programmes for spiritual re-awakening such as Sunday homily, retreats for the priests and the laity, family renewal programs, and so on, he nurtured the growth of their faith life.[2] Chavara became a strong pillar of the Malabar church through his lasting contributions as a zealous pastor and a servant leader, preacher of the Word of God, pioneering efforts in seminary formation, renewal of the clergy, liturgical renewal, educational and social apostates, etc.[3]

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2 Sophy Rose, *A Pillar and Guiding Light: Kuriakose Elias Chavara, A Theologian of the Church*, Kochi: Chavara Central Secretariat & Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2020, 46-81.

3 Francis Thonippara, Kuriakose Elias Chavara, A Father of the Syro-Malabar Church," in Benny Thettayil and Naiju Jose Kalambukattu, ed., *Father and Doctor of the Church: A Theological Reading of the Life and Writings of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications & Kochi: Chavara Central Secretariat, 2024, 66-93.

3.1. Courageous Leadership in Troubled Times

The years 1861-1862 can be called as an age of 'open war' for faith and unity in the history of the Malabar Church. The arrival of the Chaldean bishop Thomas Roccos from Baghdad without the authorization from the Holy Father, on 9 May 1861 marked the beginning of the struggles and confusions in faith. When the Vicar Apostolic Baccinelli realized the situation going out of his control, he found in Chavara, a shepherd after the heart of Jesus, to bring back the scattered sheep of the Church. He was sure that in and through Chavara God would act in right time. In the letter appointing Chavara as the Vicar General, he wrote:

> On account of the difficulties which we experience in the administration of churches under our jurisdiction for a long time, because of our advanced age and the consequent exhaustion and indisposition, and moreover, since through our administration we do not see spiritual fruits both among the priests and among the laity, in the present circumstances of things...it is necessary to constitute a vicar general. Hence, we appoint you as vicar general, so that you govern, as regards spiritual affairs, priests and lay people in the Syro-Malabar churches under our jurisdiction. In fact, I am persuaded that you have the fortitude (strength), skill, wisdom and the virtues which are necessary to fulfil this responsibility.[4]

In a letter to the Prefect of Propaganda Fide, informing him of the appointment of Chavara as the vicar general, bishop Bernardine highly appreciated his qualities, saying:

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4 Paul Pallath, *Vicariate Apostolic of Verapoly and the St Thomas Christians in 1867*, Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2018, 17.

> [Chavara] who is the prior of the of the old and principal monastery, and head of the whole Congregation, a man truly Christian, virtuous, very prudent, very well-versed in Sacred Scriptures, most proficient in Syriac language, who in this circumstance with his deeds proved himself to be very faithful to the Catholic Religion and to the Holy See, even though the intruder and his seditious group from Baghdad itself endeavoured to draw him to their side ... even promising to consecrate him bishop. If they have obtained his consecration, all or almost all would have followed him, since he enjoys great esteem, respect and authority among all. Now therefore, in order to divert the clergy and the people and to oppose the intruder I judged it (his appointment as vicar general) as the most appropriate means, and perhaps the only one.[5]

Chavara, who was all the more worried about the trouble and misfortune caused by the schism, took it as the plan of God, and being ever submissive to the order, began acting immediately for the defence of the Church. The prudent and wise intervention of Chavara proved his very personality and zeal in saving the Church from the clutches of the schismatic. He sent circulars to the priests and to the laity; he entrusted the worst situation of the Malabar Church to Mother Mary whose continuous and immediate maternal assistance he always felt strongly in his life. The news that the tricks of Roccos and his party deceived many, made Chavara sad and restless. So he along with the other priests sent letters to the Pope requesting clarification regarding the intruding bishop, for he had made divisions in the Catholic Church. Chavara found out that 86 churches had completely joined to the Roccosian group and 36

5 Pallath, *Vicariate Apostolic of Verapoly*, 20.

churches partially, and due to his earnest and sincere efforts, Roccos left for Babel.

Still the trouble continued in the Church. Chavara realized that the tough task still lie ahead, i.e., to bring back the scattered and divided churches, and reunite them to the Mother Church. Thus he started mending the torn portions patiently by collecting the details of all who were ordained by Roccos and writing letters to the Holy See asking permission for absolution to bring them back to the Catholic Church. He also knew clearly well, that it was the ardent longing of the Saint Thomas Christians to have a native ecclesial leadership that invited Roccos schism. While animating and empowering the Church to keep up its unity, Chavara courageously informed the Church authority the root cause of the problem and the remedy for it. After the departure of Roccos, Chavara wrote to the Propaganda Fide:

> We are St Thomas Christians. Since several years we do not have a bishop of our own. But those who received faith recently have their own bishop…hence Your Eminence, I would bring to your kind attention the following. It is good that we have two bishops here, one for the Latin church, and the other for the Syrian church. Thus, the craving for own bishop would cease and the relationship with the Babel would end.[6]

3.2. Focus on Liturgical Celebrations

The celebration of the Divine Liturgy and the Sacraments by the faithful in deep love and true faith would made the internal beauty of the Church ever bright. Chavara believed in the maxim, *Lex orandi lex credendi,* which is found in Prosper

6 Chavara *CWC*, Vol. IV: *Letters*, II:5.

of Aquitaine's eighth book on the authority of the Apostolic See concerning the grace of God and free will - One prays what one believes, one believes what one experiences in truth. Chavara worked hard to establish unity and uniformity in the celebration of Liturgy with decorum and solemnity, preserving the age-old liturgical traditions of Saint Thomas Christians, and adopting certain devotional practices which he believed would foster the spiritual life of all. So, he aimed at an orderly celebration of public worship with due devotion and active participation of the faithful in unity. He sent a circular to the priests[7] informing them about the printing of the missal and the Order of Mass which contained all the rubrics; realizing that the correct rubrics together with the calendar would bring uniformity in the celebration of the Liturgy leading to the unity among the members of the Church.

3.3. Spiritual Well-being of the People

Bishop Ludvic encouraged Chavara in his endeavours to strengthen the people in faith, and granted him the permission to translate the books from Tamil to Malayalam.[8] The first printed book from Mannanam Press titled *Jnanapiyusham* which could be used for the faithful individually and collectively, contained many prayers such as 15 decades of Rosary, all the minor and major feasts of the Church, the order of the Eucharistic liturgy in simple form both in Latin and Syrian rites for the use of the faithful, etc. He also made efforts to translate the Holy Saturday Service, prayers for forty hours adoration, and various benedictions from Latin liturgical books into Syriac. Chavara introduced the Sunday homily, by which the faithful were enriched in their faith,

7 Chavara, *CWC,* Vol. IV: *Letters*, IX:7.

8 See Parappuram, *Chronicles* 1472-1474.

breaking of the Word along with the breaking of the Bread united them in faith. He preached retreats for the laity in all the parishes, helped them to grow in their faith life. He was aware of a Christian family which is the domestic church is the base of every individual's faith journey. *Chavarul: Testament of a Loving Father* written by Chavara gives precious directives and guideline for an authentic Christian family and worthy Christian manner of rearing the children. Great and incredible were his efforts to promote and foster faith in the Church.

4. Mirroring the Face of Christ

Chavara, as he lived a life of holiness guided by the conscience, mirrored the face of Christ throughout his life. He could boldly yet humbly confess: "I feel that by the grace of God, the sanctifying grace I received in the holy baptism has never been lost to me at any time."[9] According to Chavara, the convents and the monasteries are established to become "the mirror of virtues" and "abode of saints".[10] His life itself was an example and inspiration for the fellow religious, for by his very life and example witnessed the aim of founding the religious Congregation. All who approached recognized him as a man of virtues.[11] He assisted the brothers and sisters who wished to attain sanctity and holiness in their faith journey. He was an

9 *CKC,* Vol. II, 13.

10 Chavara, *CWC,* Vol. IV: *Letters*, 6.2.

11 For virtuous life of Chavara see, Mareena & Benny Thettayil, "Sanctity and Virtues in the Life of a Saint," "Theological Virtues in the Life of Chavara," "Cardinal Virtutes in the Life of Chavara," "Evangelical Counsels in the Life of Chavara," in Benny Thettayil & Naiju Jose Kalambukattu, ed., *Father and Doctor of the Church: A Theological Reading of the Life and Writings of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications & Kochi: Chavara Central Secretariat, 2024, 265-318.

ideal religious who walked his talk. By his own upright life, he persuaded others to live their call following a disciplined life. Thus, the credibility of his words and the authenticity of his deeds proved him to be the mirror of the face of Christ. He was bathed in the love of Christ, each of his step became a milestone, the words that he uttered were the gem of great wisdom to be pondered and lived upon. As a perfect disciple, following the footsteps of the Lord, he reflected the love of the Lord in his life, for in him others could see the Gospel values. Love of the Church, Obedience to the hierarchy and fraternal love were some of his outstanding virtues.

4.1. Ardent Lover of the Church

Chavara being enflamed by the love of Christ and the Holy Catholic Church, was always concerned about the matters of the Church. In all that he did, his sole aim was the growth and unity of the Church. All his activities, renewal programmes, and establishment of different organizations got directed towards this single motive – to extend the Kingdom of God to the ends of the world. The missionaries were surprised to see this man of God, burning with the love of the Church. Fr Leopold Beccaro, his first biographer testifies:

> Among his virtues the most outstanding was his ardent faith in and devotion to the Holy Catholic Church and to the Holy Father. He had an ardent desire to spread the light of the Holy Church in all directions; he was grieved to the point of shedding tears when he heard of the trials and persecutions of the Church and eagerly longed to see days of triumph. Whenever he happened to hear the news

about the Pope, he was always moved to tears, either of sorrows or of joy.[12]

Chavara's love and concern for the universal Church was amazing. At a time when the communication facilities were absolutely nil, he managed to collect the news and incidents in the Western Church. Chavara's love for the Church compelled him to collect the details about the Pope, the struggles of the Church, the first Vatican Council, declaration of the decree of infallibility, the abrupt close of the Council as the Franco-Prussian war broke out, the flee of the cardinals, etc.[13] All these news was his concern and with due reverence and anguish, he responded to them. He informed the fathers in the monastery and the sisters in the convent all this news through his letters, and he requested them to pray for the Pope and the Church. On his sick bed, when he was unable to offer the Holy Eucharist due to the severity of his infirmities, his thoughts were linked with the universal Church. He united himself with the holy priests who offer the blood of the Lamb of God to the Heavenly Father, incessantly, in all the four continents.[14]

4.2. Obedient Son of the Mother Church

Obedience is the reflection of love. A kind of reciprocity lies between obedience and love. The intensity of one's love is measured in the keenness and willingness of the person's obedience. In Phil 2:8, St Paul presents Jesus as an *Obedient Son* par excellence in *Love.* Being filled with the love towards His father, Jesus accepted even the death on the Cross, as it

12 Leopold Beccaro, *A Short Biography of K.E Chavara*, Mannanam: St Joseph Monastery, 2003, 12.

13 Chavara, *CWC*, Vol. IV: *Letters,* V:6,15.

14 *Chronicles of Mannanam Monastery,* Vol 3, (1864-'71), 134 (Malayalam MSS)

was inevitable to fulfil the mission entrusted to him by the Father.

The life of Chavara was a saga of heroic obedience. According to him, obedience is to experience heavenly peace in the monastery, in the convent, which is a small heaven, by obeying the hierarchy of the Church, the superiors, and even one another. The proof of a true religious is obedience without seeing and hearing, total renunciation of one's will.[15] For him obedience was part of his very being. It was his conscience that directed him, even during his last days when he was suggested to be taken to Mannanam for a change, his reply astonished everyone. He responded that as the Bishop and Fr Leopold told him to stay at Koonammavu, his conscience did not permit him to leave that place in their absence.[16] He was ever ready to do what he was asked to do. Obedience was a leading principle of this holy man, for the sisters testified that their very reverend father used to obey like a child. Everyone marvelled at this good example which he had shown even at the moment of his death.[17] Even for the reception of the Sacrament of anointing the sick, Chavara left himself to the desire and decision of others. As an answer to the question asked by Gerard Mooppachan, "In which Rite do you wish to receive the last Sacrament and indulgences?" Chavara could answer like this, "As you all will it, if it is in my own language, I too can give the response to the prayers, but I shall be quite satisfied with whatever you decide."[18] As Leopold Beccaro

15 Chavara, *CWC,* Vol. IV: *Letters*, VI:5.

16 CKC, Vol. II, 13.

17 *CKC,* Vol. II, 20.

18 *CKC,* Vol. II, 15.

testifies his obedience towards the ecclesial authorities could never be paralleled to anyone else.[19]

4.3. A Man of Tender Love

Chavara was fascinated by the supreme love of God, which forced him to channelize the tender love towards his brothers and sisters. Fr Kuriakose Eliseus Porukara writes about the way Chavara loved the sisters: "Just as Patriarch Jacob had a greater love for his youngest son Benjamin, so Chavara loved the sisters most deeply, and brought them up most carefully, providing them with all the needs even as a hen took care of the chicks."[20]

Chavara looked into every minute details of the Koonmmavu convent as a loving father. His heart was full of love for everyone. In everything Chavara had a thought about his children. He sent the chillies and the mangoes to the sisters, instructing them to keep the seed for the future.[21] He used to call the sisters as 'loving children'. Chavara approached them with the dignity of the status of their life, addressing them as "O! Glorious royal ladies! O queens of the Lord and God! How great and praiseworthy is the state of life to which you have ascended."[22]

The paternal heart of Chavara was with full of affection and concern for them. The last three visits that he made to the convent were the manifestation of his love for them. *The Chronicles of the Koonammavu Convent* records the incident as

19 Leopold Beccaro, *A Short Biography of K.E Chavara*, 12.

20 Sebastian Palathara, ed., *Stapakapithakanmar*, Mannanam: St Joseph's Monastery, 1995, 29.

21 Chavara, *CWC,* Vol. IV: *Letters* VII:8.

22 Chavara, *CWC,* Vol. IV: *Letters* VII:2.

the expression of his tender and fervent love for them. On 15 October 1870 out of his great love he went there; even though he was very weak he made a visit again in the afternoon. Without being able to walk by himself, he reached there, with the help of another person. During that visit he made them sing *slamlekh* (Hail holy Queen). Since the sisters did not know where exactly the pauses were, he indicated to them the places where to stop and marked them.[23] The sisters marvelled at his interest to teach them handicrafts. They recorded in their Chronicle their words of indebtedness and gratitude. "Besides this he taught us, what thread to use for sewing, how to dye the thread the process to be followed and the colour to be used, etc."[24] Nothing bothered him, even his own sickness and weakness of the body. His last visits were heart touching. Even when his eye sight was dim, with the help of the superior, he went to the convent to meet the sisters and the girls in the boarding house. His physical ailments couldn't stop him from visiting them, for his visit was as an expression of his love and concern.

4.4. A Man of Self-less Service

The desire to have position, power, and prestige was kept away from the life of Chavara. He was a man of self-less service or *nishkama karma*. He loved and served the Church with the pure intention of serving the souls, keeping up the bond of mother-son relationship. Ecclesiastical offices or its dignified position never attracted him. Even when the intruder, bishop Thomas Roccos offered him the chance of becoming a bishop, his answer was, "my desire is not to become the bishop, but

23 *CKC,* Vol. II, 11.

24 *CKC,* Vol. II, 12.

to save souls."[25] His humility held him back to be known only as the prior of the monasteries, never he desired for the position of the vicar general. We never find any letter signed by Chavara as vicar general.

4.5. A Hand for the Art of Writing

Chavara wished his spiritual daughters to be equipped with all that they needed to develop their talents. He took special interest to give them training in the art of writing which could be the best means for their self-expression. He reminded the superior to encourage Sr Anna to write down all the details of the daily events.[26] On 13 February 1866, the day of the inauguration of the bamboo-mat convent, Chavara wrote in his diary that Sr Anna and Sr Thresia began to write on the paper.[27] He added that Sr Anna learned the things faster than others. Chavara himself taught the sisters how to write. The first sixteen pages of the Chronicle are in his own hand writing. He corrected the rest of the pages of the first volume and gave them necessary corrections to improve their articulations.

4.6. A Man with a Large Heart

Chavara had a large heart that he could accommodate everyone as the members of his own family. His affection towards the sisters was praiseworthy. Acknowledging the strong bond of relationship that existed between the sisters and himself he said: "What reason is behind this that now more than your blood relations, you love me and I love

25 A. M. Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2008, 229.

26 Chavara, *CWC,* Vol. IV: *Letters* VII.1.

27 Chavara, *CWC,* Vol. I: *Chronicles*

you?"[28] Wherever he lived he considered the community his own family. He insisted the members of his congregation to live in unity as '*koodapirappukal*' – children born of and nursed by the same mother.[29] He testified that it was true in his life: "I renounced my home and relations for God's sake. See I am writing this sitting at Arnattukara. My brethren here love me more than my family members, brothers, children and others. Tomorrow at Koonammavu, then at Carmel Vazhakulam and at Mannanam, whichever monastery I may go, I am loved equally."[30] Fraternal love, union of hearts and universality of prayer were something precious to Chavara.

5. A Glowing Lamp

Chavara was a glowing lamp or a shining light in the dark context of Kerala in the 19th century. The metaphor highlights his role in enlightening the society through his spiritual leadership and pioneering efforts to spread knowledge and awareness. He was a pioneer in many respects, a man with far sightedness, who walked ahead of his time. He was never scared of taking initiatives. He realized that the formation of good leaders for the society and the Church was a felt need of the time. Chavara dispelled the darkness of ignorance by the establishment of religious houses for men and women, renewal of formation of clergy, printing press and the education system. Thus, Chavara became a lamp to lead the people from darkness to light.

28 Chavara, *CWC,* Vol. IV: *Letters* VII.6.

29 Chavara, *CWC,* Vol. IV: *Letters* VI.5.

30 Chavara, *CWC,* Vol. IV: *Letters* IX.11.

5.1. Formation of the Leaders

The Church guides the flock of Christ in and through the priests who are the backbone of the Church. Chavara was well aware of the greatness of the priests in the Church. Admiring his own call to priesthood and the duty as a shepherd to the flock of Christ, he perceived that the Church would grow well with the presence of wise and prudent priests: the desired renewal in the whole Church depends to a greater extend upon the priestly ministry; an uneducated priest is not only inefficient to do anything worthwhile in his pastoral work, but may be even detrimental to the salvation of souls.[31] "The priests have to keep wisdom on his lips; the people would approach him seeking his instructions. He is the messenger of the Lord of Hosts" (Malachi 2:7).

The priests are anointed and commissioned to serve the Church that all her children reach the shore of salvation. Therefore, Chavara decided to renew the system of formation of the clergy in Kerala. He established the seminaries along with the monasteries at Vazhakulam (1866), Elthuruthu (1868). There had been a Seminary attached to the monastery at Mannanam since 1833. He considered the formation and renewal of priests his most important duty.

Malpan Palackal had perceived the charism of priestly formation in Chavara even as a young seminarian. So Chavara was entrusted with the coaching of other seminarians who were weak in studies, and in the absence of the Malpan, Chavara had to look after the seminary. Chavara dedicated himself for the priestly formation for more than three decades. On 16 February 1844, Bishop Francis Xavier, as a sign of his appreciation and recognition of Chavara's service to the

31 Leopold Beccaro, *A Short Biography of K.E Chavara*, 6

priestly formation, appointed him as the *Malpan*. He was awarded with the title '*the examiner*' of all priests of the Syrian Rite and the '*Malpan*' of all theological faculties of the priests.[32] The priests who had the training in the seminary stood along with Chavara to fight against the Roccos schism, and they went around strengthening the faithful in their Christian faith and life. In order to foster the bond of the priests with Jesus the eternal high priest, Chavara initiated the renewal of the liturgy of the hours, and *Tukasa* (order of the Holy Mass). Annual retreats were made compulsory for them, and spiritual books and other reading materials were made available to them.

5.2. Abode of Virtues

The Chronicles of Koonammavu Convent begins with Chavara's distress and disappointment in not having monasteries or convent in the land of Malayalam though the true Christian religion was in practice there from the early centuries. As the vicar general, he learned that there were many women, who desired to live a chaste life, but they had no way out to lead such a life. He was aware of the fact that the men enjoyed the privileges of the church whereas women's cries were not heard enough. Men could live a life of chastity but women had to enter into marriage and live as housewives and they had no other option.[33]

Chavara grieved of the absence of canonized saints in the Malabar church. Chavara desired to have a convent in Kerala, prayed for it earnestly and worked for it very hard. '*Alochana*' introduces Chavara's interest and desire to establish the convent. It reads, "Because frailty and weakness are seen to

32 Chavara, *CWC*, Vol. I: *Chronicles*, 44.

33 *CKC*, Vol. I, 1

be doubled, but earnestness, piety, fraternal love, interest on the convent have increased than before. Simplicity is also increased."[34] He set out with this earnestness to build up the convent, and about which Fr Leopold Beccaro wrote, "It was his great desire to start a religious house (*punyasanketham*) for women with the main intention of making it a safe place for the girls of Malabar to live their religion as good Christians and to learn spiritual things…"[35]

5.3. The Spark of Knowledge

The 19th century Kerala faced a strong and intense discrimination based on caste, creed, gender, etc. Though the proclamation of the Gospel was not prohibited, the Gospel was not preached to the *Dalits.* With the spirit of St Paul who underwent labour pain until Christ was formed in the people, Chavara worked very hard to bring the Dalits to the faith life. He found education as the best means to bring forth *'the seed and the sprouts of holiness'*.[36] His prime aim of establishing educational institutions was to increase the strength of the Church, in number, in quality, in faith, and in knowledge. As the vicar general, he sent letters to all the parishes exhorting them to establish a school along with all the parishes.

The spreading of light of faith and knowledge through education was not restricted only to the Christians. On 9 October 1864, he opened a school for the *pulayas* and the casteless masses of *dalits* at Mannanam. By starting a school for the lower castes, Chavara taught that there is space for all in the heart of the Church. He was enthusiastic to begin

34 *Alochana*, 1865, December, 92. It is the report book of the Council meeting (1864-1870) Malayalam MSS.

35 Leopold Beccaro, *A Short Biography of K.E Chavara*, 12.

36 Chavara, *CWC,* Vol. IV: *Letters* IX.2.

the schools for them in different places. The *Alochana* (August 1869) contained the exhortations he had made for the growth and development of the education system, and through his circular letters, the priests were encouraged and instructed to go ahead along with the plan.

Each monastery was entrusted with the task to open a new school in its campus, to bring more children of the less privileged who were denied the right to education, and to inspect the schools regularly and they gathered the students of four or five schools of the area together and conducted retreats for them at Mannanam.[37] TOCD Fathers took care of 42 such schools in the central Travancore in 1866.[38] This intervention of the priests in the schools paved the way for conducting retreats for the school children. Schools were opened at Elthuruth and Ambazhakadu as well. When all the parish priests gathered for their annual retreats, the Prior of Mannanam Monastery reminded them of their great responsibility to educate the children of their locality.[39]

As the schools were opened for all, Chavara got engaged in bringing those lower casts to the light of faith. Restraints and restrictions were many, but this zealous son of the Church went ahead with the mission. The Fathers took keen interest to gather them on Sundays to care for the pastoral needs of the new Christians; their number reached 100 in 1866,[40] and

37 *Alochana* (May 1868), 195.

38 *Alochana*, 111.

39 *Chronicles of Mannanam Monastery*, Vol. 3, 122.

40 *Alochana*, 129.

250 in 1870 in different places of Kuttanad, i.e., Pulincunnu, Edathua, Changanassery, Kalloorkadu, etc.[41]

As Chavara established the schools and envisaged systematic education, he also reminded the parents of their responsibility in giving good education to their children and accompanying them. In the *Chavarul* he wrote, "As soon as the children come of age, they should be sent to school. From time to time, parents should enquire about their progress in studies and also about the type of friendship they cultivate. Every Sunday, parents must review what they have studied."[42]

5.4. Apostolate of Print Media

Chavara comprehended that knowledge is a powerful weapon to fight against the evil and corruption prevailed in the society. He earnestly desired that everyone to be learned and literate in order to withstand the enemies of the Church and of the society. He thought that the launching of the printing press was the best and the powerful means to learn and to bring the people to the light of faith, knowledge and truth; it would liberate them from the darkness of ignorance, curse, false belief, etc. Only a very few individuals had with them some prayer books printed in Tamil and some manuscripts in Malayalam. It was to facilitate the imparting of religious education among the people and provide them with the necessary devotional literature that Chavara launched a press at Mannanam. He wanted all, especially, the children of the Church to be educated. For this, he equipped himself to be the role model for his fellow beings and followers, becoming a versatile linguist, for he mastered more than eight languages:

41 *Alochana*, 269.

42 Chavara, *CWC,* Vol. IV: *Letters* IX:10.

Malayalam, Tamil, Syriac, Sanskrit, Latin, Portuguese, Italian and English.

There was no Catholic Printing Press in Kerala during the time of Chavara. The Protestants at Tharangampadi were on a large-scale printing and publishing books harmful to the Catholics, much more than those at Kottayam did. To respond to this urgent issue, Chavara, in spite of all the struggles and hardships, daringly stepped out. The scarcity of good and devotional books was something that affected the Catholic Church very badly. As a seminarian, Chavara himself had experienced the lack of theological books. Catholics were prohibited to read the books published by the Protestants. In order to find a remedy to the problem Chavara got in to the revolution of letters.

Along with the social uplift of the people, Chavara as a unique pastor brought in spiritual renewal in the people. Monthly devotions, prayers to be used during the Eucharistic celebration, and prayers for various occasions were printed and published. In the *Chronicles of the Mannanam Monastery,* Chavara narrated in detail the hardship he had endured in establishing the printing press and the tiresome journey he had to make for it. The money provided by Mrs. Mariyathumma Kappamavumoottil, a benefactoress of Mannanam Monastery, was the capital fund for the press. Imported products from Europe like the printing machine, ink and paper were not affordable for him, and there were several occasions when he experienced the dearth of money to pay for the labourers. With no way out, as he prayed to St Joseph and to the Guardian angels, surprisingly and even miraculously a parishioner of Cherppunkal came with 500 *chakram* as donation, and promised him of another 500 more that would be sent by someone. These words made Chavara

relaxed and breathe a sigh of relief.[43] Such were the crucial financial struggles that Chavara had to face at many a times, but this man of God, trusting in His providence and with strong determination went ahead with his plans for the good of the people.

Realizing the urgent need of empowering the people, he started printing books and leaflets, and made them available to the people. He collected books from all possible sources which soon evolved into a Library. Mannanam Press became a busy publishing hub of religious, social, and cultural works. Malayalam translation of the *Holy Bible*, the innumerable prayer books, monthly devotions, etc., were published from this printing press. *Deepika*, the first Malayalam Daily newspaper of Kerala was printed at Mannanam press as it played a significant role in educating and empowering the Christian community and society in Kerala.

6. Conclusion

Kuriakose Elias Chavara, a brilliant and multi-faceted man of God, always kept burning the fire of God's love in his heart and worked tirelessly for the growth and mission of the Church. His earnest love for the Church made him a staunch and brave son of the Mother Church, which strengthened him to face the struggles and challenges boldly. His efforts to foster unity in the Church proved his true and genuine spirit in fulfilling his responsibility as a true son of the Church, and he never allowed the Mother Church to be shattered, but defended and supported her as a strong pillar. He dedicated himself totally to the Church, by serving and defending her. He believed that the Church existed as a

43 Chavara, *CWC*, Vol. I: *Chronicles,* 136.

channel of salvation for her children and as a sign of unity. Therefore, Chavara introduced spiritual renewal, discipline and devotion; pioneered education ensuring that all children had access to learning, promoted quality and social justice within the Church and society, established the first catholic printing press in Kerala which helped to spread the Christian teachings and general knowledge, and above all urged and inspired everyone to lead a Christ-centered life.

When Fr Kappil made the striking remark during the funeral oration of Chavara that the flag of Malayalam has fallen today, the very mission of Chavara was affirmed and was made it known to everyone. He becoming a lamp for the people, a burning lamp that dispelled the darkness of all kind. For him, discipleship was a radical following of Christ, a way of imitating him and mirroring the face of Christ. Chavara as the *Brave Son of the Mother Church, the pillar that supported her, by being the lamp and the mirror*, upheld and fortified the Church in many and various ways and ensured its growth and stability.

HOLISTIC PASTORAL VISION OF CHAVARA

Jossy Maria CMC

1. Introduction

The pastoral vision of Kuriakose Elias Chavara integrated faith with social apostolate and education for the building up of the community; and his social and educational endeavours lead to the holistic wellbeing of the Church and the society in Kerala. As a true disciple of Christ, Chavara was committed to carry on the liberating mission of Jesus and as a lover of the Church, he was guided by the social teachings of the Church. Pope Leo XIII in *Rerum Novarum* articulated the social commitment of the Church with clarity and focus: "It must not be supposed that the Church is so preoccupied with the spiritual concerns of her children as to neglect their temporal and earthly interests. Her desire is that the poor should rise above poverty and wretchedness and better their condition in life."[1] Here the specific and indispensable role of the Church in social change is very well expressed. Though Chavara lived before *Rerum Novarum*, his vision and mission strongly aligned with its principles and making him a forerunner of Catholic social teaching and action.

The plight of the 19th century Kerala society urged Chavara to initiate various programmes for the less privileged and the marginalized of the society for their holistic development. As a loyal son of the Church with great and holistic patoral vision, and as a man ahead of his time, Chavara's capacity to respond meaningfully to the social issues of Kerala brought

1 Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, 15 May 1891, no. 23. AAS XI (1892), 97-144.

forth integral development of the Church and society. The present essay is an attempt to examine and expound Chavara's comprehensive pastoral vision and mission for social transformation and development.

2. Ecclesial Situation of Thomas Christians in 19th Century

According to a report of the vicariate of Varapuzha sent to the prefect of Propaganda Fide, Rome, on 25 March 1859, the Catholic population of Latin Christians was 10,000, and that of Syrians 160,000. Indigenous priests and seminarians of the Latin Church stood at 28 and 29 and that of Syrians amounted to 340 and 240 respectively. Parishes of the Latin community were numbered at 23 and along with 37 chapels; Syrians had 115 parishes and 120 chapels. The number of missionaries in Varapuzha was five. In the vicariate of Mangalore, the number of Catholics was 40,000 and had 24 indigenous priests and six missionaries.[2] This report clearly depicts the uniqueness of the vicariate of Varapuzha which was in an anomalous situation, since it was governed by a Latin bishop, although the Eastern Christians formed the vast majority of the faithful. In fact, more than two-thirds of the Christian faithful and parishes in the vicariate of Varapuzha belonged to the Eastern Church. They had every right to obtain a bishop of their own rite and nation.

Chavara was well aware of the fact that even if all the vicariates in India were to put together had a smaller number of Christians than that of Thomas Christians of Varapuzha vicariate. It pained him that this ancient apostolic Church with 160,000 lay faithful and 340 priests and 115 parish churches was combined with and treated as an appendix to a church

2 AGOCD., Plut. 444, *Registero delle Cose*, 362; 181c.

of recent origin, with another Rite, that too with very few faithful and meager infrastructures.[3] Chavara stated it in no uncertain terms: "Such discrepancy of the rites is not found anywhere in the world except among the Syro-Malabarians."[4] In the Report of 1867 the vicar apostolic openly admitted that nine Syro-Malabar priests were appointed to serve in Quilon vicariate: "Because of great scarcity, with my permission nine priests serve the vicariate apostolic of Quilon as vicars or assistant vicars."[5] It means that vicariate of Quilon, which was exclusively for the Latins, was erected at the expense of another individual Church. A vicariate was installed even without having sufficient priests of their own. This is true about the vicariate of Varapuzha which could not provide Latin priests for the Latin parishes.[6]

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3 AGOCD., Stato delle Missioni Estere dell'Ordine de Carmelitani Scalzi nel 1863, 448r, 448v. Indie Orientali Costa Malabarica. According to the report sent to Rome in 1863 the number of priests in Syrian Rite has been reduced to 300 and parishes 113. Is it because the statistics went wrong or because of the disturbance caused by Roccos schism many left their priesthood? There were 340 priests and 240 seminarians in 1859; within four years how is it possible to have considerable change in the number of priests? On 18 May 1876 when Monsignor Leo Meurine, apostolic visitor wrote to Rome the number of priests 328, seminarians 124, parish churches 158 chapels 10. TOCD monasteries 6 in which priests 37, lay brothers 24, novices 33 (ACO, *Ponenze* 1876 ff. 725-730).

4 Chavara, *CWC*., vol. 4, *Letters* VI:4.

5 Archives of the Congregation of the Oriental Churches (ACO), Rome, *Ponenze* 1873, 681-709. See also Paul Pallath,*Vicariate Apostolic of Verapoly and the Saint Thomas Christians in 1867: Kuriakose Elias Chavara Unworthy of Episcopate?* Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2018, 71. Hereafter referred to as Baccinelli Report 1867. Q., 57. p. 71.

6 Persico report mentions about the lack of sufficient number of Latin priests for the Latin Parishes. Also, Persico says that Syrian

Chavara learned that the basic reason for the lack of identity consciousness, growth, unity, poor quality of priestly formation, and all other problems related with the Church was due to the difference of rites and the lack of local ecclesial leadership of their own rite. It saddened him that they were like a fatherless generation and there existed no cordiality between the bishop and the priests. He expressed his views clearly:

In Malabar our priests know only the Syriac language which they use for liturgical purposes. Their bishops and missionaries use a different language and follow a different rite. This situation stands in the way of unity and the mutual understanding that should exist between the Father and his spiritual children which is entirely missing here… The language used by the bishop to ordain priests is not the same as the one used by the priests. Hence, there is lack of devotion and the existing bond between them is not that of father and children, but that of master and slaves. This gives rise to a slavish fear in the priests and in the common people…[7]

3. Sign of Contradiction for the Carmelite Missionaries

When Chavara had longed for the self-government for the Saint Thomas Christians, the Carmelite missionaries thought that it would an act of usurpation, which was illogical and illegitimate; naturally, they could not understand and approve the idea. In the course of time, Leonard Mellano, the vicar apostolic showed much dislike towards Chavara for his legitimate suggestion to have an exclusive ecclesial

priests are appointed in Latin parishes as assistants. ACO., *Ponenze* 1877 pp. 595-637. Persico Report, para. 54.

7 Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 4, *Letters* VI:4.

leadership for the Saint Thomas Christians, a Church with a large number of Christians and better infrastructure and resources. Moreover, this Malabar church was a church rooted in Kerala, but the ecclesial authorities were Europeans. Unlike other vicariates of India, this Church was not the fruit of the missionary work of European missionaries. Chavara's motivation was pure and determination strong. He took courage and persisted boldly to let the higher ecclesial authorities know the real situation of Malabar Church. He was clear about the apostolic origin and identity of Saint Thomas Christians. He wrote to the Prefect of the Propaganda Fide: "We are Mar Thoma Christians who have received our faith from Saint Thomas. For the past many years, we had no bishop of our own. But those who received faith in very recent times have bishops of their own."[8] He offered his suggestion to overcome this handicap so that people would stay contented: "Hence, Your Eminence, I am placing before you a suggestion which I consider good. It is good to have two bishops here: one for the Latin Church and another for the Syrian Church. Then their longing to have a bishop of their own will cease."[9]

From the second half of the 19th century, the Syrians were fed up with the Carmelite missionaries and their dissatisfaction grew in leaps and bounds. Realizing the sentiments of the people regarding the lack of native leadership for the apostolic Church, Chavara joined with like-minded priests, informed the proper authority in the Church, namely, Propaganda Fide, through a letter sent on 22 July 1861. Realistically, but with genuine concern, he wrote: "Lastly we wish to inform

8 Chavara, *CWC*., vol. 4, *Letters* II:4. Letter to Alexander Barnabo, Prefect of Propaganda Fide.

9 Chavara, *CWC*., vol. 4, *Letters* II:5. Letter to Alexander Barnabo, Prefect of Propaganda Fide.

you of one more fact. For quite some time now, our laity and priests have been alienating themselves from the Archbishop [Bernardine]. The reason for this alienation, according to them, is that his orders are harsh to accept and his directions are excessive."[10] From the time of the appointment of Latin bishops in 1599, the Thomas Christians ardently desired to have bishops of their own rite, because they wanted sacred ordinations and other episcopal ceremonies in their own rite and liturgical language. If they had been given a bishop of their own rite and nation according to the provisions of Fourth Lateran Council as a vicar general of the vicariate of Varapuzha, Roccos schism would not have taken place.[11]

Chavara was aware of the ecclesial identity of his individual Church and feared that the seminarians and deacons who were trained and ordained by a foreign bishop would gradually lose their ecclesial heritage and identity consciousness. He perceived the need to have bishops of their own rite and liturgical celebrations in Syriac language from an ecumenical outlook. Hence, he wrote: "This would be very opportune and useful. There are also many non-Catholics in our midst who are our own kith and kin, now known as Jacobites. The above solution will help them renounce schism and to return to the unity of the Catholic fold."[12] We see in Chavara a keen search for the vision for the Indian Church that would enhance her being as a true local church.

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10 Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 4, *Letters* II:1. Letter to Alexander Cardinal Barnabo on 22 July 1861.

11 Pallath, *Vicariate Apostolic of Verapoly*, p. 120.

12 Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 4, *Letters* II:5. Letter to Alexander Cardinal Barnabo.

Chavara wrote to Rome for getting a native bishop, which was carried by Fr Leopold Beccaro OCD who accompanied Monsignor Mellano to Italy on 10 September 1869.[13] Along with Chavara many other priests had put their signatures in that letter. When Monsignor Mellano came to know about this letter in which Chavara also had put his signature, he was displeased with Chavara and he complained to Rome against him regarding this matter.[14] When Chavara died on 3 January 1871, Monsignor Mellano did not make himself available for his funeral ceremonies.[15] The priests and faithful looked at his absence as an expression of his dislike for the person of Chavara who stood for the self-government of the Church, and they feared dire consequences in the future.

Another cause of grief for Chavara was lack of theological treatises or other systematic books. He lamented, "Greeks and Latins have excellent theological books and good treatises, and when we ask ourselves why we, the Syrians, have not produced so far good books or treatises and how this situation can be improved, the answer we find is that all nations and people have their own bishops and missionaries who are well-versed in sacred sciences and that they have produced

13 Parappuram, *Nalagamanga*l, p. 1380-81 [MSS, Malayalam]. The Chronicler gives a detailed explanation regarding this letter and what happened to it later. Cf. also Jossy Maria, *Malabarinte Manassarinja Mahamissionary, Fr Leopold Beccaro, OCD*, Aluva: CMC Publications, 2023, p. 183.

14 Letter written by Monsignor Mellano to Propaganda on 19 September 1875.

15 *The Chronicle of Mannanam Monastery*, vol. 3, p. 138 [MSS, Malayalam]

in the course of years good literary works and theological treatises."[16]

In the report sent by Monsignor Baccinelli to Rome in 1867, Question 57 read: "Whether amongst the priests there are alumni of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, or of Saint Athanasius College in Rome … whether they accomplish their work satisfactorily?" To this, Baccinelli gave the following answer: "There are not any."[17] When the above-mentioned report asked about convoking provincial and diocesan synod, the vicar apostolic openly admitted that the Carmelites never convoked any synod.[18] Thomas Christians felt the disregard of the Carmelite missionaries regarding the growth of the local church that they did not send any priest for higher studies. Moreover, they did not show interest even to teach them Syriac and Latin language; they did not show respect for their local culture and they had many other grievances.

4. Chavara, Vicar General of Thomas Christians

On 8 June 1861, within a month after the arrival of the intruder bishop Thomas Roccos in Kerala from Baghdad, Chavara was appointed vicar general. Being aware of the magnitude and the seriousness of the problem caused by the arrival of bishop Roccos, Baccinelli openly admitted his inability to have control over the situation. And he explained the reason for this appointment in the following words:

On account of the difficulties which we experience in the administration of churches under our jurisdiction for

16 Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 4, *Letters* VI: 4.

17 Baccinelli Report 1867. Q. 57.

18 Baccinelli Report 1867, Q.14, 59.

a long time, because of our advanced age and subsequent exhaustion and indisposition, and moreover, since through our administration we do not see spiritual fruits both among the priests and among the laity, in the present circumstances of things, according to the decree of the council of Trent, it is necessary to constitute a vicar general. Hence we appoint you as vicar general, so that you govern, as regards spiritual affairs, priests and lay people in the parishes of Syro-Malabar Church under our jurisdiction.[19]

On 15 June 1861, Baccinelli wrote to the Prefect of Propaganda Fide informing him of the appointment of Chavara as the vicar general, in which he listed many good qualities of Chavara: "The Prior of the old and principal monastery, and head of the whole congregation, a man truly Christian, virtuous, very prudent, very well-versed in Sacred Scriptures, most proficient in Syriac language, who in this circumstance with his deeds proved himself to be very faithful to the Catholic religion and to the Holy See, even though the Intruder and his seditious group from Baghdad itself endeavored to draw him to their side…[20]

Here it is worthwhile to recall that Baccinelli had even contemplated consecrating Chavara a bishop in order to satisfy the people in the context of the then Roccos schism![21] With all these great expectations and blessings Chavara was appointed as vicar general. But we do not see any document

19 ACO, *Ponenze* 1865, 687-690. See also Pallath, *Vicariate Apostolic of Verapoly*, 17-18.

20 ACO, *Ponenze* 1865, 687-690. See also Pallath, *Vicariate Apostolic of Verapoly*, 18-21.

21 ACO, *Ponenze* 1865, 687-690. See also Pallath, *Vicariate Apostolic of Verapoly*, 18-21.

signed by Chavara as vicar general. It was ten days after his appointment as vicar general that Chavara wrote letters to the Holy Father to know the truth about bishop Thomas Roccos; even in those letters he did not introduce himself as vicar general; instead, he signed as the Prior of the TOCD.[22] This was true about his five letters to the Prefect of Propaganda Fide and to other bishops, priests, and lay people.

One year after his appointment, in 1862, in the second and third weeks of September (12-22 September), the three vicars apostolic of Varapuzha, Mangalore, and Kollam and their respective vicars general assembled at Varapuzha to discuss and determine important disciplinary laws of their vicariates.[23] The decisions taken at the Conference were sent to the Propaganda Fide on 5 October 1862, under the signatures of the vicars apostolic and their respective vicars general. Father Philip of Saint Joseph, a Carmelite missionary, represented the vicariate of Varapuzha as vicar general.[24] Though Chavara was the vicar general, his signature is found missing in the report and, accordingly, we do not have any evidence for his participation in the Conference while many discussions and deliberations of the Conference were regarding the Saint Thomas Christians. It leads us to think that when the immediate problem of the arrival of bishop Roccos was settled and Roccos went back to his country, Chavara was forgotten within one year by the bishop himself who appointed him as vicar general for the Syrian Christians.

22 Even then he knew that his position as the Prior of the monasteries was far higher than that of a vicar general of a vicariate! Moreover, I am also glad that this little 'political' appointment did not affect him much.

23 ACO, *Scritt. rif. nei congressi Chaldei* (1862-1866) f. 114.

24 ACO, *Scritt. rif.nei congressi Chaldei* (1862-1866) f. 118.

But his convictions and his inner tranquility remained the same as before. During his tenure he gave the vicariate a firm foundation with seminary and houses of formation where he guided the seminarians with kindness, firmness and patience. He wrote to his priests: "The priest who is not united to God is a stream that is disjointed from its source."

5. Chavara Unworthy of Episcopate?

We see another anomaly in the question of consecrating him as bishop. In the letter informing the prefect of the Propaganda Fide the appointment of Chavara as the vicar general, Baccinelli had made a request to consecrate Chavara as bishop. "… my opinion, my request to Your Eminence (is to consider), whether it will be convenient to consecrate him as coadjutor bishop for the Surianis, in case the sole dignity of vicar general is not enough to hold back (arrest) the multitude from following the Intruder, and to divert them from him and from the Chaldean Patriarch." Baccinelli also informed Rome: "If they [Roccos party] could have obtained his consecration, all or almost all would have followed him, since he enjoys great esteem, respect, and authority among all."[25]

But, in 1865, when the Propaganda Fide considered the question of his Episcopal consecration, Monsignor Baccinelli and his missionaries were not in favor of it and according to them all Syrian priests were unworthy of episcopate.[26] Making a thorough study of the then Roman documents, Paul Pallath made the following observation: "If Chavara had been consecrated bishop and the permanent office of a native

25 ACO., *Ponenze* 1865, 687-690. See also Pallath, *Vicariate Apostolic of Verapoly,* 18-21.

26 ACO, *Ponenze* 1873, 668-669. See also Pallath, *Vicariate Apostolic of Verapoly*, 39-52.

vicar general with Episcopal character had been established as desired by Propaganda Fide the Mellus schism and its consequences could have been avoided. History proves that the Western missionaries always strived their best, utilizing the entire arsenal at their disposal, to jealously preserve the episcopacy and jurisdictional power for themselves and this was the main cause of troubles, divisions and schisms among the St Thomas Christians in India, whose forefathers had embraced Christianity even before the Christianization of Europe."[27] We see Chavara's reflections were on the same line that he evaluated the reason for the Syrian Christians turning to Babel to get bishops of their own rite.[28]

6. A Man of Wider Ecclesial Vision

Chavara worked for the integral growth of the Church, and his timely intervention saved the Church from division. He nurtured the faith of the people by conducting retreats in the parishes, by introducing forty hours adoration, by making several books available for them, by introducing liturgical reforms and many other renewal programs. The conviction, that only the learned and saintly priests can effectively lead the people of God, was very deeply inscribed in him that enabled him to focus his attention on forming the leaders; he focused his attention on the priestly formation from 1833 onwards, namely, roughly two years after the foundation of the CMI at Mannanam. Valuing his contribution in the field of seminary formation on 16 February 1844, Monsignor Francis Xavier, the vicar apostolic of Varapuzha appointed him as the 'Examiner of all the priests of Syro-Malabar Church' and the Malpan. He was authorized to give sanction to priests to preach and

27 Pallath, *Vicariate Apostolic of Verapoly*, 120.

28 Chavara, *CWC*, vol. 4, *Letters*, VI:4.

hear confession, and recommendation to the deacons for priesthood. He continued this service till his death.

Monsignor Baccinelli entrusted him with the responsibility of settling disputes of the parishes, priests and individuals from the time he was appointed as the vicar apostolic of Malabar. His predecessor Monsignor Ludvic also was confident of Chavara's creative problem-solving method. The ten letters that he wrote to the bishops, during the period of 1848-1856, tell of the stories of his wise method of reconciling people by bringing peace in the parishes. In those letters he put his signature as Chavara *Kathanar*; he was simply a priest of the Syro-Malabar Church and the Prior of TOCD monasteries.[29] What he was proud of was his priestly identity. He saw the hand of God in everything that happened in his life.[30]

Chavara was the recognized leader of his time. On certain occasions people thought Chavara's interventions were necessary. For an example, in the month of November 1869 when some problems occurred in Anakallunkal parish, though Chavara was sick and unable to travel, people wanted him to be present to solve the matter amicably and he reached there.[31]

At the news of his death, the sisters of Koonammavu convent wrote in their chronicle, "This father was a mirror and lamp to all the Christians in Kerala. Moreover, he was a strong pillar that supported the holy Church in protecting its faith. With zeal, he worked for its growth and expansion."[32] He

29 Chavara, *CWC*., vol. 4, *Letters*, III:1-10.

30 Chavara, *CWC*, vol. 3, *Dhyanasallapangal*, p. 13 [1981].

31 *CKC*., 1:152-53.

32 *CKC*., II:23.

could hold the whole universe in his heart; at the moment of his death, he made a touching prayer joining with the priests of the whole world, especially with the Church in Asia and America: "… Even though I was not able to celebrate Holy Mass after my illness increased, I remain one in spirit with the priests, who offer to God the Father the divine lamb every hour continuously during day and night in the four parts of the world, in Asia and America, etc."[33]

Chavara instructed the members of his congregation to open up monasteries, convents and boarding houses for girls in the vicariates of Kollam and Varapuzha. Although Kollam vicariate was exclusively for Latin Christians he was concerned about their growth and development as well. He was a man beyond geographical, liturgical boundaries. When he printed the first book from the Mannanam press, *Jnanapiusham*, in 1847 he printed 'the rite of the Holy Mass' of both the Latin Church and of the Syrian Church.

7. Social Context of Kerala in the 19th Century

The Kerala society at the time of Chavara was very much backward in social, cultural and educational levels. Chavara was a visionary leader of the time who envisaged many plans for the spiritual and social progress of the Church and the society. In the 19th century, Kerala was thoroughly caste-ridden; it had the most rigid and elaborate caste structure in India. The low caste people were characterized as the poor and oppressed. They lived below poverty line, lacking even the minimum requirements for their survival in terms of food, clothing and housing.

33 *Mannanam Nalagamam*, Vol. 3 [MSS] (1864-72), p. 133.

They were not allowed to enter the Hindu temples, to bathe in temple ponds, and to go to the public markets. Kerala society was not based on the principles of freedom, equality, and social mobility. Neither men nor women of the low castes were allowed to wear clothes above their waist; any woman who wished to cover the upper part of her body was even made to pay special taxes. They were also prohibited from wearing ornaments and to construct houses with roof-tiles.[34] They were denied the right to education, property, development and participation. There prevailed untouchability, and social, educational and economic backwardness were considered the criteria for the scheduled caste category. The Dalits had to break through the barrier of untouchability, not simply in its formal legal sense but in its wider social application.

Four major groups with strict hierarchical orders existed, namely, the Brahmins, Kshathrias, Vaishyas and Shudras. The lower castes population was numerically quite strong.[35] The Pulayas and the Parayas were the most inferior among the untouchables. They were not allowed to walk on the public roads, to go to markets and temples where even the animals might freely stray.[36] Untouchability and unapproachability divided and degraded the society into opposing groups. The upper classes believed that not only the touch but even the proximity of certain classes polluted them. These social groups had to keep some specified distance from each other

34 T. K. VeluPillai, *Travancore State Manual*, vol. 1, Thiruvananthapuram: Government Press, 1940, 825.

35 Leela Gulati, Ramalingam, and I. S. Gulati, *Gender Profile, Kerala: Looking Back into History*, New Delhi: Royal Netherlands Embassy, 2000, 1-6.

36 Samuel Mateer, "The *Paraya* Caste in Travancore," *The Journal of the Asiatic Society of Britain and Ireland* (1884), 180.

according to the position each occupied in the social order.[37] Those classes were termed non-caste Hindus. Having visited Kerala in 1897, Swami Vivekananda commented on the ugly type of caste system that existed in the society and pictured Kerala as 'a mad house of religion'. This observation was made 26 years after the death of Chavara and it gives us a clear picture of the pitiable social conditions of Kerala society.

In this section, we discuss the role of Chavara in the awakening of Kerala society and culture from the shackles of inhumane caste divisions and unhealthy traditions in the 19th century. The academic discussions and writings in Kerala have never represented the reformative nature and the role of the person of Chavara for the awakening of Kerala society. The scholars who have dealt with the aspects of history, culture, modernization and awakening of Kerala have neglected the social relevance of Chavara's activities and often remained silent or ignored it willfully.[38] Many scholars attempt to depict the contributions of social reformers, like Sree Narayana Guru, Chattampi Swamikal, Vaikom Mohammed Moulovi, V. T. Bhattathiripad, and so on as the progenitors of renaissance in the Kerala society. In all these discussions, the Christian contributions were ignored; even if they were mentioned, they refered only to the contributions of LMS, CMS, Basel Mission, etc. In these latter instances, historians attempt to depict them as mere agents of colonial modernity.[39] It is against such a

37 C. N. Somarajan, "Foundations of Kerala Society and Politics," *Journal of Kerala Studies* 15 (March-September 1988), 105.

38 See P.K. Gopalakrishnan, *Keralathinte Samskarika Charitham* (Malayalam), Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala State Bhasha Institute, 2010.

39 K.N. Ganesh, *Reflections on Pre-Modern Kerala*, Thrissur: Cosmo Books, 2016, 263.

social background, studies on Chavara's organized attempt to modernize the Kerala society becomes relevant; he brought forth reformation and awakening to a great extent in the Kerala society in the 19th century. He was well-known for reaching out to the poor and played a major role in educating and uplifting people. Mannanam was the animating centre from where all the activities in the parishes or villages were monitored.

8. Integral Social Vision of Chavara

The vision that guided and motivated Chavara to introduce the social uplift programmes was his love for the people whom he called *Koodappirappukal* (siblings). For Chavara, God was his *appan*, merciful father, and all His children were his brothers and sisters. He translated this faith into charity to have a community of fraternal love and sharing. His compassionate heart could recognize all the troubles of his neighbours as the troubles of his own. He accepted every human being as his brother or sister, for he dreamed of a casteless society.

The steps taken by Chavara for the social development were mainly comprised of educational reforms, uplift of the *dalit*, formation of leaders, renewal of the families, women empowerment, literary contributions and charity works. His approach towards those who were in the periphery was fourfold: welcoming, protecting, promoting, and integrating them into the mainstream of the society. For Chavara, as a Christian, it was a natural expression of his faith commitment to be involved in the movement for *dalit* liberation. The motive force behind all these activities was the transformation of the society.

9. Social Sensitivity and Peace

For Chavara, social sensitivity meant to feel with the less privileged, the poor and the marginalized and share with them the resources without calculating the rewards. He was engaged in the liberation and empowerment of the oppressed in order to attain universal harmony. He felt that the economic and social uplift of the semi-starved millions was essential to their welfare and freedom.

Chavara expressed his solidarity with the neglected and the abandoned. He gave up all types of luxurious ways of life and lived with the minimum facilities because he knew that any hint of luxury will counteract the credibility of his social commitment as a priest and a Christian leader. Pope John XXIII in the Encyclical *Pacem in Terris* highlighted human rights as the foundation of peace in the human society[40] and it can be firmly established only if the order laid down by God be dutifully observed.[41] It emphasizes the importance of the cooperation of all men and women of good will in establishing peace. It speaks the language of universal brotherhood and solidarity of human beings. Since peace is the absolute respect for the order lay down by God,[42] Chavara believed that unless and until the social discrimination had been removed from the minds and lives of the people peace would not reign in the society. Peace results from that harmony built into the human society by its divine Founder and actualized by the human beings as they thirst for ever greater justice.

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40 John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris,* 126. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem.html; accessed on 18.09.2023.

41 John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris,* 1.

42 John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris,* 1.

With the initiatives of Chavara a new awareness had been created that the church is a servant at the service of the humankind, irrespective of caste, creed, colour, or nationality. He brought an attitudinal change in the mindset of the official church and brought the church into a new relationship with the contemporary world. The social vision of Chavara was an integral part of the evangelizing ministry of the Church and his social vision sought to proclaim the Gospel and make it present in the complex network of social relations. Chavara attempted to interpret the social realities in the light of the Gospel values.

Chavara's social consciousness enabled him to work for the integration of social reformation with his spiritual and apostolic visions. All his activities had an essential dimension of social justice and liberation, for the Christians on those days continued the evil practices of untouchability and other caste discriminations.[43] They practiced caste system and followed the rules of purity and of pollution, and the Synod of Diamper prohibited such practices by the Christians.[44]

10. Care for the Servants

Kerala witnessed different kinds of social discriminations against the low caste people in the 19th century. They were considered slaves and their human dignity was not recognized. Chavara's spiritual vision led him to be an innovator of many socio-pastoral, cultural, educational and social reforms. While he most conscientiously lived the life of a Religious, dedicated

43 See Scaria Zacharia, ed., *The Acts and Decrees of the Synod of Diamper 1599,* Hosanna Mount: Indian Institute of Christian Studies, 1994, 31-32.

44 Zacharia, ed., *The Acts and Decrees of the Synod of Diamper 1599,* 49; 202-203.

to the love and service of God, the same divine love in him inspired him to devote himself to the love and service of fellow human beings. As a man of contemplation, Chavara conversed with God and sought His presence in the deepest realm of his heart. At the same time, he was an altruist – a man for others.

Chavara's counsels to the Christian families given in the form of the *Testament of a Loving Father* is universally applicable and are relevant to this day. In it Chavara had instructed the families to take care of the spiritual needs of their servants: "Masters should know that they are responsible for caring for the needs of their servants and in assisting them in their spiritual welfare."[45] He also instructed them to limit the number of domestic workers in the families and spoke about the just wages to be paid to them regularly. Chavara had insisted that the domestic workers must be sent for the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist.[46] His instruction about just wages and honoring the dignity of workers was something very unique and it was unheard of in Kerala. He specified: "Never withhold just wages from laborers or make undue delay in paying them, because it is an offence that cries out to God for justice. Do not insult the poor; neither should you vex them because if God sees them weeping, he will surely wreak vengeance on you."[47] By insisting on paying decent wages to the workers at the right time without having them to wait for long, Chavara respected the dignity of human person, who has been created in the image of God.

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45 Chavara, *Chavaru*l, I: 23. *CWC*., vol. 4, *Letters,* IX:10.

46 Chavara, *Chavarul*, 1:23.*CWC*., vol. 4, *Letters*, IX: 10

47 Chavara, *Chavarul*, 1:18. *CWC*., vol. 4, *Letters,* IX: 10.

11. House of Charity

Chavara expressed his love for the needy in a concrete manner by instituting a 'House of Charity' for the less privileged in the society. It is heart-warming to see the way he encouraged or motivated his parishioners to open a house of charity in Kainakary. He presented before them many examples of people who were engaged in nursing the sick, helping the poor from European countries and also persons known to them, such as Father Ouseph Chavara from their own parish. The letter he had written to his parishioners motivating them to open a house of charity was inspiring.[48] He knew very well that the worst discrimination, the poor had to undergo was the denial of spiritual care to them. Therefore, he made books available for those who live there and even arranged a library for them.[49] In his Testament, he requested the members of his congregation to offer to the house of charity some of the relics from his collections as a sign of protection and salvation to them.[50]

12. Chavara, an Apostle of the Families

Chavara's act of writing of the 'Family Code' which he named *The Testament of a Loving Father*, (*Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul*) was socially a responsible act. He prepared this insightful and practical document on 13 February 1868, and it reached millions of families all over the world as it has been translated into various Indian and foreign languages. It offers practical direction to the families in leading a God-fearing as well as socially commendable life. It emphasizes the role of parents

48 Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 4, *Letters* IX: 11.

49 Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 4, *Letters* V:15.

50 Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 4, *Letters* VI:4, para 4.

and family members regarding the training of their children in religious, moral, and social values. He bequeathed to his family members and relatives in his native village Kainakary and through them to the entire human family, this Testament, which, he believed, would keep him united with them by the regular reading of the text and following the instructions contained therein. While the biblical insights and inspiring anecdotes contained in the Testament attest to the fact that Chavara had a deep sense of Christian foundations for leading a genuine family life, his insightful practical directives indicate how thoroughly he understood the dynamics of a family, especially on grooming children and nurturing discipline within the family. Family is the heaven on earth. It is with the intention of transforming all the families into heaven on earth, that he, in a spirit of prayer and discernment and yearning for "God's light and peace," invited the family members to cultivate love, order, and peace, even if that would call for sacrificing personal convenience and comfort.

Chavara was convinced of the fact that family is the "image of heaven",[51] and the foundation of the Church. He defined family:

A family is the community of a few people joined together in blood relation and bound together by a bond of love, where the members exhibit mutual respect and practice obedience to parents and walk in peace before the Lord and the people; and each one according to this proper state of life seeks to attain eternal salvation and lives peacefully.[52]

51 Chavara, *Chavarul* (Introduction), *CWC*., vol. 4, *Letters* IX: 10.

52 Chavara, *Chavarul* (Introduction), *CWC*., vol 4, *Letters* IX: 10.

The family is the most precious human institution, and every couple has the important responsibility to safeguard it against the numerous forces that seek to destroy or weaken it. Chavara was a champion of families and his Testament to his parish community was a great treatise for effective family life. He gave importance to 'family-centred spirituality'. He instructed his parishioners on the significance of family prayer, family timetable or time management, Sunday observance, relationship with their servants, etc. He inculcated in the family members solidarity with the poor and sick and instructed them to visit and serve them on Sundays.[53]

Chavara, being a devotee of the Holy Family, instructed the parents to guide their children in devotion to the Holy Family of Nazareth.[54] Chavara's meditative eyes rested on the tender love of this unique couple for each other and for their child;[55] on their fidelity to religious duties of prayer and worship; on their dedication to work as a means of earning their livelihood.[56] In his *Atmanuthapam* there are many lines in which Chavara praises the mutual commitment and subjection of Joseph and Mary.[57]

Chavara's instruction on mutual respect of husband and wife is considered very unique and original. He said: "By seeing the respect of the father towards mother, children respect her; in the same way mother's respect to the father is the model

53 Chavara, *Chavaru*l, I:22. *CWC*., vol. 4, *Letters,* IX:10.

54 Chavara, *Chavaru*l, II: 2. CWC., vol. 4, *Letters,* IX:10.

55 Chavara, *Atmanuthapam*, cantos V:110-114.

56 Chavara, *Atmanuthapam*, cantos V:158-174.

57 Chavara, *Atmanuthapam*, cantos V:118-126.

for children to respect their father."[58] In *Mulieris Dignitatem*, Pope John Paul II brought forth a new interpretation for the mutual subjection of husband and wife, which he called "the Gospel innovation" based on the Letter to the Ephesians 5:21-33.[59] The text reads: "All the reasons in favor of the 'subjection' of woman to man in marriage must be understood in the sense of a 'mutual subjection' of both 'out of reverence for Christ'."[60] Chavara propagated the idea of 'mutual subjection' and mutual respect in view of developing healthy and holistic relationships within the families.

13. Marital Spirituality or Family Spirituality

Despite its importance and relevance, marital spirituality is seldom talked about. According to Pope Francis' *Amoris Laetitia*, marital spirituality is the spirituality of the bond in which divine love dwells.[61] The couples must strive for this spirituality during their daily household activities, troubles and struggles, joys and hopes. The Pope says: "The spirituality of family love is made up of thousands of small but real gestures."[62] It is not so much by doing extraordinary things, but by paying attention to small and seemingly insignificant

58 Chavara, *Chavarul*, II:9. *CWC*., vol. 4, *Letters, IX*:10.

59 John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 24. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1988/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19880815_mulieris-dignitatem.html; accessed on 18.09.2023.

60 John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 24.

61 Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 315. https://www.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf; accessed on 18.09.2023.

62 Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 315.

things with love. Such actions of love are the ingredients of true marital spiritual life. God dwells deep within the marital love that gives him glory.

In the third canto of Chavara's *Atmanuthapam*, a meditation on the deep mystery of Incarnation, he pondered deeply on mothering experiences of Mother Mary such as conception[63], pregnancy,[64] childbirth,[65] kissing and embracing of the newborn baby,[66] breast-feeding,[67] and so on, and presented these as spiritual practices. Those events are women's God experience and should be cherished, appreciated, celebrated and valued as such. In the Old Testament, priests were asked to make atonement and to offer sin offering for the woman who gave birth to her child (Lev 12:6-8). Whereas here is a priest who contemplates the great gift of giving birth and breast-feeding etc., and presents them as spiritual exercises and not as acts meant for atonement and sin offering. These events are to be celebrated and no more considered taboo for women. Here is an example of his contemplation on the experience of mother and child while breast-feeding:

> With tender love, the mother breast-fed
> the babe in joy, I long to see.
> The holy awe, the mother enjoyed,
> While feeding him, I long to see.[68]

63 Chavara, *Atmanuthapam*, Cantos III:8-10.

64 Chavara, *Atmanuthapam*, Cantos III:11-12.

65 Chavara, *Atmanuthapam*, Cantos III:23-24.

66 Chavara, *Atmanuthapam*, Cantos V:83-90.

67 Chavara, *Atmanuthapam*, Cantos V:37-40.

68 Chavara, *Atmanuthapam*, Cantos III:37-40.

Chavara could be seen as a champion of restoring dignity to women's body and their mothering experiences.

To maintain true love and strong bond of communion in the families and the communities, Chavara had instructed the members to have real concern for those who are sick and sufferring. Highlighting the example of Father Chacko Valliara, his nephew, he narrated his parishioners how persons were transformed by serving the sick.[69] He shared his own life experience with his parishioners of having strong family bond that prevailed in the monasteries where he lived.[70]

14. Parents as Saints

In the Apostolic Letter *Gaudete et exultate*, Pope Francis says: "I like to contemplate the holiness present in the patience of God's people: in those parents who raise their children with immense love and sacrifices… This is the holiness which we often find in our 'next door neighbors' who live amidst us and 'reflect God's presence'."[71] Again, the Pope tells: "Our very parents become *living saints* with all their self-emptying concern and care for us."[72] "Are you a parent or grandparent? Be holy by patiently teaching the little ones how to follow Jesus."[73] Meditating on the birth of Jesus, Chavara conveyed

69 Letter to his parishioners encouraging them to open a house of charity in Kainakary, Chavara, *CWC*., vol. 4, *Letters* IX:11.

70 Chavara, *CWC*., vol. 4, *Letters,* IX:11.

71 Francis, *Gaudete et exultate*, 7. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20180319_gaudete-et-exsultate.html; accessed on 18.09.2023.

72 Francis, *Gaudete et exultate*, 6, 14.

73 Francis, *Gaudete et exultate*, 14.

the message that the birth of every child is a holy and joyful event, and it unites the couples and the family members.

Much before Pope Francis instructed the people of God to consider their parents as saints, Chavara admired his mother as a saint. The life she lived in the family caring for her children and husband was enough for him to consider her a saint. Before receiving the Holy Communion or in preparation to welcome Jesus into his heart, Chavara first invited Mother Mary and his other favorite 'mother saints', including his own mother,[74] to be present with him when Jesus would enter his heart. He believed that he was not worthy to welcome Jesus into his heart, and therefore, he requested the presence and the virtues of these saints in his heart. It was his strong belief that his mother was deeply loved by God in the heavenly abode and that she would continue to support him in his faith journey.

15. Love for Nature and Eco-Spirituality

Chavara's love for the nature or his eco-spiritual vision was evident in the process of searching and purchasing the land for the monasteries and other institutions. While planning to buy a new plot of land for a monastery at Chanaganassery, Chavara instructed the concerned person: "The place should be sufficiently distant from the marketplace so that the noise of the market may not disturb the life in the monastery. There should be water. There should be a river close by so that we can conveniently reach the place by boat. The place should be sufficiently large with big trees around to moderate the heat. Besides the space for the construction of the monastery, there

74 Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 3, *Dhyanasallapangal*, 49.

should be place also for gardens, etc."[75] Chavara was a hard-working person, lived a simple life and he loved animals, too. Mannanam Chronicle records his love for animal husbandry:

The *Valia Priorachan* Father Chavara bought a she-buffalo for Rs. 5/- and kept it where the monastery had a marshy paddy field (*kary*) near the place called Vennathottiyil. Father Prior tended the buffalo with special care. In the course of time, she gave birth to many calves – so many that some of them did not survive. Finally, the remaining twelve were sold in the *kary* itself for more than Rs. 300/- by auction. Mannanam Monastery bought one of them named, Manappara for Rs. 45/- and kept it in the same field as a memento of the past.[76]

16. Pooling of Local Resources

Chavara's leadership qualities included pooling of resources for the projects he initiated for the welfare of the community. He did it by motivating the people of the locality. In 1860 when the convent for women was getting ready at Puthenpally Monsignor Bernardine Baccinelli wrote letters to the Priors of Carmelite monasteries and Carmelite cloistered nuns for financial help. The letter reads: "The building is still incomplete for lack of funds and I do not know when we would be able to accomplish this task…"[77] But the approach of Chavara was to depend on local resources, not to look

75 Letter to Father Cherian, Parish Priest of Changanasserry, on 7 April 1868, Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 4, *Letters*, VIII:4.

76 ASJM, Mannanam, *Mannanam Chronicle* (MSS), vol. 4, 61.

77 AGOCD., *Plut.35e.* Letter of Monsignor Baccinelli to the Provincials, Priors and Religious of the Carmelite Order, dated 29 June 1860; APF., see also *Indie Orientali* 1859-1861, Vol.17, ff. 1420-1421. The letters written on the same date to both men and women religious have the same content with a slight difference.

for foreign help. Even for the construction of seminary and center for higher education he did not look for finance from the abroad. Through the circular letter written to the parish priests in 1850, he motivated the priests to raise fund for the same.[78]

The following testimonies loudly speak that within seven or eight months a two-storied convent building was ready at Koonammavu, that too, with the generous contribution of the local people. The sisters, too, knew the source of money for the construction of the convent. They wrote: "Our Fathers by their efforts and their letters, inspire some persons, to give us donations… Once or twice loans were taken from the monastery and some others and works were continued."[79] They have recorded the name of the persons who contributed the wood and other materials for the construction work.[80] The sisters continued, "Towards the end of the work, too, once it happened like this. Seeing that the money was over they said, "Let us send a letter to Kaduthuruthy, Muttuchira and see whether we get some money or not."[81] They collected Rs. 600/- in cash and sent it through the Father Superior of Mannanam monastery.[82] Chavara wrote in his dairy the details of the donations he had received, especially from the parishes of Kuttanadu.[83] Regarding the money collected for the construction of the convent, on 20 February 1867 when

78 Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 4, *Letters*, IX:2.

79 *CKC*, vol. 1:46.

80 *CKC*, vol. 1:47-48.

81 *CKC*, vol. 1:48.

82 *CKC*, vol. 1:48.

83 Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 1: *Chronicles*, 174-175.

the construction was just completed, Monsignor Baccinelli reported it to Propaganda Fide: "Their house is constructed with the alms given for this purpose by the faithful of some churches and priests; in the meantime they live, it can be said, in a hut miserable in everything."[84] Not only for the construction of the convent but their daily life expenses were met with their own money not with any contribution from the bishop, he testified: "They sustain themselves with the dowry (patrimony) that they must bring with; for three poor I provide for the food at the rate of about 14 coins a month for each one."[85]

Other contemporary documents testify to the fact of local contributions for the construction of the convent. *Alochanapusthakam* bear witness to the fact that even bishop did not donate anything for the same. "When there was no hope at all, still they hoped against hope. Without anything from the Very Reverend Archbishop and from the *Pidiyary*, in a miraculous way, so to say, from the local churches, from the faithful and in a manner unheard of (as a new news) from the parish priests, obtained about Rs. 8,000/- most of which were collected through letters. Thus within a short span of time, the convent was built in a fine model…"[86] *The Chronicle of Mannanam Monastery* added why they could not receive any thing from Baccinelli or from *Pidiyary* system: "But it

84 Baccinelli Report 1867, Q. 72, p. 76.

85 Baccinelli Report 1867, Q. 72, p. 76.

86 ASJM, *Alochana*, 139. (Book of Consultation of the Monastery at Mannanam), 1864-1871. It is the record of the discussions and deliberations of the monthly council meeting of the TOCD Superiors of all the monasteries with Chavara and Father Leopold, the Delegate Provincial, held at Mannanam Monastery (1864-1871).

would take time for the collections of *Pidiyary* to come and funds were needed now for the seminary and other beneficial activities undertaken by the archbishop."[87] Bishop's main interest at that time was the opening of the seminary at Puthenpally[88] and to buy a land and construct a monastery for Latins at Manjummal for which two boys were studying by staying with the novices at Koonammavu monastery.[89] This had been corroborated by the report of Baccinelli to Rome in 1867. He said, "Another one [monastery] emerges now, the foundations of which have been completed, and this will be the first one for the Latins.[90]

The story of the construction of the Koonammavu convent gives evidence to the influence of Chavara, the recognized leader of the people. The people were ready to support generously whenever he approached them for help and thus the convent was built in seven or eight months with the generous help of the local people.

17. Education for Social Empowerment

The following section deals with the educational vision of Chavara against the socio-economic and educational background of Kerala in the 19th century. Chavara perceived education as the best means of human uplift and social mobility. His contributions laid a strong foundation for the educational, social, and financial development of Kerala.

At the beginning of the 19th century the state government of Travancore began to take interest in the field of education

87 Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 1 *Chronicles*, 130.

88 The seminary at Puthenpally was opened on 15 August 1866.

89 Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 1 *Chronicles*, 132.

90 Cf. Baccinelli Report, 1867, Q. 63, p. 73.

in line with the Protestant missionaries. Political leaders, for example, Gouri Parvathi Bai, with the assistance of Diwan Colonel Munro, introduced a system of free education under state control in 1817.[91] But this was only a privilege of upper caste males of the time. Both the Hindus and the Protestants profited out of this.

Catholics were not allowed to step into these institutions. Monsignor Baccinelli cleared his position in these words: "I do not allow anyone to go to them, as even to those of the gentiles, and if anyone goes there, I punish him until he leaves. I tolerate only for prudential reasons, and for not being able to do otherwise, that some goes to schools, that a little ago the government has erected. However, there too the teacher is a catholic and errors against the faith are not taught."[92]

Realizing that the catholic community would even remain subjugated if they did not move with the times, Chavara decided that the religious congregation should concentrate on educational work. He opened schools where apart from Christian doctrines, reading, writing, and arithmetic in vernacular were taught. Monsignor Baccinelli reported to Rome that in all the schools in the diocese, "it is taught to read, write, calculate, compose well in good Malabar language, etc. … In these schools the English language, history of India, geography, etc., are taught."[93]

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91 V. NagamAiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, vol. I, Thiruvananthapuram: Gazetteers Department, Kerala Council for Historical research, 1999, 475.

92 Baccinelli Report 1867: Q. 51, pp. 70-71.

93 Baccinelli Report 1867: Q. 51, pp. 70-71.

18. Popularization of Education

Chavara marked the beginning of the popularization and reformation of education in the Catholic Church in Kerala. He established the first school for the dalits at Arpoocara in 1864,[94] and initiated the popularization and reformation of education in Kerala. Numerous documents testify that under the leadership of Chavara several schools were established attached to the churches and monasteries. Till then, the Catholics had no opportunity to educate their children because Monsignor Baccinelli was against the Catholics going to the schools run by the schismatics and heretics. He allowed them in certain cases to go to the schools run by the government.[95] i) Historical documents show that there is a steady increase of the number of Catholic schools after the appointment of Chavara as the Vicar General. It deserves our attention that the number of schools which was only one in 1864 rose to 42 by the year 1866 and became 191 by the year 1867. It highlights the efforts of the TOCD priests under the leadership of Chavara, the Prior and the Vicar General. After 1861, when Chavara was appointed the Vicar General of the Syrian Christians, there was a surge in the number of schools because of his tireless efforts of Chavara and the TOCD priests.

In the official report submitted to the Propaganda Fide in Rome on the state of the Christians of the Eastern Church in the Vicariate apostolic of Verapoly in 1867, Archbishop Bernardino Baccinelli mentioned the number of schools as 191 attached to 104 Suriani Parishes and the subjects taught

94 *Alochana*, Archives of St Joseph's Monastery, Mannanam, (ASJM), The Book of Consultation of the Monastery at Mannanam, 1864-1871, p. 139.

95 Baccinelli Report, 1867, Q. 53, p. 70.

to the students: Besides Catechism on Sundays, they were taught to read, write, calculate, compose well in Malayalam, etc., on weekdays.[96] It marked the beginning of reformation of education in Kerala. Chavara efficiently executed the idea 'a school for a church', (*Pallikkoru pallikkoodam)* and inaugurated a social awakening.

Chavara established a Sanskrit School, attached to St Joseph's Monastery at Mannanam in 1846. Inspired by St Ephrem Chavara explained to the priests that education brings sight to the blind, the blind of spirit as well as the blind of sight.[97] He envisaged different stages of learning, language study, study of other subjects, etc., for he was convinced that those who are not educated are spiritually blind (*jnanakurudanmar*). According to him, it was due to this blindness that the Christians in Kerala lacked the seed and sapling of sanctity. On 25 March 1850, he had sent a circular to the parish priests to motivate them for a centre of education, where Malayalam, Tamil, Latin, Syriac, etc., could be taught and to collect from the parishioners a contribution of ten percent of the income for the running of the centre.

Chavara instilled in the parish priests the significance of education and made them realize that the knowledge alone could uplift a community.[98] He reminded them of the grave responsibility in sustaining and spreading education: "The

96 ACO., Archivi Congregazioni Orientali 1862-1877. Scritture referrite Congressi Malabarenssi, ff. 150-172.

97 Chavara, CWC, vol. 4 *Letters*, IX:2. Circular Letter to parish priests written on 25 March 1850.

98 Chavara, CWC, vol. 4 *Letters*, IX:2. Circular Letter to parish priests written on 25 March 1850.

priests are duty-bound to teach the faithful,"[99] he maintained; he also insisted the necessity of an integral education as well as the religious foundation of educational action.[100] His educational contributions laid a strong foundation for a just society. Since October 1864, under the direct guidance of Chavara, the TOCD community was committed to uplift the people of God, especially the marginalized. Monsignor Leonard Mellano's circular letter on 7 November 1872 stated the crisis the schools in the vicariate faced due to a lack of interest from the part of the parents to send the children to the school, some schools were without students, and without teachers. The remedy he suggested was to open a Sanskrit school in every parish. He offered to provide textbooks for the said schools.

Education for the marginalized was a solid step against the caste-dominated and privatized form of education prevalent in Kerala. Although the new schools were attached to churches and supervised by the priests of the monasteries, everyone had access to education without the caste or colour-based discriminations. Chavara aimed at inclusive and integral education of all, and wished that the kingdom of God should be extended to all people.

19. Evangelization and Integral Human Welfare

Instilling new vigour and enthusiasm for evangelization in the priests, Pope Francis pointed out that many of our brothers and sisters live without the strength, light and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ, without a community of

99 Chavara, CWC, vol. 4, *Letters*, IX:2. Circular Letter to parish priests written on 25 March 1850.

100 Chavara, CWC., vol.4, *Letters* IX:2 Circular Letter to parish priests on 25 March 1850.

faith to support them, without meaning and a goal in life.[101] In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope instructed that more than by fear of going astray, my hope is that we will be moved by the fear of remaining shut up within structures which give us a false sense of security, within rules which make us harsh judges, within habits which make us feel safe, while at our door people are starving and Jesus does not tire of saying to us: "Give them something to eat" (Mk 6:37).[102] The Pope wants us to rediscover mission as the priority. Narrating the sad plight of the vicariate of Varapuzha, Leopold Beccaro wrote to Rome on 23 November 1873 regarding the evangelization kept in a low key.[103]

Chavara took initiatives to amplify the evangelization of the downtrodden. He instructed all the monasteries to get involved in the evangelization by taking the good news to the periphery. Chavara had genuine love towards the marginalized and the less privileged of the society, especially the *pulayas* of his time. In 1860s, on the part of Chavara, we see an urgency to bring them to the mainstream of the society. The *Alochana* and the *Chronicle of Mannanam Monastery* vol. 3, many pages of the Chronicle of Varkey Parappuram, and other contemporary documents speak of the fresh enthusiasm of Chavara and the TOCD fathers towards the evangelization of the people of the suppressed classes. Baccinelli appreciated their ministry of evangelization among the *Pulayas* and the

101 The Congregation for the Clergy, Instruction "The pastoral conversion of the Parish community in the service of the evangelising mission of the Church," on 20 July 2020, 3.

102 Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), n. 49: AAS 105 (2013), 1040.

103 Leopold, *Leopold Missionariyude Kathukal*, I:1.

celebration of sacraments for them.[104] Fr Leopold Beccaro reported to his superiors in Rome regarding the process of welcoming the *Pulayas* to the Church. According to his letters, 30 persons were given baptism in the month of July 1860 and 300 people were preparing themselves to be admitted to the Church. He also noted that when baptism was administered to *Pulayas* there was strong criticism from various sections of the society, including Christians who thought that the church in which they were given baptism was polluted; even the sacrament of baptism was contaminated.[105]

Fr Mathew Palakunnel also had mentioned the objection and reactions against welcoming the low caste people to the Church.[106] They were admitted to the Church only after making proper preparation. Fr Leopold Beccaro reported that the neophites learned by heart the 'Catechism of Saint Bellarmine', which was taught by lay persons. It was conducted in some rooms of the TOCD novitiate house and some other houses in Koonammavu.[107] Chavara prepared a text for the 'rite of baptism of adults',[108] which he translated from Latin to Syriac. Chavara made clear that the celebrations of the sacraments are the moments of encounter between Christ and the faithful, an encounter that deepens the faith.

104 Baccinelli Report 1867, Q. 68, p. 75.

105 Mathew Thundathil, trans., *Father Leopold Beccaro OCD, Theresian Missionary (1837-1914)*, Trivandrum: CIPH, 2014, 83.

106 *Palakunnel Velliachante Nalagamam* [Malayalam], p. 14.

107 Leopold Beccaro, *Leopoldu Missionaryude Kathukal* [Malayalam], ed. Jossy, Aluva: CMC Publications, 2010, II:1, pp. 29-32.

108 ASJM, *Chronicle of Mannanam Monastery*, vol.3 [MSS], 1864- 1871, See also *Palakunnel Velliachante Nalagamam* [Malayalam], p. 14.

The efforts taken by Chavara to bring up those at the periphery calls for a pastoral conversion to be authentic missionaries. Chavara gave sufficient importance to conversion and transformation of the members through the power of the Gospel, for he continued the efforts to make them grow in faith and get incorporated them into the mainstream of the community. The admission of the *dalits* to Christian faith by way of baptism resulted in a change of their identity, improved social status, dignity and better social and cultural progress through education.

Chavara wanted to inculcate in the low-caste an awareness of self-worth. He wished that they would not be ostracized from the society, develop self-confidence and live a sound moral life. Hence, he opened schools at Mannanam and Arpookara, and later at Edathua, Pulinkunnu and Kainakari, where everyone irrespective of caste and colour were admitted. Introducing 'noon feeding' in the schools Chavara made sure of their regular attendance. He insisted on decent wages to the workers at the completion of the work.[109] The two pious associations, namely Confraternity for Happy Death and Association for Charities (*upavishala*) were meant to help, especially those in the lowest strata of the society that they have a peaceful and happy death. Chavara, in his circular letter to his confreres and in the *Chavarul*, stressed the right of everyone to live a decent and dignified life.

20. *Vedopadesham* for the Downtrodden

The *Alochana* records the thorough planning and preparations of the TOCD Fathers to commence the classes for the *dalit* children and those in the peripheries. It was decided to

109 Chavara, *Chavarul*, I:18. *CWC.*, vol. 4, *Letters*, IX:10.

encourage the people of the locality to build a small structure to house the school for the *pulayas*. Since it was assessed that it would take longer time, they decided to spend the money from Mannanam Monastery and to begin the school on 9 October 1864. On the day, at 10 am, 75 people both men and women gathered at the Monastery, and they were taught, and the Gospel was preached to them.[110] During the following months more members were added to the group. Father Ephrem of Mannanam Monastery prepared the group by preaching a retreat to them; out of them 19 men and women received baptism at the Monastery chapel. The new Christians were instructed to join for the Eucharistic celebration daily at 5.00 am offered specially for them.[111] *Alochana* narrated how they were cared for and how the whole community at Mannanam and other institutions were involved in their upbringing in faith and development by raising their social status. Besides the pre-baptismal catechumentate, the post-baptismal catechism was arranged. *Vedopadesham*[112] was the common term used for instructing and incorporating them into faith. Similar type of instruction was continued for their children and the adults. TOCD fathers took care of 42 schools in the central Travancore in 1866.[113] Schools were opened at Elthuruth and Ambazhakadu as well. When the parish priests gathered for their annual retreats, the Prior of Mannanam

110 ASJM, *Alochana,* September 1864, *Alochana*, p. 26.

111 ASJM, *Alochana*, p. 105.

112 '*Veda* stands for religion as well as sacred Scripture. *'Upadesam'* is instruction. They were instructed on both the Bible and the Christian religion.

113 ASJM, *Alochana*, p. 111.

Monastery reminded them of their greater responsibility to educate the children of their locality.[114]

21. Table of the Lord

Gathering around the Eucharistic table, eating from the same bread, and drinking from the same cup constituted a new culture of uniting the newly baptized members. The Altar of the Lord or Eucharistic celerbation united and brought together the newly formed Christian community. They were led to new freedom because until then they were not allowed to enter any place of worship, for they had no right to worship. They were encouraged to worship and experience their communion with the Lord and with one another. The fathers took keen interest to gather the new Christians on Sundays to take care of their pastoral needs; and their number was 100 in 1866,[115] and 250 in 1870 in different places of Kuttanad, i.e., Pulincunnu, Edathua, Changanassery and Kalloorkadu.[116] The first Holy Communion of the children was celebrated on the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Histroy testifies that at Mannanam, there were two communities of Christians; the Holy Eucharist was celebrated for the new group of Christians separately; and to this day this division is perpetuated.[117]

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114 ASJM, *CMM*, vol. 3, p. 122.

115 ASJM, *Alochana*, p. 129.

116 ASJM, *Alochana*, p. 269.

117 Although Chavara wished to strengthen the new Christians from the Dalit community that they enjoy a dignified status, practically, the then traditional Catholic community was not mature enough to welcome them and to support them as their fellow Christians. Given the fact that it would take longer to correct the mentality of the traditional Christians, Chavara and other TOCD Fathers made room for these new Christians by way of arranging separate Holy Qurbana, catechism classes, and

22. Midday Meal

Introducing midday meal in the school, Chavara brought about a change in the food habits of the children. They began to dine together the same food for all, which was never heard of in their life. This also brought about tremendous change in their attitude towards others: as they all ate together, a sense of oneness, unity, and togetherness were inculcated in them. It was the compassion of Jesus (Mk 8:2-3) that inspired the TOCD fathers to distribute midday meal at the beginning of November 1864. *Alochana* narrated: "On Sundays many children come for catechism; some are very poor; some of them come a long way; and the classes are till evening."[118] Hence they arranged free lunch for the children.

A good number of the *pulayas* and the *parayas* were agricultural labourers; they produced every grain of rice, but the irony was that the rice they produced went to the barns of their high caste masters and the wages they received were not sufficient to fill their hungry stomach.[119] The wage for a week was only two measures of rice, and it was available to them only for a few weeks in the year. Hence, they used to eat radish, grains, chameleon, rats, or anything edible that they could gather. Naturally, *dalit* children were undernourished, illiterate, and were denied access to water resources in their villages and public roads or institutions due to the widespread

other ecclesial provisions, which are continued till today in the personal parish at Mannanam. Interestingly, when a new parish was erected at Mannanam, taking away all traditional Catholics, the Archeparchy of Changanacherry continues the strategy separation!

118 ASJM, *Alochana*, in November 1864 (Entry on 1 December 1864).

119 K. L. Bernard, *Flashes of Kerala History*, Cochin: Victory Press, 1970, 120.

social segregation. In the schools run by the TOCD Fathers, the children were led to the 'Table of the Lord' and were given 'midday meal', which attracted them to the schools.

One of the means sought for the preparation and distribution of midday meals was *pidiyari* scheme and the fathers sent letters to the neighbouring parishes and started collecting rice from the parishes of Pallippuram, Muttom, Vechoor, Vaikom, Muttuchira, Kudamaloor, and Kaippuzha.[120] When the schools were opened in these parishes, they also made use of the *pidiyari* scheme. Therefore, on 3 December 1865, the fathers bought 18 acres of paddy field with the purpose of meeting the expenses of the schools.[121]

23. Dress Distribution and Enhancement of Self-Respect

Men and women of low castes in Travancore were not allowed to cover their chest. Children walked around naked as Chavara observed during his *Kalari* education.[122] He specifically instructed the parents not to allow children go naked even inside the house.[123] It was in this social situation that he decided to distribute dress for women and children when they started coming to the church for learning catechism. A part of the collection at Mannanam Chapel on the feast of Saint Joseph was spent to buy the clothes for the children. Chavara introduced uniform dress at Mannanam in May 1865.[124]

120 ASJM, *Alochana* in November 1864.

121 ASJM, *CMM*, vol. 3, p. 90.

122 Chavara, *Atmanuthapam*, Cantos 1:93-112.

123 Chavara, *Chavarul*, II: 3. Chavara, CWC., vol 4, *Letters,* IX:10.

124 ASJM, *Alochana* in May 1865.

24. Conclusion

Chavara believed that the Chruch should be actively involved in the social well-being of the people developing their skills and improving their livelihoods. He regarded education as a means to uplift social status of the poor which was indeed a revolutionary action. The education must be deep-rooted with strong fundamentals of moral and spiritual training along with intellectual formation, psychological maturity, and skill development. Chavara visualised a comprehensive education and he inspired his confreres to continue it with timely renewal. During the formal release of the stamp of Kuriakose Elias Chavara, held at Trivandrumon on 20 December 1987, R. Venkataraman, the then President of India, affirmed: "Christian missions worked among the *adivasis*, the aboriginals, and among the *Harijans*, in a practical implementation of the Christian ethic of service. Few people have exemplified this dimension of Indian Christianity as memorably as Father Chavara." He portrayed Chavara as a strong social prophet of the time and appreciated his role and contributions for the transformation of the society in Kerala.

Chavara as a true son of the Church with great pastoral zeal and creativity focused himself for the holistic spiritual formation of the people God. He advocated Eucharist-centered and family-centered spirituality; and promoted unity within the Church. His pioneering contributions in education, social apostolate and in print media emphasized the role of the Church in the life and growth of the people. With his influential pastoral vision, there was a noticeable change in the Church which was hitherto inwardly focused to an outwardly focused one; and Chavara with pastoral concern for the downtrodden made it possible. He was committed to the mission of leading the Church to the peripheries and his pastoral vision continues to inspire the Church today.

REINTERPRETING KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA

Taylor's Dweller and Seeker Framework for Contemporary Pastoral Care

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1. Introduction

The membership and influence of traditional religions are increasingly declining in the West, especially in Europe. The secular reductionist approaches, in general, deny the role of the supernatural and confines itself to the boundaries of the universe. One of the popular expressions of this view is from Carl Sagan, an American scientist: "The cosmos is all that is or was or ever will be." These notions and ideologies shook the fundamental belief systems of the Western world. According to a report from the German Bishops' Conference in 2022, 522821 people left the catholic faith in one year.[1] However, the present trend of decreasing Church membership is not a closed door for its mission.

Despite the unparalleled challenges the Church experiences, the current situation presents unique opportunities to proclaim the Gospel. One way to explore these opportunities is to comprehend the orientation of the faithful in the Church. Another is to look beyond the boundaries of the West. This paper attempts to understand the orientation

1 Deutsche Bischofskonferenz, "Katholische Kirche in Deutschland Statistische Daten 2022" (Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz, June 28, 2023), https://www.dbk.de/fileadmin/redaktion/diverse_downloads/presse_2023/DBK_FLY_Statistik_2022_Ansicht.pdf.

of the faithful of the Western Church using the dweller-seeker framework of Charles Taylor. Charles Taylor is a well-known and influential Canadian philosopher whose notable works include *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* and *A Secular Age*. His reflections on Catholicism in contemporary society, which is entitled "A Catholic Modernity?" have initiated various scholarly discussions. Even though a lot has been written about dwelling and seeking within the Catholic Church, this paper's uniqueness lies in applying this framework in the Indian context, especially to the life, works and activities of Kuriakose Elias Chavara. He is a Catholic Saint belonging to the Syro Malabar Church in India. He was a social reformer known for his innovative approaches to transform the society. Furthermore, he was a holy saint who heroically practised virtues, initiated reforms to strengthen the Church and defended her from schisms.

Through this paper, we attempt to answer the following research question: How can Charles Taylor's framework of dwelling and seeking, when applied to the life, works, and mission of Kuriakose Elias Chavara, offer insights to guide the Catholic Church in addressing the lived realities of dwellers and seekers among its faithful? To answer the question, this paper begins by exploring Taylor's framework of dwelling and seeking. Then, this framework is applied to the life and mission of Chavara. Finally, the conclusion gives insights into how the life and works of Chavara can inform the Church's response to dwellers and seekers.

2. The Evolving Spiritual Landscape in Contemporary Times

Charles Taylor refers to Robert Wuthnow's typology of Dwellers and Seekers to conceptualise the spiritual landscape

in contemporary times.[2] In *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s*, Wuthnow analyses the gradual evolution of spirituality in the American conscience since 1950.[3] In this attempt, he makes a stark distinction between the Spirituality of Dwelling and Seeking. According to Wuthnow, the traditional spiritual life was oriented towards the spirituality of dwelling and underwent a major change in 1965 due to moral and political uncertainties. These challenges and uncertainties paved the way for developing and fostering a spirituality oriented towards 'seeking.' Dwellers are those totally committed to the Church in which they have been raised, while seekers are not committed to an institution but to searching for the truth. In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of seekers and a decrease in the number of dwellers, and Taylor expects this trend to continue. Taylor observes: "…[W]e can predict that the number of seekers will probably increase with time over against the dwellers."[4]

2.1. Dwelling and Seeking in the Age of Authenticity

Charles Taylor contests the claim of secularisation theorists that religion is an outdated reality overlooking decline and demise. These 'subtraction stories' characterise modernity as a liberated phase from the bondage of religion and the consequent decline in religious beliefs and practices. Taylor critiques this claim by unravelling the layers of historical

2 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 512.

3 Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America since 1950s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

4 Charles Taylor, "The Church Speaks - to Whom?," in *Church and People: Disjunctions in a Secular Age*, ed. Charles Taylor, José Casanova, and George F. McLean (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2012), 23.

changes that led to the present situation, leading to a nuanced understanding of the present situation.[5] He calls the present age, beginning in the 1960s, "the age of authenticity." This age is an outcome of historical changes and cannot be understood as the result of the necessary removal or subtraction of religion. One of the defining features of the age of authenticity is the freedom that an individual enjoys to pursue a path of their choice to fullness or to keep away from any religious or secular ideologies. The roots of this expressive individualism are not recent, but they can be traced back to the Romantic period. However, it was not an accessible option for the majority of the people and was confined to the elites. In contrast, in contemporary times, it has become a mass phenomenon.[6]

According to Taylor, the age of authenticity opens up diverse options for the individual, including the possibility of following a traditional religion. These options allow the individual to live a life on one's own terms. Some trending expressions such as 'do your own thing' and 'be yourselves in the world of today' are examples of the age of authenticity gaining currency among the masses. Unlike traditional religions, where birth defines membership, in the age of authenticity, a choice is made on the ability of a religion or an ideology to make an impression on the individual. For an individual, the choice one makes "…must speak to me; it must make sense in terms of my spiritual development as I understand this."[7] In place of external authority and doctrines, the choice of a spiritual path is identified exclusively based on the meaningfulness of the spiritual path. This can

5 Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 22.

6 Taylor, 473.

7 Taylor, 486.

result in extreme positions of denial and affirmation of the possibility of transcendence, leading to militant atheism and fundamentalism. Furthermore, there can also be diverse middle positions concerning these extreme positions, leading to the 'fragilisation' of the options of believing and non-believing. Hence, Taylor observes that "[t]his mutual fragilisation of all the different views in presence, the undermining sense that others think differently, is certainly one of the main features of the world of 2000, in contrast to that of 1500."[8] One of the outcomes of this feature in the age of authenticity is the opening up of diverse options before an individual, leading to the possibility of unlimited pluralism in public space. Taylor states, "Of course, this understanding of the place and nature of spirituality has pluralism built into it, not just pluralism within a certain doctrinal framework, but unlimited."[9] He calls this social imaginary an "immanent frame" where both belief and non-belief exist together.

For Christianity, the age of authenticity is both a challenge and an opportunity. It is a challenge because it would result in a sharp increase in traditional religious belonging, as indicated by the trends in Europe, where people increasingly identify themselves as atheists, agnostics, or non-religious. It is an opportunity because the current situation cannot necessarily lead to the decline and demise of religion. Taylor observes that "The new framework has a strong individualist component, but this will not necessarily mean that the content will be individuating. Many people will find themselves joining extremely powerful religious communities."[10] According to

8 Taylor, 303–4.

9 Taylor, 489.

10 Taylor, 516.

Taylor, two of the many ways in which the Church responded include Vatican II and the Charismatic movements."[11] Furthermore, understanding the nuances of dwelling and seeking helps respond to the age of authenticity.

2.2. Dwelling and Seeking in the Church

Dwelling and seeking are two modes of relating to the Church in contemporary society. Dwellers, in general, remain fully loyal to the Church, whereas seekers reserve their loyalty and search for truth on their terms. George F. McLean highlights this distinction by pointing to one of the disjunctions in the contemporary Church, as highlighted by Taylor, between "dwellers" and "seekers": "the "seekers" who wish to realise in their life new, more personally authentic, ways of being Christian and Catholic vs "the dwellers" who feel that in the Church all is already clear, well defined and simply to be followed assiduously."[12] Homogenisation of dwellers was a trend from the pre-modern societies to the first quarter of the twentieth century. However, this period overlooked the genuine questions raised by the seekers and oversimplified the complexities of religious practices. In the pre-modern society, "the church is at its best not when it is questioning, adapting and changing, but when it stands firm on its age-old answers"[13] without much clarity and coherence. There were many converts to Catholicism in the twentieth century due to its unchanging or unwavering nature and placing itself as the

11 Taylor, 513.

12 George F. McLean, "Disjunctions in the 21st Century," in *Church and People: Disjunctions in a Secular Age*, ed. Charles Taylor, José Casanova, and George F. McLean (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2012), 1.

13 Taylor, "The Church Speaks - to Whom?," 20.

only way to salvation. These aspects influenced the preceding dominance of spirituality revolving around seeking.

Seekers, displaying the essence of the age of authenticity, attempt to go beyond their present affiliation to religion and search for meaning and truth in their own terms to come in contact with the spiritual. The life of seekers can be compared to that of a journey, and their current status is provisional and temporary. Referring to Danièle Hervieu-Léger, Taylor clarifies the approach of seekers. There are two stages: the phase of search and the phase of conversion. The conversion phase is the culmination of the phase of search that a seeker undertakes.[14]

The Western cultural dynamics have been pivotal in understanding the rise of seekers. According to Taylor, this momentum began towards the end of the nineteenth century among the Western elites; later, it gathered a wide momentum by the second half of the twentieth century.[15] According to Taylor, these aspects of seeking become part of the common sense for all other classes in the later phase. In general, the shift from dwelling to seeking is observed in a negative light, especially in opposition to faith. Moreover, this shift is marked as a step towards self-indulgence and self-absorption. However, Taylor calls this momentum the path towards authenticity. Moreover, this path is accompanied by various trivialising developments, such as the growth and influence of consumer capitalism.[16]

14 Taylor, 17.

15 Taylor, 17.

16 Taylor, 18.

The Church must not limit its focus on dwellers and remain open to seekers. Seeking is part of the long history of the Church. Taylor explains this by focusing on the aspect of mistrust displayed by seekers. Their identification as "spiritual and not religious" is one way of expressing this mistrust. This is because of two reactions, namely, the failure to grasp the necessity of the disciplines and the quick and definite answers given by the Church to certain questions without giving importance to the aspect of search. However, Taylor observes that the mistrust displayed by the seekers is unjust because the Church "has been a great source and site of seekers." He points to the examples of St Teresa of Avila, St Ignatius, St John of the Cross, St Francis de Sales, St Teresa of Lisieux and St Mother Teresa. Like the seekers of today, some of them had differences in opinion with the Church authorities and also experienced a passing phase of spiritual dryness. However, the crucial aspect of their seeking, which makes them different from seekers of today, is that they were strongly anchored in the Catholic Church. This anchoring cannot be seen in the seekers of the authentic age.[17]

One of the challenges the Church faces in contemporary times is engaging dwellers and seekers. Conservatives among dwellers and seekers could voice extreme views. Church's responses to diverse issues might not augur well with those occupying extremes of this spectrum. However, Taylor underlines the need to "reach out" to both groups to bring about "greater mutual understanding" and "mutual sympathy".[18] For instance, as indicated earlier, the seekers could be made aware of the examples of seekers within the

17 Taylor, 18.

18 Taylor, 21.

Church who, by being rooted in the Church, displayed the attitude of seeking, such as St Teresa of Avila and St John of the Cross.

Furthermore, opportunities for better communication between seekers and the Church could be initiated. The seekers could be provided platforms to make them better heard than forcing them to obey. He gives the example of Taizé approach. It is characterised by giving importance to listening to the seekers and putting their search in perspective rather than providing them with predetermined answers.[19] Open and deep engagement between dwellers and seekers can bridge the gap between their differing perspectives.

Taylor agrees that there are no simple solutions to permanently settle the deep-rooted differences between dwellers and seekers. It requires creative and dynamic frameworks of engagement. One way of exploring the possibility of a dynamic framework is to look beyond the West. Hence, in this paper, we shift the focus from West to East, particularly on the life, work, and mission of Kuriakose Elias Chavara.

3. Seeking and Dwelling in Chavara

Kuriakose Elias Chavara's life reflects various shades of dwelling and seeking. He was a seeker who was anchored in faith as a dweller. He epitomised the concept of 'dweller' in numerous ways. His ardent faith in God and deep commitment to the Holy Catholic Church made him a distinguished figure in the Syro Malabar Church. His humane touch embraced traditional religious understanding, making his dwelling unique and remarkable.

19 Taylor, 20.

The spirituality of seeking can be traced to Chavara's life and mission. This seeking dimension became evident through exploring his spiritual life, efforts in the reunion movement, prudent discussions and deliberations with Bp Roccos, Melus, Denaha, and Antony Thondanattu, his forgiving attitude towards Mr Mathan Manjooran Kalpurakal, and advocacy for liturgical reform. We begin by examining the aspect of dwelling in his life, followed by an exploration of the dimension of seeking.

4. A Dweller Who Lived the Legacy of Prayer Experience

Chavara's deep prayer life reflects an essential element of his dwelling dimension. The deep prayer life of Chavara can be substantiated with a few testimonials. Fr Louis Manjummel OCD, who chose Chavara as his spiritual guide, distinctively mentioned St. Chavara's prayer life in his letters. The letter written by Fr Louis dated 12 January 1936 to Fr Merchili finds a vivid explanation of Chavara's prayer life. According to his description, Chavara spent his daily evening meditation for an hour in a kneeling posture with teary eyes, and Fr Louis further testified that it was a source of inspiration for the members of the monastery.[20]

Personal encounters and testimonials further highlight Chavara's sanctity and the influence of his prayerful life. When Chavara was active in his ministries, Fr Varkey Muttathupadath, one of the students of Chavara, respectfully collected a few strands of Chavara's hair and preserved it in a relic. Later, he gave this relic to his nephew, Fr Joseph Muttahupadath, and after a short span of time, he handed

20 Thomas Panthaplackal, *Chavarayachan Oru Rekhachithram* (Ernakulam: The CMI Secretariate for Evangelization and Pastoral Ministry, 2004), 103.

over this precious relic to St Joseph's Monastery Mannanam in 1936. In his testimonial letter dated 08 September 1936, Fr Joseph Muttahupadath cherished the close encounter of Fr Varkey Muttathupadath, his uncle, with Kuriakose Elias Chavara and its influence in his own life.[21] Bishop Mar Athanasius, the founder of Reformed Mar Thoma Church, had a deep connection with Chavara. He says, "In this country, who else than Fr Prior is likely to go to heaven? Holding on to his leather belt, I, too, shall endeavour to reach there." This statement of a non-Catholic prelate is a direct proclamation of Chavara's holiness.[22]

The testimonies of Bp Marcelin OCD and Fr Leopold Beccaro further underscore Chavara's exemplary virtues and his role as a mediator of blessing in the Kerala Church. Bp Marcelin OCD testified to the uniqueness of Kuriakose Elias Chavara in his Malayalam work titled *Satyavedacharithram*. Bp Marcelin acknowledged the contributions of Chavara in fostering the faith life of the commoners, and he firmly mentioned that Chavara was the sole architect who was instrumental in bringing an abundance of blessings to the Kerala church.[23] Similarly, Fr Leopold Beccaro, the spiritual guide of Chavara, in his personal diary dated 3 January 1831, wrote, "He was exercising himself in the practice of all virtues, especially in the simplicity of heart, living faith, tender obedience, and devotion to the Most Blessed Sacrament, to the

21 Panthaplackal, 102.

22 Thomas Kochumuttam, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2017), 8.

23 Panthaplackal, *Chavarayachan Oru Rekhachithram*, 102.

Bl. Virgin Mary and St Joseph."[24] Finally, Fr Leopold Beccaro concluded his personal diary with a short prayer, "O holy and beautiful soul, pray for me."[25] These testimonials reflect the prayer life and dwelling spirituality of Chavara in its fullness.

4.1. Integrating Spirituality and Action

In contrast to the observations that clericalism and hierarchical structure alienate people of God from the Church, Chavara's life as a dweller blended spirituality and action, drawing people closer to the Church. Being a dweller, Chavara loved to practice his love for his Divine Master in his committed service, especially on the pastoral front. While he was serving as Vicar at Pallipuram, one night, he was informed that one of the parishioners, who was suffering from contagious smallpox, became severely ill and asked for anointing the sick. By considering the pastoral necessity, Chavara got ready to cater for the spiritual needs without any sort of hesitation. When people tried to stop him, Chavara said, "It is my duty and God will take care of me."[26] This incident indeed reveals how Chavara integrated his spirituality and action, even in the midst of life-threatening situations.

In his analysis, Taylor points out that overemphasis on authority is a reason for seekers to distance themselves from the Church. Very often, this overemphasis will lead to various scandals, and these scandals question the moral integrity of the Church. Chavara's moral integrity can be analysed in his effort to construct the Koonammavu convent. As directed by

24 Leopold Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara* (Mannanam: Postulation of the Cause of Bl. Chavara, St. Joseph Monastery, 2003), 17.

25 Beccaro, 17.

26 Kochumuttam, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 7.

Chavara, Fr Geevarghese Thoppil went to different parishes and returned with Rs 400 as donations. However, under the guidance of Chavara, they were able to finish the construction of the convent with half of the amount, and Chavara instructed Fr Geevarghese to return the remaining sum of money to the donors.[27] This incident explores the moral integrity of Chavara in its fullness. Thus, Chavara, as a dweller, integrated spirituality and action.

4.2. A Dweller Who Stood for the Unity of the Church

As a dweller deeply rooted in the Church, Chavara exemplified a steadfast commitment to unity, dedicating himself to resolving Roccos schism (1861 -1862). During this time period, the rebellion became public and out of 154 parishes, 84 fully and 30 partially followed Bishop Roccos. Archbishop Bernardine Baccinelli, the vicar apostolic, the European missionaries and a few enlightened individuals helplessly watched this grave situation with pity. To address this schism, the Archbishop appointed Chavara as the vicar General for Syrian Christians in his letter dated 8 June 1861. In the patent order, the Archbishop wrote, "I hereby nominate you as the Vicar General so that you may administer, as regards the spiritual matters, the priests and laity of the Syrian churches under our jurisdiction."[28] To understand the selfless service of Chavara in containing Roccos schism, it is appropriate to refer to an excerpt from the diary of Fr Leopold Beccaro on 3 January 1871. Fr Beccaro wrote:

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27 Kochumuttam, 7.

28 "Beatificationis Et Canonizationis Servi Dei Cyriaci Eliae Chavara (Positio Super Miraculo)" (Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1977), 216, Dharmaram Library Archives.

> He has undergone immense hardships for the good of Christians of Malabar, especially during the time of schism of Roccos, when he, being appointed the Vicar General of Syrians, showed his extraordinary devotion to the Holy See. He fought day and night to arrest the spread of schism, from which he could save not less than 40 parishes. On this account, the Holy Father Pope Pious IX sent him a letter expressing his great satisfaction.[29]

Similarly, he raised his concerns with His Eminence Alexander Cardinal Barnabo, then Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of Faith, expressing the need for native bishops. According to Chavara, the presence of native bishops will help Jacobites and other rebellious factions return to the Catholic communion. Therefore, as a dweller, Chavara's love for the unity of the Church seems evident in his mission, and these two examples prove this claim in fullness.

4.3. A Dweller with Humane Outlook

Chavara's life exemplifies a deep, humane outlook, where his inclusivity and compassion shaped his interactions and mission. The charisma of Chavara can be gleaned throughout his life and mission. According to Fr Leopold Beccaro, "he is greatly loved by the Vicars Apostolic of Malabar, the Gentiles and the Nestorians not excluded."[30] This testimony reveals the inclusivity of Chavara's personality. His humane outlook has been acknowledged by many. For instance, in the chronicles of Fr Varghese Parappuram, he mentions an incident at Koonammavu. It was in the context when the uncle priest of

29 Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 17–18.

30 Beccaro, 18.

Fr Scaria Kalathil fell ill, and on his deathbed, he expressed his desire to see Fr Scaria. Fr Leopold, the novice master, was against Fr Scaria's visit to his uncle; nevertheless, Fr Chavara supported Fr Scaria's visit by considering the urgency. Since it was the time of the superiors' meeting at Koonammavu, Fr Leopold insisted on secret voting to make a unanimous decision. When they began to cast votes, Fr Leopold raised a black pellet between his fingers and showed it to all so that all may follow his path. When Fr Chavara's turn came, he raised a white pellet and showed it publicly. The superiors were in a dilemma and requested that they discuss and reach a consensus. However, Fr Leopold was insistent on voting. When the ballot box was opened, Leopold was surprised to see that all the votes, except for one, were white.[31]

These two testimonials reveal Chavara's personal charisma, which is oriented towards a humane outlook. Moreover, Chavara's efforts in the establishment of schools devoid of caste barriers, spreading the good news to the people in the peripheries, and innovative efforts to uplift womanhood in society can also be inferred as the culmination of the above-mentioned outlook. Thus, we can firmly classify Chavara as a dweller with a humane outlook.

5. Unravelling the Spirituality of Seeking in Chavara

The spirituality of seeking in Chavara can be explored by dividing his spiritual life into three phases. The first phase marks his close encounter with Jesus. In this phase, the main points of discussion are his spousal mysticism and union with the divine. The second phase is identified as radical self-consciousness and a call to repentance. This period is marked

31 Kochumuttam, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 77–78.

by interiorisation, reflection, and radical *metanoia*. The final phase is the period of realisation.

5.1. Close Encounter

Chavara's mystical experience is deeply rooted in Carmelite spousal mysticism. Thomas Kochumuttom CMI observes that Chavara's mystical experience revolves around Carmelite mystical pattern, i.e., spousal mysticism, where the relationship between God and human beings is understood in the spiritual realm, but explained in the context of real marriage, mutual commitment, so on and so forth. In the *Compunction of the Soul*, Chavara uses the term *'kanakenam'*, which literally means 'I long to see.' This terminology, indeed, explains his intensity of love for Jesus.

Moreover, the spousal mysticism in Chavara became explicit in his letter addressed to the mother superior and the entire community at the Koonammavu convent. He Chavara wrote, "Above all, learn the art of loving Jesus Christ. Stay constantly in His presence. Walk along with him. Converse with Him continuously. When you feel attached to any other object, the loving Lord turns His gaze on you and asks you: "Look at me! … He whispers to you: "You must love me."[32] In 1869, Chavara wrote another letter during the days of 40 hours of adoration at Koonammavu; there he wrote, "the adoration you give to your divine spouse Jesus Christ from the corner of your convent is most pleasing to him. I have seen with my own eyes that the palanquin in which the queen was travelling was covered on all sides with a thick curtain to hide her from

32 Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara: The Letters*, ed. Lucas Vithuvattickal and K. C. Chacko, trans. Mary Leo, vol. IV (Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Bl. Chavara, 1990), 82.

human gaze, if so how demanding would be your Divine Spouse … I feel a holy envy at your immense good fortune … Oh queen and spouses of our Lord and King Jesus Christ, the state of life you have embraced is indeed praiseworthy. The terrestrial empresses will feel jealous of you."[33] Thus, these two references point towards spousal mysticism in Chavara's works.

Similarly, Chavara's mystical experience can be further traced in certain sections of *Compunction of the Soul.* Chavara did not directly mention his authorship in the book *Compunction of the Soul*; nevertheless, Rev. Fr Zacharia Kalathil, Fr Mathai Palakunnel, Fr Varkey Parappuram and Leopold Beccaro identified Chavara as the author of this mystical narrative.[34] Out of his intense mystical experience, Chavara wrote:

> God of unbounded kindness, Holy Lord
> O Sea of Mercy, of mighty depth unfathomed
> You did look on me with tender care
> And Tended me with unstinted love.[35]
> Lord of Mercy, the son of God
> His glorious splendor, I long to see
> The foundation of mercy, God incarnate
> Who, the ugly form of man assumed
> To uproot him from the slush of sin
> The Redeemer of humankind,

33 Chavara, IV:76.

34 Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara: Compunction of the Soul, Dirge (Pana) and Anasthasia's Martyrdom*, trans. Mary Leo, Sheila, and Sergius, vol. II (Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Bl. Chavara, 1989), xii.

35 Chavara, II:2.

I long to see.[36]
Oh, Lord! I gaze at Your most beautiful
Lotus-face with single-minded love.[37]

Come and take over my soul, O Lord, my heart is ready with its doors wide open to receive you. Reside in my soul as you sat on the lap of your mother. Remember, Lord, how happy you were in the embrace of these memorable days, Lord, hearken to her supplication on my behalf.[38]

My God, my Love, my Master oh, was it
Your thirst is insatiable to redeem mankind …
O Cross, Beloved, open your arms wide
And in your living embrace quickly close me.[39]

In the above-cited passages, Chavara's intense God experience, especially his providential trust in the tender loving care of God, can be inferred undoubtedly. From these observations and analysis, one may collectively conclude that Chavara integrated and applied his mystical experience in his daily life.

5.2. Self Consciousness

Delving deeper into Chavara's writing reveals that the intense encounter of Chavara with Jesus enabled him to have concrete self-awareness. In this phase, he identified and audited his

36 Chavara, II:17.

37 Chavara, II:22.

38 Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara: Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, ed. J. Chirayil and George H. Ambooken, trans. Jose Chittilappilly, vol. III (Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Bl. Chavara, 1990), 22.

39 Chavara, *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara: Compunction of the Soul, Dirge (Pana) and Anasthasia's Martyrdom*, II:65.

current status of the soul with a sense of openness and humility. This inclusive analysis and its depiction made Chavara affirm his sinful nature. Chavara wrote in his Colloquies with the Heavenly Father:

> I deem not myself worthy to reach high degrees of prayer and sanctity. As I am a great sinner with a heart impure and opaque without virtues of cleanliness and modesty. I realise that I am not worthy to receive the spirit of contemplation and attain to perfection … Unworthy as I am God so designed that I also become in spirit a child of St Theresa … Here I come before you, Oh my Heavenly Father, with a heart full of repentance … O my Father dear! I cast myself on my knees before your throne of Mercy. I am bent on clinging to your pierced but live feet until you speak to me words of forgiveness … O my God! A great sinner I am, I am struck with fear to enter this chapel, the abode of your presence.[40]

> Though a sinner, my unworthiness, he redeemed O wonder of wonders.[41]

> Alas, my Lord! God of love and goodness,
> Joy and peace, since from me have fled
> My heart sore-pressed with sorrow and pain; I felt
> I was no more the privileged child of God.[42]

Chavara integrates the aspects of holiness and repentance. He uses this integration as a pathway for leading a virtuous

40 Chavara, *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara: Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, III:1–9.

41 Chavara, *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara: Compunction of the Soul, Dirge (Pana) and Anasthasia's Martyrdom*, II:5.

42 Chavara, II:5.

life. This integration reflects his personal growth in his mystical union as a seeker. This will become clearer in the next phase when he mentions baptismal grace and innocence.

5.3 Period of Realisation

The integration of holiness and repentance expresses a unique path that Chavara lived. When it comes to the final phase of his life, especially on his deathbed, Chavara, with his full knowledge, affirmed with clarity the depth of his spiritual life. According to *Positio,* submitted in 1977, the last parting words of Chavara are as follows:

> Why are you weeping? Man, whoever he may be, has to die one day. By the grace of God, I have been keeping in mind this moment … My pious parents in many ways impressed on me great regard for the Holy Family; Jesus, Mary and Joseph. (*By pointing his hands towards the portrait of the Holy Family, he continued*) By the grace of God, I dare say that with their help I never had experienced an occasion where I was deprived of grace received in baptism.[43]

To validate the references that have been taken from *Positio*, an excerpt from the diary of Fr Leopold Beccaro seems to be highly reliable. Fr Beccaro wrote, "Today, on January 3, 1871, Tuesday at 7.15 in the morning, Fr Cyriac Elias of Holy Family, the first Prior, died after a life of great innocence. He could declare before his death that he had never lost the baptismal innocence. He was exercising himself in the practice of all virtues, especially in the simplicity of heart, living faith, tender obedience, devotion to the most Blessed Sacrament, to

43 "Beatificationis Et Canonizationis Servi Dei Cyriaci Eliae Chavara (Positio Super Miraculo)," 548.

the Bl. Virgin Mary and St Joseph."[44] In the second phase of radical self-awareness, Chavara's seeking spirituality enabled him to integrate the aspects of holiness and repentance. This integration paved the way towards the third phase- the period of realisation. However, Chavara also showed his personal relationship with the Holy Family, which helped him to tread beyond the aspects of the sinful conscience, which we see in the second phase. In this phase, Chavara was sure he did not lose the baptismal grace throughout his life. It becomes evident through these two references, and it also points out that his staunch seeking nature to be united with his Divine Master guided him to look beyond the temporalities and limitations of his life.

6. A Seeker Who Exemplified the Path of Forgiveness

Chavara exemplified the legacy of forgiveness practised by Jesus, his Divine Master. His life shows the path in which one has to deal with seekers who are hostile and indifferent. The perfect example can be traced to Chavara's attitude towards Mr Mathan Manjooran Kalpurakal of Muttuchira parish. In his testament to the members of the congregation, he requested the members of the community to cater for the needs of Mr Mathan Manjooran, who was the steward at the St Joseph's Monastery, Mannanam. Mr Mathan Manjooran misappropriated some property of the monastery, and the civil court punished him. In retaliation, he filed a criminal case against Chavara in the criminal court of Alappuzha. After hearing both parties, the court dismissed the case filed by Mr Mathan as fraud.[45] This instance reveals the forgiving nature of Chavara.

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44 Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 17.

45 Chavara, *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara: The Letters*, IV:73.

Chavara's forgiving nature was further demonstrated in his dealings with Bp Thomas Roccos, who plotted against him and his monasteries but, was ultimately met with patience, assistance, and kindness even during a time of schism. Similarly, Bp Thomas Roccos threatened Chavara in various ways, and the supporters of Roccos plotted plans to take over Mannanam and Elthuruth monasteries by force to make his residences. This rivalry became clear with the letter written by Bp. Roccos dated 24 June 1869. In this letter, he abused Chavara and threatened him with excommunication and expulsion from the monastery.[46] Similarly, in the chronicles, Chavara described a circular published by Bp Roccos in the churches stating, "As the Prior and the inmates of the Monastery had insulted us and our father, the Patriarch, who had sent us, they were now in spiritual danger. As it is our duty to inform you of this so that you will not fall into eternal perdition by lending your ears to their evil councils."[47] According to Chavara, this circular had a tremendous impact, and people belonging to Protestant and Jacobite churches were in the forefront to humiliate and challenge Chavara and his supporters in various ways. Moreover, two priests and some deacons left the monastery to follow the charisma of Bp Thomas Roccos.[48] Even in this disturbing context, Chavara did not hold grudges towards Bp Roccos. Towards the end, a much-awaited response from Propaganda Fide revealed that

46 "Beatificationis Et Canonizationis Servi Dei Cyriaci Eliae Chavara (Positio Super Miraculo)," 220.

47 Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara: The Chronicles*, ed. K. C. Chacko et al., trans. PJ Thomas, vol. I (Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Bl. Chavara, 1990), 86.

48 Chavara, I:86.

Bp. Thomas Roccos reached the territory of Varapuzha without the due consent of the Holy See. After due consideration and counsel, Bp Roccos expressed his willingness to leave the country, and Chavara was instrumental in providing helping hands for his safe and sound return journey. Moreover, Chavara waited patiently for hours in the harbour till the ship left.[49] This incident reveals his forgiving nature, even to those who intentionally tried to harm him in the midst of the schism.

Chavara's ability to forgive and reconcile is exemplified in his efforts to rehabilitate Fr Anthony Thondanat, a leader of the Roccos faction. Fr Anthony went to Mesaoptamia and got him consecrated by the Nestorian Patriarch Simon Ruben XVIII and returned to Kerala as Archbishop Abdisho. After his arrival, he was not cared for by anyone, and he had no means to live. To add to the misery, he fell ill and was suffering from other age-related ailments. In this situation, Chavara explored the possibility of reconciliation by arranging a meeting at the neighbouring Church, i.e., situated in Fort Kochi. With the consent of the Archbishop, Chavara accommodated Fr Anthony in St Joseph's Monastery, Mannanam, where Fr Antony made a spiritual renewal with the guidance of Chavara. Later, Fr Anthony was appointed Vicar of Edamattom, Vilkummadam, etc. The act of forgiveness and courtesy exhibited by Chavara are the best ways to develop, especially in addressing seekers who remain hostile towards church authorities.[50]

7. A Seeker With Inclusive Vision

Chavara's inclusivity in regaining seekers to the Catholic fraternity becomes more evident with his efforts and

49 Kochumuttam, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 66.

50 Kochumuttam, 66.

prospects in initiating the reunion movement. His efforts for the reunion movement are visible throughout his writings. To have a smooth transition of Jacobite brethren to the Catholic faith, he envisaged the need for native bishops belonging to these Syrian communities. He addressed this need in his letter to His Eminence Alexander Cardinal Barnabo, then Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of Faith. After giving a befitting introduction to the crisis among the Syrian and Latin Christians, he raised an amicable solution to address the issue. Chavara wrote:

> Hence, Your eminence, I am placing before you a suggestion which I consider good. It is good to have two bishops here; one for the Latin Church and other for the Syrian Church. Then their longing to have a bishop of their own will cease. Then gradually their relationship with Babylon will end … This would be very opportune and useful. There are also many non-Catholics in our midst who are our own kith and kin, now known as Jacobites. The above solution will help them renounce schism and return to the unity of the Catholic fold.[51]

Concerning this letter, Chavara's authorship is often doubted due to the lack of a signatory note in the copy of the letter available in Mannanam. However, Fr Varghese Parappuram and Fr Mathai Palakunnel mentioned vividly this letter that is addressed to the Roman Pontiff and the Prefect of the Congregation of Propagation of Faith in their respective chronicles.[52] Similarly, there are also proofs to show that the letter has been sent through Fr Leopold, who accompanied Archbishop

51 Chavara, *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara: The Letters*, IV:14.

52 Panthaplackal, *Chavarayachan Oru Rekhachithram*, 14.

Leonard on his visit to Rome in 1869.[53] Moreover, Bp Louis Pazhyaparambil, in his book *'An Account of a Most Important Period in the History of the Malabar Church'* reiterates Chavara's authorship of the above-mentioned letter. Therefore, it becomes clear that Chavara was open enough to accept and reach out to those seekers who abandoned catholic faith due to their ignorance.

Similarly, Chavara's heart was always open to doing missionary activities across the land. Concerning this Fr Thomas Panthaplackal refers to the chronicles of St Josephs' Monastery, Mannanam, where he traces a few instances in the life of Chavara and his companion took firm steps to baptise more than 100 people at a time. Apparently, this zeal for souls makes Chavara instrumental in founding catechumenates and schools together.[54] Thus, Chavara held an inclusive vision towards the nourishment of the mission of his Divine Master with an open heart. Furthermore, this openness is directly pointing towards his attitude to gain seekers for the kingdom of God.

8. Chavara: A Seeker who Integrated Dialogue and Communion

There are various instances in Chavara's life where he employed the aspects of dialogue and negotiations effectively. Before the arrival of Bp Thomas Roccos, Denaha Bar Johan, a Chaldean priest, arrived in Kerala without due permission from the authorities. He also pretended to be the legitimate bishop, and thus, he successfully alienated the faithful from the administration of Varapuzha Vicariate. Once, he came to St Joseph's Monastery, and his sole intention was to win over

53 Chavara, *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara: The Letters*, IV:12.

54 Panthaplackal, *Chavarayachan Oru Rekhachithram*, 15.

Chavara and his community with his side. However, Chavara listened to him patiently and expressed his disapproval explicitly. As it was late, as a matter of courtesy, they served him a good supper and gave him accommodation at night.[55] Chavara was sure that Denaha Bar Johan had an evil intention, especially to gather Chavara's support; however, he negotiated with Dehna constructively and explicitly expressed his unwillingness to join their front. Thus, Chavara showed negotiations and dialogue as a sublime way to deal with seekers who have gone astray.

Secondly, when there was a crisis in the Anackal parish, the chief of the parish approached Fr Chavara and sought his presence to rectify the issue. During those days, Chavara was staying at Koonammavu and he had severe age related ailments. However, barring all those age-related issues, Chavara settled the issues at Anackal parish with due negotiations and dialogues.[56] Thirdly, his willingness to have a dialogue with Fr Anthony Thondanat, who opposed him vehemently during the Roccos schism, can be traced as his willingness to accept and consider seekers who went astray in their spiritual quest.

9. Chavara: A Farsighted Visionary Seeker

Chavara was concerned about the ordinary faithful and their faith experiences. In this regard, he expressed his concerns about the lack of learned leaders in the Church. His vision for organised seminaries and convents in the Syrian rite can be seen as the outcome of this genuine concern. As the Vicar General of Syrian Christians, he wrote various letters and

55 Kochumuttam, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 65.

56 Kochumuttam, 5.

circulars concerning this topic. The circular dated 25 March 1850 set forth his vision in a clear and lucid manner. Chavara wrote:

> St Ephrem, a Doctor of the Church, teaches that the second source of enlightenment is learning (knowledge). Just as without eyes one cannot see the material things of the world, so also without knowledge it will be impossible for us to see or understand the reality of the world that is above and the Lord lies therein … Our Lord himself has taught that if the blind leads the blind both will fall into the pit … To make up for this deficiency, it is decided to erect a seminary in a convenient place as agreed to buy, especially by our bishop.[57]

This passage gives clarity on Chavara's vision in the establishment of the seminary at Mannanam. Similarly, he had a pressing reason for the establishment of the convent at Koonammavu. Chavara opened the chronicles of Koonammavu in the following manner:

> People in Malabar had true faith from the ancient times. But there was no monastery or convent. They had heard a lot about virtuous life but there were no living examples. Men could become priests and thus be celibates. But women, even if they were willing to observe virginity, had no option but to marry and lead a worldly life. As there were no means to do it, they had been remaining in this plight for long.[58]

Chavara affirmed that treading the path of holiness is the pertinent reason behind the establishment of the convent

57 Chavara, *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara: The Letters*, IV:96.

58 Chavara, *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara: The Chronicles*, I:193.

at Koonammavu. Similarly, in an excerpt from the diary of Fr Leopold Beccaro, he wrote, "He founded the convent of the nuns after undergoing many hardships."[59] Moreover, in the first biography on Kuriakose Elias Chavara written by Fr Leopold Beccaro, he wrote, "It was his great desire to start a religious house for women with the main intention of making it a safe place for the girls of Malabar to live their religion as good Christians and to learn spiritual things (*Vedakaryangal*)."[60] These references clearly state that his vision and concern for the Church seem to be the primary reason why Chavara underwent a lot of hardship in establishing the convent at Koonammavu. Fr A. Mathias Mundadan CMI, in his book titled *St Kuriakose Elias Chavara,* cited the chronicle of Koonammavu convent, which stated:

> Our Father gave us four books printed both in Latin and in Malayalam … Fr Prior often came and taught us how to read and write Latin … On 12 February 1870 Fr Prior came to the parlour … he had brought with him a small Latin book of the office of the Bl. Virgin Mary … He read out to us a part of it and told us to read and start saying these prayers. He then added, "This was my aim in teaching you Latin."

The last statement of Chavara reveals his secondary objective in establishing the convent—the empowerment of womanhood. During those days, women were rarely sent to schools and other institutions; nonetheless, Chavara attempted to teach them classical languages. This reveals that he envisaged the prospects of women's empowerment in the days to come. Thus, the systematic establishment of

59 Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 17.

60 Beccaro, 12.

seminaries and convents was the lasting solution he devised to address the challenges and problems of the Church in the days ahead.

Similarly, Chavara's involvement in reforming liturgical texts, efforts to impart education irrespective of caste distinctions, establishment of the printing press for the greater good, establishment of *tapasbhavanam,* and social concern for the poor and downtrodden seem to stem from his people-oriented vision. Thus, Chavara's life reflects the heart of a true seeker, one who blazed his own trail by transcending the confines of mere dwelling and embracing an inclusive vision rooted in faith.

10. Conclusion

The life and mission of Chavara, when analysed through Taylor's framework of dwelling and seeking, offer valuable insights for the Church to respond to the complexities of engaging dwellers and seekers. First, instead of a mutually exclusive approach, Chavara embraces a 'both/and' approach to dwelling and seeking. His life demonstrates that these orientations are not mutually exclusive. His life of deep prayer and enduring loyalty and commitment to the Church, the hallmark of a dweller, was seamlessly integrated into the action, such as in the reunion movement and engaging those who challenged and opposed the Church, such as Bishop Roccos. The spiritual path he explored and experienced has unique characteristics which did not lead him away from the Church but strengthened his visionary engagement within and outside the boundaries of the Church. Second, Chavara's approach to engaging with those with different views highlights the importance of dialogue and understanding. For instance, even after facing stiff opposition and threats, he

negotiated prudently with Denaha Bar Johan and engaged patiently with Fr Anthony Thondanat. This resonates with Taylor's call for "greater mutual understanding" and "mutual sympathy" between dwellers and seekers within the Church.

Third, forgiveness and compassion are central to Chavara's pastoral approach. He forgave Mr Mathan Manjooran, who took him to court and even offered support to Bishop Roccos during his departure, demonstrating his compassionate and forgiving nature. Notably, he provided accommodation and spiritual guidance to Fr Anthony Thondanat, which eventually resulted in his reinstatement after the latter's return from joining the opposing faction during the Roccos schism, highlighting his commitment to pastoral care for those who have strayed from the Church. Fourth, Chavara advocated for social justice and inclusivity beyond a traditional dweller paradigm. This is evident in his efforts to establish schools open to all castes and religions, as well as his initiatives for women's empowerment through education and the founding of convents. His actions echo the call for a people-oriented vision that Taylor associates with "seeking" spirituality.

Finally, Chavara underscores the need to cultivate visionary leaders who are rooted in the Church and open to the needs of the faithful. The key role he played in founding religious congregations for men and women and establishing seminaries recognises the need for spiritually formed, academically informed, and socially sensitive leaders, including women. He also led the reform of liturgical texts, established printing presses for broader reach, and showed concern for the poor and downtrodden. This approach stands in contrast to a spiritually and socially insensitive authority, which leads to the alienation of seekers from the Church.

Chavara's life and mission offer insights that enable the Church to meaningfully respond to challenges and explore opportunities presented by dwellers and seekers. By embracing the Chavara model of a "both/and" approach, fostering dialogue, emphasising forgiveness, advocating social justice, and cultivating visionary leadership, the Church can foster a vibrant and inclusive community of faithful.

PASTORAL PROPHETISM OF CHAVARA
Revisiting the Visiting Roccos

Benny Thettayil CMI

1. Introduction

The story is of an ecclesial crisis of 1861-1862 that would have led to a further division in the Church of Malabar and of the intervention of Chavara along with his religious community, who successfully averted the crisis. Kochumuttom refers to it as "an open rebellion" in the Malabar Church of Kerala.[1]

On 9 May 1861, Thomas Roccos, a Chaldean bishop from Baghdad arrived in Kochi without authorization from the Holy Father. Although the Church in Kerala had been spiritually accompanied by the Chaldean Church, after the arrival of the European missionaries, the Holy See had clearly instructed the Chaldean Patriarchs not to interfere with the affairs of the Church in Kerala. However, dissatisfied with the ecclesiastical leadership given by the European missionaries, some of clergy wrote to the Church in Chaldea requesting the Patriarch to intervene. Joseph VI Audo, Patriarch of the Chaldean Church, consecrated Roccos, and sent him to Kerala. This move of the Patriarch was in response, on the one hand, to the repeated petitions that reached his office from Kerala requesting him for a bishop, and on the other hand, under the pressure from some of his own clergy in Bagdad who kept insisting to bank on their prerogative over the Church in Malabar. At any rate, Roccos had clear instructions from the Patriarch not to stay on in Kerala. Furthermore, he was directed not to get involved in any aspect of the administration

1 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara* (TSSC 1), Bangalore: Dharmaram, 2017, 25.

of the Church but only to enquire about matters in Kerala and leave.

The concern for the Church in Kerala that had been spiritually animated by his predecessors, had moved the Patriarch to consecrate Roccos a bishop. It is the same concern that made Roccos to set sail for the coasts of Kerala, with neither an intention of overstay nor involvement in ecclesiastical administration. As Roccos landed in Kochi, in all fairness, the Church in Kerala gave him the honour of a visiting bishop of their own tradition.

However, the clergy who used to write to the Patriarch requesting for an episcopal leadership from the Chaldean Church, misguided the people regarding the real identity of Roccos and purpose of his visit. Archbishop Bernardine Baccinelli, the vicar apostolic of Varapuzha, sensing the possible confusion that the visiting prelate can cause in the Church in Malabar cautioned the clergy and faithful about the manner in which they would receive him. However, his warning fell on deaf ears. The disgruntled leaders instigated the people and out of their enthusiasm for a bishop of their own Rite, they welcomed him wholeheartedly and with open arms.

Although Roccos had landed with the best of intentions to accomplish the mission entrusted to him by the Patriarch, the welcome that he received as he landed, the desire of the Church as a whole for a bishop from its own tradition, and the overwhelming support of the clergy and the laity that he found, clouded his mind and summarily he chose to discard the instruction of the Patriarch who had sent him. He began to assume the episcopal and administrational powers that were not invested in him.

The incident caused much confusion and stress in the Church in Malabar. At least temporarily, the event divided the Church

into two, both the parties claiming legitimacy for their stances. The baffled faithful of the parishes followed the clergy who had a sway on them. The legitimate authorities were vilified for their ecclesial stance and the followers of Roccos sympathised with him and the cause as it seemed to them as legitimate. Communication with Rome was time-consuming and a response from the Holy See would take months coming. The narrative had become so vitiated that the archbishop and his pleas fell on deaf ears and ecclesial credibility struck rock bottom.

As grace would have it, in these stressful times, Kuriakose Elias Chavara emerged as a beacon light. The people had held him in high honour and his stance on the matter became crucial in finding a solution to the divisive ecclesiastical issue. Despite the various kinds of lures placed before Chavara by Roccos and the clerical group that backed him along with the majority of the laity of the St Thomas Church in Malabar Chavara resisted the move. Vested with the new authority that was given to him, as the Vicar General of the St Thomas Church in Malabar, and with the help of the religious community founded by himself along with his companions, not only did Chavara successfully face, navigate and manage to avert the ecclesial and pastoral crisis that was presented by Roccos but also he saw to it that the visiting prelate set sail bound for Bagdad honourably.

Ecclesial confusions of various magnitudes have rocked the Church from time to time. The hypothetical reflection that we make as we revisit the above-narrated Roccos episode is what if Chavara had joined hands with Roccos? What if Chavara had sailed with the wind, taking advantage of the favourable circumstances and moved forward, basking in the glory that was given to him on a platter?

In the following reflection, we look at the *would-have-been* from various angles. How the Church would have looked

without the intervention of Chavara and his confreres, how would the religious congregation that Chavara founded would have looked if he had the episcopal authority to call the shots, would he have been favoured and backed by the people, and how would he have personally benefitted from such a move. In the following lines, we project the hypothetical picture of the Church in Kerala from the ecclesial, personal and monastic perspectives.

2. The Ecclesial Probability

From the historical perspective, it is a foregone conclusion that, had not Chavara or someone of his stature not stepped in, either the whole St Thomas Church or a large majority of the Church would have followed Roccos. When we are considering the ecclesial probability, we reflect on, first of all, why did Roccos find such an overwhelming support in the Syrian Church in Kerala? Secondly, what would have been the result of such a movement under the leadership of Roccos from the ecclesiastical point of view?

2.1. The Auto Cephalous Spirit

Every ecclesial tradition is sentimentally attached to the ways of their ancestors and even for legitimate reasons, it is very hard to break the age-old practice of an ecclesial community. The St Thomas Christians of Malabar were not any different. They still cherished their erstwhile practice of receiving East-Syrian bishops from Babylon. According to M. Mundadan, "This tradition [of Babylonian leadership] ended centuries early, and the Holy See directly appointed bishops for the St Thomas Christians. Yet the priests and people in Kerala could not easily understand that the right of the Patriarch to send bishops had ceased to exist. This was because they were blinded by their passionate attachment

to Mesopotamia."[2] Despite the fact that the Holy See had altered the system, either because they did not know about it or because they did not agree with it, the people as a whole had not taken the change to their hearts.

A part of the Church in Malabar was so determined to keep the missionary leadership out of their Church that they would have any bishop to govern them provided that he was from the eastern tradition. As Mundadan notes, they were so desirous of a Syrian Bishop that some of them even approached the Nestorian Patriarch Simon XVII Abraham for the purpose. Having sensed the move, the Catholic Patriarch Joseph VI Audo warned the dissident Fr Thondanatt, the leader of the movement, and his followers against it.[3]

With these sentiments of discontentment brewing in the hearts of many of the clergy and faithful, it was natural that they would rebel against a system that was imposed upon them and would fall back to the older ways that they were used to. Roccos was the accident waiting to happen. Even Roccos was convinced of the fact that, after all, it was at the request of the Church in Malabar that he had come. Hence, Roccos wrote to Chavara at

2 M. Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bangalore: Dharmaram, 2020, 194-195.

3 Mundadan, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 191. Antony Thondanatt associated himself closely with Antony Kudakkachira who was at the forefront of the movement demanding for a Chaldean prelate. Kudakkachira travelled to Babel twice and while on his second visit, he passed away. Thondanatt travelled with Kudakkachira to Babel for the purpose and continued to live there spearheading the cause. See Mundadan, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 188. He got himself consecrated by the Nestorian Patriarch Simon Reuben XVIII in Kurdistan and returned to Kerala as Archbishop Abdisho. Finding no following, he reformed and was reinstated to the Catholic Church. See Kochumuttom, *Spirituality*, 66.

his arrival: "We wish to inform you that in response to your desire and petitions, we came to Kochi on 9 May."[4] To a large part of the Catholics in Malabar, Roccos was the answer to their prayers to God and petitions to Babylon.

2.2. The Brewing Ecclesial Discontent

The ecclesial harmony existing in Malabar between the European missionaries and St Thomas Christians was far from ideal. According to T. Kochumuttom, the Church in Malabar was "miserably fed up and dissatisfied with the Varapuzha administration and the European missionaries at large who had utterly failed to understand and respect their legitimate requests and feelings. Therefore, they refused to believe the vicar apostolic when he said that Bishop Roccos had come without the Pope's permission. Instead, they blindly mistook the intruder for their lawful hierarch and declared allegiance to him."[5] Roccos or not, anyone from Chaldea would have found a following among the St Thomas Christians who, in their ecclesial allegiance to Babylon were eager to be ruled by those who belonged to the Eastern tradition.

Roccos found a very large following among the Christians in Malabar. The viability of a possible independent Church or a Church that is aligned to any eastern ecclesial tradition is exemplified by the aftermath of the Synod of Diampur. As Mundadan notes, the people were so blind and enthusiastic that even though the Protestant newspaper from Kottayam clearly said that the whole fiasco was happening without the permission of the Pope, they would not listen![6]

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4 Mundadan, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 204.

5 Kochumuttom, *Spirituality*, 26.

6 Mundadan, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 195.

In the backdrop of the popular expectation of an eastern bishop, the clergy who backed Roccos were so successful that the people considered Roccos as their bishop and declared allegiance to him. Roccos too, overwhelmed and encouraged by the unexpected support of both the clergy and the people, started exercising jurisdictional power over them and began performing episcopal ministries among them. Very soon, the Syrian parishes one after another went to his side. Out of the total 154 parishes, 86 of them fully and 30 of them partially followed him![7] The reigning bishop and the sitting ecclesiastical administration miserably failed to contain the situation. Bishop Baccinelli sent out a formula of faith to the faithful demanding an oath. These were carried to the parishes by a number of priests, both diocesan and religious. As Mundadan would note, only a minority swore by the formula and many ignored it and others criticized it.[8] The movement in favour of the visiting bishop had become so popular and both the clergy and the laity gave it such support that "the vicar apostolic and the missionaries could only helplessly watch the situation going out of hand and leading to a disastrous schism."[9]

2.3. The Landslide Support to Roccos

As mentioned above, out of the total 154 parishes, 86 of them fully and 30 of them partially had followed Roccos.[10] It is for

7 Kochumuttom, *Spirituality*, 26.

8 Mundadan, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 195.

9 Kochumuttom, *Spirituality*, 26.

10 Mundadan, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 214-215. However, according to Mundadan, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 196, the letter that Baccinelli sent to Rome makes the number very insignificant: "the report that the Vicar Apostolic had sent to Rome, saying that only the deceased Fr Kudakkachira and a few churches that were insignificant, were with the new movement."

this reason that in utter helplessness they desperately attempted to rope in the support of Chavara. The Roccosian group, along with Bishop Roccos also attempted in several ways to wins over Fr Chavara to their side, even by offering him episcopacy. He did not succumb to any such temptations. According to Kochumuttom, had he accepted their offer, no doubt, the whole Church would have followed him, because he enjoyed among all the people, great esteem, respect and authority.[11] With so many behind them, the rest would have jumped on the band wagon. With a slight encouragement of the remaining clergy under the leadership of Chavara, they would have joined the group. If the majority had their way, perhaps the entire Saint Thomas Church would have followed Roccos. Perhaps, there would have been no division in the Church of Malabar, but certainly, there would have been a separate Church severed from the Holy See.

As already noted, the St Thomas Christians in Malabar "were miserably fed up and dissatisfied with the Varapuzha administration and the European missionaries at large who had utterly failed to understand and respect their legitimate requests and feelings."[12] Both the clergy and the laity had their grievances. In the 1850s, as part of his reform, Baccinelli, the Vicar Apostolic closed about 20 Malpan seminaries. In this way, many of the Malpans were demoted, and later, they became ardent adherents of Roccos and the party that supported him.[13]

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11 Kochumuttom, *Spirituality*, 27-28.

12 Kochumuttom, *Spirituality*, 24-25.

13 Mundadan, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 17. Mundadan, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 196-197 refers to a letter of Antony Thondanatt who expresses his strong feelings against the missionary bishops in the Church of Malabar. He openly opined that they "were all to be expelled either by law or by force." The passion for a Chaldean bishop was not quenched at the departure of Roccos. Thondanatt

The backing that Roccos received was also because of the identification that the St Thomas Church in Malabar made with those bishops who came from Chaldea. That is the reason, Malpan Aype, who was already won over by the Roccosian party, when he came to meet Chavara, the Prior at the Monastery at Mannanam, persuaded the Prior to join in. When the Prior questioned him rearding the authenticity of the letters from Bagdad that he was referring to, oscillating between apology and persuasion, Aype asked the Prior: "*if the new bishop was not, after all, one of us*? They felt that it was not proper to leave him among the strangers in Kochi and so they had brought him to Thaikkattussery."[14] One of the underlying reasons that guided the agitators is the assumption that the missionaries were foreign imposters and the Chaldeans are *us*.[15]

As far as the Christians in Malabar were concerned, a divorce of the Church from the European ecclesiastical overloads would have been a very welcome move. And this is why the faithful in general welcomed Roccos despite the repeated warnings from the vicar apostolic. In fact, Baccinelli himself "admits the difficulties he had long been experiencing in the administration of the churches in Kerala, and then regrets that his efforts so far

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"promised the Roccosians that he would go to Mosul and bring another bishop. He was given the expenses for the travel." It was along with Roccos that he set sail for his search for a new bishop. See Mundadan, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 214-215.

14 Mundadan, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 203, (italics mine).

15 This view of the Roccosian party is erroneous in the light of the permission that Baccinelli granted not only Chavara, but also all the Malpans and the vicars to go and meet Roccos. "His Grace even expressed his willingness to allow us to submit to him if we found that he had orders from the Holy See or Propaganda authorizing him to rule over us." See Mundadan, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 205.

have not produced the desired spiritual fruits among the priests and laity."[16] The dissatisfaction that was brewing among the laity and the clergy is the primary reason for the massive following that Roccos found.

2.4. The Reunification of the Separated Churches

Chavara was deeply concerned about the tragic division within his Syrian Church of Kerala that separated the Jacobites from the Catholics in the mid-seventeenth century. This misfortune had come about because of the highhanded dealings of the Portuguese missionaries in Kerala. Chavara would do anything legitimate to bring about the reunion of the separated brethren. According to Kochumuttom, the Jacobites also, ever since their separation, were by and large eager to be reunited with the Catholic Church. They insisted that they should be permitted to retain their customs and practices, and that their Episcopal dignity should be recognized so as to maintain their identity and autonomy. The contemporary Carmelite missionaries were opposed to these conditions. However, within the ecclesial circumscription, Chavara continued to encourage all efforts for the reunion of all the separated brethren.[17]

A prelate from Chaldea would have in all probability, united the separated Churches in Malabar. Denha bar Jona, who came to Kerala to collect alms, easily impressed the people. Several of the Malpans followed him. He won over the Jacobite priests. When he failed to make Chavara visit him, he made a personal visit to Mannanam and met Chavara. "The Catholics among them said that here was one fit to be their prelate."[18] Describing the

16 Kochumuttom, *Spirituality*, 26.

17 Kochumuttom, *Spirituality*, 30.

18 Mundadan, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 184-185.

episode of Denha bar Jona, Chavara speaks of a very resourceful Southist Jacobite priest who supported Denha. On account of the common lineage, the Chaldean leadership would have worked as a unifying point among the several eastern churches in Kerala. However, according to Mundadan, the "Jacobites jibed at them (Catholics) for going on submitting to the Latins and the Italians, instead of getting from Babel some Syrian prelates of *their own*."[19] If it was the highhandedness of the European missionaries that caused the division of the Church in Malabar after the Synod at Diamper, logically, distancing from the missionaries would have brought about the reunification and vindication of the Synod of Diamper and the healing of the fissure created by the Coonan cross oath.

As mentioned above, the reunification of the separated Churches was the desire of Chavara all the way. His interest in this regard is expressed also in his letter to Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda in 1869. He informs the Cardinal that a ritual Bishop for the Syrian Catholics in Kerala would expedite the reunion of the Jacobites. He wrote: "This would be very opportune and useful. There are also many non-Catholics in our midst who are our own kith and kin now known as Jacobites. The above solution will help them renounce the schism and return to the unity of the Catholic fold."[20] With this desire prodding Chavara and the massive support that he enjoyed in the Church, the reunification of the churches in Kerala would have been a *fait acompli*.

2.5. A New Ecclesial Entity

If Roccos had been consecrated bishop despite the explicit disapproval of the Holy See, the consecration was to be

19 Mundadan, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 184-185 (italics mine).

20 Mundadan, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 179-180.

considered a defiance on the part of the Patriarch.[21] Furthermore, if Roccos began to exercise the episcopal powers in the Church of Malabar when he had been granted none of it, he was evidently an imposter. If Roccos was received by the Church in Kerala in spite of the clear instruction of Baccinelli, the reigning bishop, the move was in defiance. Such an explicit defiance of the Holy See by any Church or by a group in the Church led by the clergy, would lead to cessation in the Church.

If Chavara had been worldly wise, and if he backed the movement that had gathered momentum in the St Thomas Church, as Baccinelli wrote to the Holy See, the entire St Thomas Church would have followed Chavara and the schism would have been a foregone conclusion. Baccinelli pointed out in his letter to the Propaganda Congregation dated 15 June 1861, referring to the role of Chavara in the whole fiasco: "Had he accepted their offer, no doubt, the whole Church would have followed him, because he enjoyed among all the people great esteem, respect and authority."[22] This kind of an adulation from the reigning bishop indicates the calibre of Chavara and the role that he played in alleviating the confusion. The same esteem that he had among the hierarchy and the people could be used to muster support and turn the whole affair in his favour, resulting in the whole of the Syrian community marching under his banner.

In that event, since the whole affair was an affront to the Holy See, there would have been a cessation resulting in the

21 Mundadan, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 193-194, refers to the letter of Henry Amanton, the Delegate Apostolic, sent to Baccinelli, probably prior to the consecration of Roccos, referring to the "conspiracy being hatched by the Patriarch and the bishops."

22 Kochumuttom, *Spirituality*, 27-28.

birth of another Church, certainly separated from Rome, and probably reunited with all those factions that were separated in the aftermath of the Synod of Diamper.

3. The Personal Probability

Was Chavara naïve in refraining from backing Roccos, Denha, Kudakkachira, Thondanatt and his own priests who were prominent in the community who relentlessly tried to make the Chaldean ecclesial leadership available to the Syrians in Kerala? By no means. He was as desirous as they were for a separate episcopal leadership for the Syrian Christians.

In 1869, Chavara wrote to the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda Congregation informing him that things had settled after the episode of the intruding Bishop Roccos and that there was perfect peace. However, he cautions that the peace would not last as demands for a ritual bishop would continue. Hence, he suggests that the vicariate of verapoly be ritually divided into two, each with its own ordinary – one for the Latins and the other for the Catholic Saint Thomas Christians.[23] This kind of a vision for the Church notwithstanding, if he did not back the dissidents, his move is to be considered purpose-driven.

In the following discussion, we focus on the personal credentials of Chavara that would make him the most favourable of the candidates for the office in the given ecclesial pool.

3.1. Favoured by the People

In the wake of the Roccos episode, several Malpans, influential and rich clergy, wealthy and illustrious laity followed the bishop from Bagdad. Many came to receive him at Kochi when he arrived. Eventually, they tried to lure Chavara and his

23 Mundadan, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 163.

religious community to his side. Chavara and his community was a formidable force at the time. "In his capacity of a religious superior, and religious leader wielding great spiritual authority over the priests and people and later also in the official capacity of the Vicar General of the Vicariate of Verapoly,"[24] Chavara wielded great power over the people. He was a popular religious leader.

3.2. Favoured by the Local Clergy

All the clergy, both those who backed Roccos and those who did not back him, held Chavara in high esteem. Several of them, the influential clergy were students of Chavara. While the Roccosian party was swelling and the movement was gathering momentum, the party was able to convince and win over Malpan Kattakkayam Aype of Pala, a "rich and very influential" priest who was a former student of Chavara. The party leading the agitation planned to take Aype to Kochi to meet Roccos. Although he had agreed with the party that he would go along with them, he wanted first to check with Chavara. He insisted that before proceeding to Kochi, "they might go to Mannanam and get the opinion of Prior Chavara."[25] He said: "Among us, Father Kuriakose Chavara Prior of Mannanam is an important person. Before we take any action in this matter, we should go and meet him and act according to his opinion."[26]

The ecclesiastical stature of Chavara was such that there was only one among the Syrian clergy to be pointed out by name when the dissident Roccosian party were considering a native

24 Mundadan, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 196.

25 Mundadan, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 201.

26 Varkey Parappuram, *Chronicle* (Manuscripts in Malayalam, available in the Archives of St Joseph Monastery), Mannanam, 678 f.

Syrian Christian for the episcopate. This is why when Thondanatt instigated the people, he had only Chavara's name to pinpoint. He notes: "if we nominate those among us who deserve the episcopal dignity, for example, Rev. Fr Chavara and others, they have the faculty to consecrate them in Kerala."[27]

Chavara, the Prior of the monastery, and the ministries that were done in the monastery and the general pastoral care given by the members of his monastery were cherished by the church leaders. With their favour, Chavara could, had he so desired, swing the fate in one way or another and there would have been enough backing for the move from the part of the clergy.

3.3. Favoured by the Babylonian Church

There were powerful people in Bagdad who wanted Roccos and his movement to succeed. According to Mundadan, there was a group of lay leaders in Bagdad called "Kokils who were very strong-willed persons. When they asserted their will, the patriarch and bishops had to yield to their pressure. They became champions of the cause of Thondanatt and party [who were strongly advocating for a native bishop]. That made the patriarch and bishops helpless."[28]

Thondanatt, who was living in Bagdad, wrote to his confidantes in Kerala encouraging them and expressing his "strong feelings against Latin superiors who were all to be expelled either by law or by force. He said that there was an instruction from Rome to the Patriarch that no one from Kerala should be consecrated bishop."[29] Should Chavara be inclined to go along with the Roccosian party, the Roccosians in Malabar

27 Mundadan, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 197.

28 Mundadan, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 193.

29 Mundadan, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 196-197.

and the influencers like Thondanatt in Bagdad together could muster the backing of the Chaldean Church in favour of Chavara.

3.4. Favoured by the Reigning Archbishop

The insightful Apostolic Delegate, Bishop Baccinelli was quick to perceive that the only way to find a solution for this messy situation brought about the appearance of Roccos was to give a free hand to the one who was trusted by both the parties and who was held in esteem by all. The only person that fit that description was Chavara whom the archbishop made the Vicar General for the Syrians in his vicariate immediately.[30] Furthermore, Baccinelli wrote to Rome regarding the rationale of the step that he took: "Though the rebel group and the intruder bishop attempted by several ways to win over Fr Chavara to their side, even by offering him episcopacy, he did not succumb to any such temptations. Had he accepted their offer, no doubt, the whole Church would have followed him, because he enjoyed among all the people great esteem, respect and authority."[31] Baccinelli trusted Chavara could find a solution to the issue.

Chavara was the only way out of this sticky situation. Hence, Baccinelli wrote to Rome picturing Chavara in the most glowing terms: "In these difficult and critical times, with the consent of my councillors, I have constituted as my vicar general the senior most among the Tertiaries, the Prior of the principal monastery, and the head of the entire Congregation, a man truly Christian, virtuous, very prudent, well-versed in Sacred Scripture, expert in Syriac language, who in the present circumstances has proved

30 Kochumuttom, *Spirituality*, 27.

31 Kochumuttom, *Spirituality*, 27-28.

by facts most attached to the Catholic religion, and to the Holy See."[32]

Although the archbishop proposes Chavara's name for episcopacy, yet, he expresses a reservation regarding the lack of the necessary perception of the proposed office of bishop as a drawback in Chavara. However, the archbishop "reassures that with the support of the vicar apostolic and missionaries, he will reap more fruits than the Chaldeans because he is a good, prudent, and obedient person and a captivating preacher."[33] So far, a realistic picture of Chavara is presented by the archbishop as he considers Chavara for the office. However, once this crisis was overcome, as will be seen below, the subsequent proposals for him to be given the office will be resisted for various lame reasons.

Baccinelli's trust in Chavara was such that he further wrote to the Prefect of the Propaganda Congregation in the context of the ruckus that arose at the wake of the arrival of Roccos making an unprecedented proposal: "Now I have an idea and I request Your Eminence to give serious consideration to it. In case the dignity of vicar general alone will not be enough to keep away the people from the intruder and from the Chaldean patriarch, will it not be better to consecrate the said prior as coadjutor bishop for the Syrians?"[34] Thus far, a proposal of this sort had come only from people like Kudakkachira and Thondanatt. However, the state of affairs was so desperate that the proposal began to appear from the most unlikely places.[35]

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32 Kochumuttom, Spirituality, 27-28.

33 Mundadan, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 228.

34 Kochumuttom, *Spirituality*, 27-28.

35 See Mundadan, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 197, for the appreciation of Thondanatt for Chavara.

However, as Kochumuttom notes, after the Roccos event, when there was an enquiry from Rome regarding the possibility of the Prior's consecration as bishop, the same archbishop and the missionaries strongly objected to it.[36] Fr Marceline wrote:

> Where do you find one who has the qualities necessary for a bishop? There are in the monasteries many good, upright priests. But where is the prudence, where the courage, where the knowledge and other qualities required of a Bishop? Of course, he does not make any clear mention of Chavara. Fr Leopold not only agrees with Marceline's position in its entirety but also makes negative remarks about Chavara's nomination as bishop, namely, that he lacks knowledge of moral theology and experience in matters of administration, being already 63 years old… Vicar Apostolic Baccinelli sent to Rome his reply dated 24 September 1865.[37]

36 Kochumuttom, *Spirituality*, 75.

37 There is a marked contrast between the letter of Baccinelli to Chavara at his appointment as the Vicar General, which is reflected in his letter to Propaganda Congregation at the peak of the Roccosian agitation and the letter that he wrote to the same Congregation after the Roccos episode. On the one hand, to Chavara he wrote: "I am convinced that you have the fortitude, ability and the virtues necessary to carry out this office. Hence, besides the authority and privileges, which the common law acknowledges, I grant you all those privileges, which I am entitled to impart in accordance to my patent letters." See *Positio super Introductione Cause et super Virtutibus ex Officio Concinnata*, Vatican: 1877: 216f. Furthermore, on 15 June 1861, in his letter to the Propaganda Congregation, he spoke to them of Chavara in glowing terms: "I have constituted as my vicar general the seniormost among the Tertiaries, the Prior of the principal monastery, and the head of the entire congregation, a man truly Christian, virtuous, very prudent, well-versed in Sacred Scripture, expert in Syriac language, who in the present circumstances has proved by facts most attached to the Catholic

In the letter, Baccinelli still holds that the Prior is a good man and the best among the Syrian priests, but endorses Leopold's views that "he had little knowledge of moral theology and experience in administration, and was too old."[38] These deliberations and the reasons placed against the appointment of Chavara are veiled. The unveiled and real reason for this opposition is related by Msgr Agliardi, the first Delegate Apostolic of India, which points to the ambition of the missionaries and the possibility of their appointment to the episcopacy being taken away.[39] And by the time Rome really moved and decided to act on the first proposal of Baccinelli in a positive manner, Chavara was no more.[40]

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religion, and to the Holy See." See Kochumuttom, *Spirituality*, 27. On the other hand, on a later occasion, influenced by Leopold and others and endorsing their views on Chavara, Baccinelli wrote to Rome observing that Chavara had little knowledge of moral theology and experience in administration, and was too old. See Mundadan, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 230. The missionaries had evidently forgotten about the adulation that Chavara received from the Pope: "Holy Father Pope Pius IX, gloriously reigning, on hearing about the stability of Chavara's faith and about his zeal for saving the Christians from schism, wrote to him a letter of high praise and satisfaction." See Leopold Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, L. Vithuvattical, Mannanam: 2003, 11. The possible reason for this U-turn that the missionaries made in their opinion on Chavara could be gleaned from the report that Baccinelli sent to Rome on 5 October 1865 on the revolt of the Latin Christians against Fr Leopold and Philip OCD. An accusation was levelled against Leopold that he was being partial towards the native Church. See Mundadan, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 313.

38 See Mundadan, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 230.

39 See Mundadan, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 235-236.

40 See Mundadan, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 236.

4. The Monastic Probability

After the passing of the senior founders of the religious congregation, the weight and responsibility of leadership fell on the shoulders of Chavara. Right from the foundation, the project experienced one jolt after another. Although some of these setbacks could be seen as the teething troubles of a young religious community, yet many of them could have been averted with proper ecclesiastical authority vested in the hands of Chavara. Indeed, he was at the helm of affairs but was always at the receiving end as terms regarding the religious community were dictated by the missionaries. Viewed from the hindsight, and certainly Chavara would, in his ridiculously scrupulous trust in the Providence, see the hand of God directing the destinies of the community even in the most objectionable decisions hurled at him and the community regarding the most fundamental tenets of the new religious community.

The name of the new religious congregation, the rule that was given to the community, the tradition that the members of the religious community were goaded into, and the religious ideal that they wanted to follow[41] were diametrically opposed to the mind of the members of the community. These were often imposed upon them against their will.

There were avoidable transfers that were given to the first members of the community as a result of which, the progress of the work on the first monastery was hampered.[42] Half of the

41 Kochumuttom, *Spirituality*, 34 notes: "… the ministry of preaching that had been an integral part of the charism of the new religious community assumes importance. They had made their own the Dominican ideal of 'preaching what one contemplates'.

42 There were some parishes that were opposed to the idea of a monastery that was coming up. At their instigation, Archbishop Francis Xavier, the new Vicar Apostolic, transferred Chavara

members of the community left because the newly given rule to the young community was too strict, proper to the seasoned monks in the European monasteries and was not in any way suitable for the novices who had just begun their life in the community.[43] Further on, several prominent members of the community were dismissed on account of their demand for a native bishop, which is the subject matter of our present reflection.

The canonical approval for the new religious congregation was delayed for about 25 years by the successive missionary bishops for no apparent reason. "During the long period of about 25 years between 1831 and 1855, the Fathers made repeated requests to the prelates one after another for the congregation's canonical approval, which however, was indefinitely delayed for no apparent reason."[44]

Perpetuation of one's own tradition, imposition of the tradition on to the cultures that one sets out to evangelize, the fear of becoming redundant when the indigenous population is empowered, the fear of the possibility of dwindled opportunities when the candidacy base for leadership is expanded, and several more of such xenophobic reservations are seen worldwide. It is for this reason, some parishes and their clerical leaders did not want the foundation of the monastery to happen and poisoned the ears of Archbishop Francis Xavier who promptly executed measures to impede the progress of the foundation.

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and Porukara. "These transfers, for all practical purposes were punishments that the Fathers did not deserve and therefore unjust! Moreover, their absence from Mannanam virtually meant that the construction of the monastery had to be stopped, which was deeply painful." See Kochumuttom, *Spirituality*, 72.

43 Kochumuttom, *Spirituality*, 198.

44 Kochumuttom, *Spirituality*, 197.

Although it is futile to shed tears over the spilt milk, an evaluative retrospection would be beneficial. Had Chavara been in a position to call the shots, the congregation that he co-founded would have been more autonomous in matters of choosing the name, the rule of life, choosing the religious tradition and spirituality. There would have been ecclesial backing to bolster the vocations to the community, and as a result, foundation of numerous monasteries in the South.

5. The Prophetic Fortitude

In the context of the ambitious rat race for positions of authority in all walks of life, the increasing mediocrity in leadership, and the resultant ecclesial confusion that Churches are sucked into in various parts of the world, one question lingers for our concluding reflection: Why did Chavara desist the move from the Roccosian group that offered him the episcopacy knowing full well that the remaining part of the ecclesial community, which was in the minority could be influenced by the Chavara so that they could have a landslide support? As the Archbishop had acknowledged regarding his calibre in his letter to Rome that the whole Church would have followed him because he enjoyed among all the people great esteem, respect and authority. This possibility notwithstanding, why would he refrain from unfurling his sail to the favourable wind when it blew, knowing full well that the aspirations of the entire Church – separated and united – would be fulfilled with a native bishop and episodes like Denha would not be repeated? Our reflections on these questions follow:

5.1. The Scrupulous Allegiance to the Church

Throughout his life, even in matters that were seemingly insignificant, Chavara was obedient and docile to the Superiors. Even when justice was denied to him by the authorities in matters that were both personal and ecclesial, and when others wanted

to rebel for the right reasons, he would make them look at the issue in a positive perspective.

When Roccos arrived and his supporters wanted Chavara to visit Roccos, he would only go to him with the explicit permission of the Vicar Apostolic. Chavara conducted himself when he was allowed to visit Roccos at Thaikkattussery. He informed the Roccosian party that he would not kiss the episcopal ring of Roccos because that ring was the sign of a consecration made without the approval of the Church.[45] He would not make a move that was contrary to the thinking of the Church.

Loyalty and obedience were the hallmarks of Chavara's pastoral life. In the context of Chavara's involvement in the defence of the unity of the community necessitated by the visit of Roccos, Kocumuttom notes: "But he remained firm in his commitment to the Mother Church and loyal to the legitimate authority. His only concern was the unity of the Catholic Church and obedience to the lawful superiors."[46]

For Chavara obedience to *legitimate* superiors was one of the supreme values. Roccos had come to Kerala against the order of the Pope and he had refused to submit to Baccinelli who was the *legitimate* local ordinary. In Chavara's ecclesial vision, the disobedience exposed both those who disobeyed and those who were persuaded to follow him to the danger of eternal damnation. Hence, Chavara, as a conscientious pastor, thought that he was duty-bound to guide them in the right direction.

5.2. The Unmitigated Humility

Although Mundadan does not speak about anyone from the Roccosian party explicitly asking Chavara to become their

45 Mundadan, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 154.

46 Kochumuttom, *Spirituality*, 28-29.

bishop, the response of Chavara to Deacon Kunnan Mekkattil who carried the letter of Thondanatt to Chavara, asking for his allegiance, indicates that he had been given an offer of episcopacy. In the private meeting that they had, Chavara told Kunnan: "My dear child, my desire is not to be made a bishop, but to save my soul."[47]

As we have seen in detail, the Church would have been different in the aftermath of the Roccosian visit, and it was largely on account of the efforts of Chavara and his confreres that the danger of secession was averted. However, he would not make a big deal of it. In his humility, he would rather downplay it calling it a "religious quarrel" (*veda-kalãpam*) and a "matter of misery" *(đuritam),* and it was so, indeed.[48] He would not gloat in the glory of the commendation that he received in a letter from Pope Pius IX either.

In contrast to Denha, Kudakkachira and Thondanatt who had an axe to grind as they spearheaded the movement for a native bishop and two of them succeeded in the attempt with dismal consequences, Chavara was humble enough to acknowledge his own limitations and unworthiness. Moreover, when Baccinelli wrote to Rome recommending Chavara as the coadjutor bishop, he promptly added a note referring to his humility: "Chavara having made a simple vow of humility, would not accept the position and dignity of a Bishop unless commanded under obedience."[49] Baccinelli knew Chavara inside out.

5.3. The Realism of Chavara

Chavara had a realistic assessment of the structure of the Church and the various components that the Church was constituted of.

47 See Mundadan, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 197.

48 Kochumuttom, *Spirituality*, 29.

49 Mundadan, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 228.

Hence, he had a clear vision of the ecclesial leadership that would be beneficial for the Church in Malabar. First of all, he knew that in comparison to the members of the missionary community from Europe, the members of the Church in Malabar were not ready to assume an ecclesiastical leadership role.[50] Secondly, he did not consider any Chaldean fit enough to be a bishop in the Church in Malabar. He made a contrast between the Europeans and the Chaldeans and it was sharp: "When we consider the frail faith of the Babylonians, their greed for money and the simonies practised among them on the one side, and on the other, the power of endurance, generosity, devotion the readiness to work for the glory of God and the other virtues we have seen among the missionaries, I think no one with wisdom and prudence would opt for a Babylonian to be appointed to rule over us."[51] In his consideration for ecclesial leadership, he categorically and in clear terms, ruled out the Chaldeans.

Thirdly, there were the European missionaries who were in office in his time. He assessed that the current leadership was not appreciated by the Church as a whole. Despite the great reverence he had for the present group of missionaries, when Chavara was considering candidates for episcopate, his choice for the future was not to replace the Europeans, but to tap their potential for the Church. He noted his opinion on the Chaldeans:

> …the only means of weaning the Malayalees from the people of Babylon is… to bring… a few missionaries from Europe, people who are prepared to study the Syrian

50 This must have been the common perception that when Thondanatt looked around for someone native worthy to be pointed out for the office, he had only Chavara to pinpoint by name.

51 Mundadan, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 442.

> language and who are willing to adopt our Syro-Malabar Rite so that they may offer Mass in our language and in our Rite. In due course, along with the petitions from the churches, let us also send a petition to the Holy See to appoint, on the termination of the tenure of our present archbishop, one of these missionaries as our prelate. If we succeed in getting European missionaries in whom are combined the knowledge, devotion, and familiarity with our Syriac language and our Syro-Malabar Rite, there can be no greater blessing possible to our community. And when such missionaries will be appointed as vicars in our parishes, we will get several blessings, our Church will also give rise to saints.[52]

In this suggestion, Chavara had brought together the pastoral acumen of the Europeans and the pastoral need of the Church.

Fourthly, and finally, Chavara would go for a solution according to which each rite would have a bishop. He wrote to Alexander Cardinal Barnabo, Prefect of the Propaganda Congregation: "Hence, Your Eminence, I am placing before you a suggestion which I consider good. It is good to have two bishops here: one for the Latin Church and another for the Syrian Church. Then their longing to have a bishop of their own will cease. Then gradually their relationship with Babylon will end."[53] Mundadan believes that Chavara changed his mind regarding the single head for the entire Church, inspired by Leopold "who stood for a ritual division of the Vicariate of Verapoly with two prelates."[54] As an astute pastor, Chavara assessed the various

52 Mundadan, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 444.

53 Mundadan, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 445.

54 Mundadan, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 444.

groups of pastors in the Church and had formed a clear vision of the leadership.

6. Conclusion

It takes pastoral courage, almost prophetic fortitude to be so self-effacing in the face of ambitious possibilities that are open to you. It is tempting to grab what comes on your way when high offices are served to you on a platter. It sweeps you off your feet as you subtly scheme and manoeuvre knocking a few wagons as you proceed making headway for the office that you have eyed for a long time. It gives you a heady feeling when you feel that it has come within your reach. You are ecstatic when your dreams are fulfilled as everything falls into place and finally, you fall into the office! Soon you realize that the ancient seat had held the weight of giants, and you are too small to fit the seat! It had been tempered in the heat of prophetic austerity and now it proves too hot for your own seat.

The prophetic office itself becomes the acid test demanding from you all that it takes to prove your mettle. The prophet's office demands life from you and if you are prophetic, the seat is your undoing (Mt 23:35). Giving life would mean that you marginalize all that you had in mind when you were doing the scheming to get to the seat. Holding on to your dear life would mean that you make the Israelite prophet repeat the caution that he made all those years ago about the rulers of the house of Jacob and chiefs of the house of Israel: "Its rulers give judgment for a bribe, its priests teach for a price, its prophets give oracles for money; yet they lean upon the LORD and say, 'Surely the Lord is with us! No harm shall come upon us'" **(**Micah 3:11).

The more we are surrounded and guided by the false prophets the more the enemies say to themselves: "We will utterly subdue them." It is when they have burned all the meeting places of God

in the land, we look around along with the psalmist and realize that "We do not see our emblems; there is no longer any prophet, and there is no one among us who knows how long" (Ps 74:8-9).

The story of the prophetic stand that Chavara adopted in those stressful times in the context of a great need stares at the mediocrity of pastoral stand that some of the pastors take and the tepid obedience that we practice in the Church. The analytical perception that he had of the pastoral situation challenges our modern concerns in the Church and the way we address them. The selfless dedication he made for the sake of the ecclesial community confronts the axes that we carry around to grind as the opportunity arises. Chavara was a prophet of a pastor who loved the Church so much that he was able to let go.

PART II

Chavara's Catechetical Initiatives

CHAVARA
A Catechist Par Excellence for All Times

Jacob Marangattu CMI

1. Introduction

Catechesis is a ministry in the Church which can be defined as education in faith. The two poles of this process are education and faith. Therefore, the process of catechesis depends upon what we understand by education and faith. We know that historically both of these concepts and their praxis have undergone much evolution. Accordingly, the process of catechesis, too, has undergone evolution in the understanding of its content and method.

Earlier, education was understood as a one-way process of transmitting knowledge from a teacher to students. It was mainly explanation or narration by the teacher to the students, in which students passively listened to everything the teacher did and everything the teacher said. Students didn't need to be active in the class except listen to what the teacher taught. Later, from the 19th century, the methodology of teaching was improved by incorporating psychological principles of growth of children. A three-step process was introduced into the process of education, such as presentation, explanation and application, so as to make the learning process attractive and more effective. Also space was allowed for the children to learn by 'doing'. The Montessori method in education is one of the fruits of such a development. Still later, the method of teaching underwent drastic change by the adoption of the inductive method in place of the deductive method. Education became more experiential with teachers making use of stories or anecdotes to introduce the lesson as well as interactions

with students. This allowed a kind of freedom from the strict class room settings. It was felt that classes could be taken in particular contexts as necessitated by the nature of the themes under consideration. And in these last decades there has occurred a paradigm shift in the area of education due to the entry of electronic communication media in its process.

In the same way, the concept of faith, too, underwent much evolution and development in history. Earlier, faith was understood as believing in and accepting the divinely revealed truths necessary for the salvation of the soul. These truths were the statements uttered by God or the commands he gave us for our salvation. At a later stage, the Church held that God communicates himself to humanity not only through his words but also his deeds. It meant that faith consisted not only in believing in revealed truths, but also personalizing the signs that God worked in history, or conforming one's life to God's pedagogy in history. At all these levels, the understanding of faith had nothing to do with human experience. Whether one's neighbour was poor, or oppressed, or marginalized didn't matter in the faith practice of the Catholics. Subsequent developments in biblical studies and theology brought in the importance of human experience in the considerations of faith. The task of faith vis-à-vis the dehumanizing situations, such as, poverty, oppression and marginalization was hotly discussed by re-reading the biblical message and revisiting the Church teachings. The liberational interventions of God in history as well as prophets' denunciation of oppressive structures were brought to the focus of faith and Church's ministries were reinterpreted through the angle of liberation. Faith could not be divorced from its task to serve for the integral development of people.

Thus, incorporating the developments that took place in the understanding of education and faith, catechesis, too, underwent historical evolution. In the first centuries of the Christian era, catechesis consisted in orally transmitting prayers, knowledge of sacraments and commandments. At a later stage, catechesis began to be considered the transmission of God's revelation. Learning and keeping to memory these truths, or doctrines, were considered essential for salvation. Catechism books were prepared in order to assure uniformity, clarity and precision of the contents. But still, it was a one-way process of teaching of doctrines to the students. Later, methodological improvements were brought into catechesis as we saw above, by incorporating the psychological principle of learning and getting pupils to be creative using their hands and thus to learn by doing, which in catechetical circles is known as the Munich method.

Still, the content of catechesis remained the same, that is, the doctrines to be believed and memorized for the sake of salvation of souls. It was felt that this kind of learning took away the joy of Christian living from the life of children. Instead, the proclamation and explanation of salvation history as contained in the Bible was found to be ideal for catechesis. Such proclamation of biblical events would not only retain the interest of the children, but also give the entire message God addressed to humanity in history. This new approach that surfaced in the catechetical circles in 1930s in the German speaking areas came to be known as the Kerygmatic approach. Thus catechesis became the proclamation and teaching of the Bible. In all these stages catechesis was making use of the deductive method.

Now, a new problematic situation was hit upon. The proclamation of the salvation history was blind to the actual

life situations of the addressees of catechesis, their hunger, or poverty or marginalised situations. Can catechesis be blind to the sufferings of our fellow brethren? Such reflections brought in the human-centred approach in catechesis, which is also known as the experiential or anthropological approach. It gave way for the inductive method in catechetical teaching that is to say, catechetical considerations should begin from the actual human situations and lead to universal and general applications. This new approach came forcefully in the catechetical circles from 1950s.[1]

Today, catechesis is understood as the sum total of all that these approaches, prevalent in different stages in history, wanted to convey. Catechesis is the process that transmits authentic faith to the baptized people. Faith becomes authentic when it touches the entire human person, his/her body and soul, heart and mind, and the living conditions. Thus the aim of catechesis is to reach the people to maturity of faith life, the stage where faith animates a person's intellectual life, attitudes, relationships and his/her activities. In other words, faith becomes authentic and mature only when it becomes the guiding principle of a person's cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions. Catechesis is considered to be the tool to bring in this development in the life of a person as well as the Christian community.

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1 To learn more about the development of catechetical approaches in history, see, Cyril de Souza, *Catechesis for India Today: An Appraisal of the Catechetical Proposal of D.S. Amalorpavadass,* Bangalore: Khristu Jyoti Publications, 1994, 15-20; Louis Erdozain, "The Evolution of Catechetics: A Survey of Six International Study Weeks in Catechetics," in Michael Warren, ed., *Sourcebook for Modern Catechetics*, Winona, Minnesota: Christian Brothers Publications, 1983, 86-109.

The article explains the catechetical pedagogy Kuriakose Elias Chavara employed in the 19th century for the faith education of the Christian community of Kerala and how his mission sowed the seeds of a renaissance in the Kerala society that was lying deep down in the evils of illiteracy, underdevelopment, and mutual exclusion due to the widespread caste practice.

2. Chavara: A Catechist who Lived ahead of His Time

When we go through the life and mission of Chavara, one amazing factor strikes our minds. He lived in the 19th century when the catechetical praxis was still at the doctrinal level. The Kerygmatic and the anthropological approaches were not even in the minds of the Church Magisterium. It is here that we need to evaluate the contributions Chavara made to the field of catechesis. His focus was on the Kerygmatic as well as anthropological approaches as we shall see below. That means he anticipated the future developments that happened in the catechetical field in the Church. One should say that he was attentive to all the four phases of development of catechesis. He was keen on giving correct doctrines in a way attractive to his listeners through the profuse use of stories, anecdotes, poetry and imageries as his works reveal. In his work, *Atmanuthapam*, he narrates the whole New Testament story in poetic form. It also crosses over to the times of the Apostles and even the Assumption of our Blessed Mother. But simultaneously he heard the silent cry of his own people as well as the society that was doomed in ignorance and underdevelopment caused by the prevailing caste system as well as lack of sufficient infrastructure for development. He devised many schemes, almost all of them, of a pioneering nature to bring in the Good News of knowledge and development to the people. His zeal and compassion for the people who were then a people

without shepherd led him to a series of pioneering activities that put the foundation for the renewal of the Church and the renaissance of Kerala society. It is to be noted here that the people whom history acknowledges as renaissance leaders of Kerala entered public life after the life time of Chavara and they were all treading the paths traced by him.[2]

3. Profile of a Catechist

A catechist has, primarily, to be a person who is fully evangelized by undergoing a life of formation in Gospel values in one's own self. We may enumerate a few essential features of a catechist and how these are seen reflected in the life of Chavara.

3.1. Love of the Church

The Church was at the heart of Chavara's thoughts. In a circular letter he wrote in 1843, he says, "Man the crown of creation, and is created by God of infinite goodness. The moment he is born, death too is born. To cross over this sea of death, the voyage is really difficult and perilous. In order to cross over the sea, we need a sailor who is really an expert, familiar with the route and who, at the same time, is capable of withstanding every obstacle along the route. We need also a heavy anchor, which would resist every tempest in the sea and protect the ship from being caught amidst the billows. We need also a strong vessel, strong enough to resist the tempests in the sea which gives guarantee of safety and protection to passengers. The Church is this vessel."[3]

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2 M.G.S. Narayanan, "Precursor of Reformist Movements," in John Mannarathara, ed., *The Life and Legacy of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara,* New Delhi, Bengaluru: Viva Books, 2015, 41.

3 A. Mathias Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 377.

Fr Leopold, Chavara's spiritual father all through his life, testifies to his love of the Mother Church. The former says that an ardent love of the Church and true devotion to the Holy Father were the most outstanding virtues found in Chavara. Fr. Leopold acknowledges, "He had an ardent desire to spread the light of the Holy Catholic Church in all directions; he was grieved to the point of shedding tears when he heard the trials and persecution of the Church and eagerly longed to see the days of her triumph. Whenever he happened to hear the news about the Pope he was always moved to tears, either of sorrow or of joy."[4]

The love of the Church was the motivating factor that pushed Chavara into the pool of activities when he saw the sorry state of the Christian community of his time. Such a miserable condition was caused largely by ecclesial turmoil of the 19th century. Chavara cherished in his heart a very comprehensive plan for the overall reform and development of this Church. He knew that the Church alone cannot be pushed forward without largely bringing in reform in the secular society. So he wanted to give birth to a spiritually mature Church to counter the problems of herself and the society in an intelligent way. To this effect he devised a multi-pronged approach of the renewal of the Church.

Love of the Church was a leading ideal in his life. Even in trying times, he abided by the decisions of his ecclesiastical superiors. Even as the canonical recognition of the newly founded religious congregation was prolonging indefinitely,[5]

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4 A. Mathias Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara,* 450.

5 Though the CMI Congregation was founded in the year 1831, canonical recognition for the congregation was obtained only in 1955.

he didn't show unrest or displeasure nor did he pressurise the authorities, but took everything as the will of God coming through the Mother Church.[6] Finally, when the canonical recognition was granted, it was not as the members expected, instead, they were affiliated to the Carmelite Family, by providing them Carmelite rules and constitutions. Chavara saw it as Providence and he fully abided by the decision of the Church.

The unity of the Church was a cause dear to him. His efforts for the reunion of the breakaway Jacobite faction as well as his fight against the Roccos schism are two shining landmarks that loudly speak of his love of the Mother Church. The reunion movement was to bring back the Jacobite faction into the Catholic communion under the Pope. These efforts largely spearheaded by Chavara and later his disciples were partially fructified in 1930 when Bishop Mar Ivanios of the Orthodox faction embraced Catholicism together with a good number of his followers which resulted in the creation of the Syro-Malankara Rite.[7] The Roccos schism was a major threat to the Catholic Church in Kerala caused by Bishop Roccos, who illegally entered Kerala from Chaldea at the invitation of some of the eastern looking clergy of Kerala and began to bring the parishes in Kerala under his jurisdiction. Failing in all the efforts to put a halt to the march of Roccos and his supporters,

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6 Lukose Vithuvattickal, ed., *Letters of Chavara*, VI/4, *Chavara's Testament to the members of the Congregation*, Mannanam 1982, 98-103.

7 There are three *sui juris* Churches in India: the Latin Church, the Syro-Malabar Church and the Syro-Malankara Church. The Syro-Malankara Rite was created in 1930 so that those who reunited with Catholicism from the Orthodox Church could continue their Antiochean traditions.

the Vicar Apostolic wrote to Rome to appoint Chavara as the Vicar General of the Malabar Christians in order to contain the grave danger of a possible schism in the Church. Chavara, through his holy and diplomatic tactics, got Roccos out of India without in any way causing damage to his popularity or personal dignity. He showed extreme kindness to the intruder Prelate as well as his supporters. Chavara persuaded Rome to revoke the excommunication invoked upon him.

Yet, though Chavara fought to finish the Roccos schism and got Bishop Roccos out of India, he (Chavara), too, was of the firm opinion that the Churches in Kerala, that is, not only Syrians but also Latins, needed native Bishops to lead them. To this effect he wrote a letter to the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of Faith (Propaganda Fide) in 1869 explaining the truth of the sincere and just desire of the people and requesting the Sacred Congregation to appoint two bishops, one for Syrians and one for Latins. Chavara wrote that such a move would diffuse the possibility of future troubles as well as enthuse the Jacobite faction to come back to Catholicism.[8]

Chavara's love of the Church and the outstanding virtues shining in him were recorded in a letter Vicar Apostolic Bernardino of St Therese wrote to the Prefect of the Propaganda Fide informing him of the appointment of Chavara as the Vicar General.[9] The Vicar Apostolic described Chavara in the letter as "a man truly Christian, virtuous,

8 Lukose Vithuvattickal, ed., *Letters of Chavara*,II/5, p. 33-35.

9 Letter of Vicar Apostolic Bendardino to the Prefect of Propaganda Fide informing him of the Appointment of Chavara as Vicar General, in Paul Pallath, *Vicariate Apostolic and the St. Thomas Christians in 1867: Kuriakose Elias Chavara Unworthy of Episcopate?*, Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2018, 18-21.

very prudent, very well-versed in Sacred Scriptures, most proficient in Syriac language, who in this circumstance with his deeds proved himself to be very faithful to the Catholic Religion and to the Holy See…"[10] In the same letter the Vicar Apostolic had also made another suggestion to the Prefect and the Holy See to consecrate Chavara as a Co-adjutor Bishop "even if this highly commented and proposed person lacks the necessary knowledge for this position, nor can he have, being from this country, the chest (courage) that is required in a bishop in such particular circumstances, but supported by the Vicar Apostolic as the vine leans on the elm, and by the missionaries he will certainly bear better fruits than those of the Chaldean Patriarch … because he is good, prudent and obedient and also fascinating in preaching."[11] Chavara's humble ways are projected, again, in the next observation made by the Vicar Apostolic in the letter. "… he would not accept such (episcopal) character and dignity without (having given) a precept, as I had to give him, in order to make him accept the office of the vicar general."[12]

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10 Paul Pallath,*Vicariate Apostolic and the St. Thomas Christians in 1867,* 20.

11 Paul Pallath,*Vicariate Apostolic and the St. Thomas Christians in 1867,* 20.

12 Paul Pallath, *Vicariate Apostolic and the St. Thomas Christians in 1867,* 20. However, Chavara was not made a bishop because some objections were raised from the missionaries. Paul Pallath, after analysing the letters written by the missionaries citing reasons, such as, inexperience in governance, insufficient knowledge of morals, advanced age, indisposition and extreme weakness of body, against the choice of Chavara for episcopacy, concludes, "The real reason for the opposition of the missionaries to the consecration of a native bishop was their desire to preserve the episcopacy and jurisdiction over the St Thomas Christians exclusively for themselves." Cf. Paul Pallath, *Vicariate Apostolic*

3.2. Sense of Conversion

The beginning of holiness is the sense of conversion. The seeds of divinity can grow only in a soul that longs for God. In his most voluminous work, *Atmanuthapam*, we find Chavara in a poetic way articulating a sense of repentance over some of the events and situations of his childhood life. We need not take them as real sins committed, but these are the perspectives of a holy soul which counts even minor cases as sinful. He narrated that at the *Kalari* the children were from different religious communities and there were occasions and contexts which were not akin to his upbringing. He said that he might have imitated the actions of those children, who were mostly non-Christians. When he remembered those days he felt so much of compunction and he stated that till he joined the *Kalari* he moved only as fitting to the holy eyes of Jesus. Moving with those children, he might have become ungrateful to God. He says that what he saw in the *Kalari* were causes for sin, such as, playing without modesty, walking naked, words and actions not becoming for a child of Jesus.[13]

In most of his works he expressed the compunction of his soul. In his chronicles, he often lamented his faults and shortcomings. He asked pardon to his co-religious. He asked pardon also to the nuns at Koonammavu.[14] At the beginning of *Dhyanasallapangal*, the saint after recollecting the advice his mother had given him, that is, to keep away from pride

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and the St. Thomas Christians in 1867: Kuriakose Elias Chavara Unworthy of Episcopate?, Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2018, 118 .

13 *Atmanuthapam*, slokas, 92-112, in Z.M. Muzhoor (ed), *Complete Works of Chavara, Vol II, Literary Works*, Mannanam, 1981.

14 Lukose Vithuvattickal, ed., *Letters of Chavara*, VII/2, Letter to the Sisters of Koonammavu Convent, p. 106-107.

and self-complacency, humbled himself saying that he was unworthy to reach high degrees of prayer and sanctity, because he was a great sinner with a heart impure and opaque without the virtues of cleanliness and modesty.[15]

A repentant person is a humble person. Chavara's humility can be measured from the questions he asked himself, "For is it because of my power and skill that I did things whatsoever? How is it that you came hither? Who called me from home? How did I become a priest? How could I join the community and become a member of the congregation? Why should anyone address me as prior? Do I deserve any one of these favours? The answer is: "Not at all to be sure".[16] His extreme humility made him identify himself with the prodigal son of the parable. In *Dhyanasallapangal*, he made a long meditation on the parable posing himself as the prodigal.

3.3. Depth of Faith

Chavara was a person, we may say, who walked not by the eyesight but by faith. He had such a strong faith in the Providence of God. There were numerous incidents in his life, where he initiated activities without resources in hand.[17] His firm belief was God would provide it. And God did provide them. He also taught his people to have such a strong faith in God. When he instructed the people to collect funds for the future establishment of a Confraternity of Happy Death,

15 Z.M. Muzhoor, ed, *Complete Works of Chavara,* Vol II, *Literary Works*, Mannanam, 1981, 13.

16 Z.M. Muzhoor, ed., *Complete Works of Chavara,* Vol II, *Literary Works*, Mannanam, 1981, 13

17 A. Mathias Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara,* 429.

he instructed the people to collect as much as they could and "God would provide the rest."[18]

Chavara had a very childlike relationship with God. God the Father as well as Jesus, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity were for him *Appan*. He used the term *Appan* 31 times in *Dhyanasallapangal*. *Appan* is the word that shows the most intimate relationship between children and the father in a family. In *Dhyanasallapangal*, he stated that he couldnot call God by any other name.[19] He also compared God's unparalleled love to the love of a mother. Just as a mother awakens the sleeping child and gives it breast milk, our loving *Appan* will fulfil all our needs even before asking for them. He moved and did everything trusting in the Providence of God, the logic of which the rationalists cannot understand. He had such an intimate relationship with God that for him prayer was like the intimate conversation among the friends.[20]

He had great faith in the intercessions of the saints. In *Dhyanasallapangal*, we often find the saint interceding to Saint Teresa of Avila, whom he considered his Mother in faith for graces to pray and meditate well. Similarly, he often invoked the names of Saint Joseph, the Holy Family and Saint Maria Magdalene in his daily prayers.[21]

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18 Lukose Vithuvattickal, ed., *Complete Works of Chavara,* Vol IV, *Letters,* Mannanam, 1986, 160.

19 Z.M. Muzhoor, ed., *Complete Works of Chavara,* Vol III, *Spiritual Works,* Cochin, 1981, 17.

20 Z.M. Muzhoor, ed, *Complete Works of Chavara,* Vol III, *Spiritual Works,* 14.

21 Z.M. Muzhoor, ed., *Complete Works of Chavara,* Vol III, *Spiritual Works,* 15, 16.

His life was guided by the faith in the communion of saints. Just as he prayed to the souls in heaven he reminded the people to be conscious of those in the purgatory who needed the prayers of the living. Through many anecdotes he taught the people on the need for praying the souls in purgatory.[22]

Atmanuthapam, in its earlier verses, gives expression to his faith. He firmly believed in the total graciousness of God. So he thanked God for all the gifts, physical, intellectual and spiritual, that he possessed. He thanked God for being born with a healthy body without any deformity, for being born from believing and moderately rich parents, he thanked God for the grace of baptism; that he did not die unbaptized; for the priesthood, etc.[23] He always believed that whatever he undertook was not his work, but God's own.

A strong faith life was visible in the totality of his life-style. His humble submission to the will of the Superiors,[24] his sense of renunciation[25] and his forgiving mind are indicators of his sublime faith life. Though his hectic work during the turbulent Church history of the 19th century had earned him some adversaries, he kept nothing against them in his mind. Some of them towards the end of their life was given asylum in Chavara's monastery itself. Roccos had even threatened his life, but Chavara gave him a decent and dignified sent off!

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22 Z.M. Muzhoor, ed., *Complete Works of Chavara,* Vol II, *Literary Works*, 129ff.

23 Z.M. Muzhoor, ed., *Complete Works of Chavara,* Vol II, *Literary Works*, *Atmanuthapam,* slokas 1-44.

24 A. Mathias Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara,*142-143.

25 A. Mathias Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara,* 424.

3.4. Divine Connectedness

The book *Atmanuthapam* reveals to us the man who Chavara was. The book brings to us the inner longings of a mystic. Chavara's desire was to see Jesus and all the mysteries associated with him with his own eyes. He wanted to see the primordial brightness of the Son of Man. He wanted to see the Son of Man in his incarnated form in which he assumed the form of a lowly human being in order to remove the stains of human sin, how the brightness that dwarfs the brightness of the Sun was eclipsed in his human body.

He longed to see how the son of Man spent nine months in the womb of the Virgin. He wanted to see how he in his foetal stage came to Bethlehem as per the decree of Caesar. He longed to see how God became one among us as the word Emmanuel denotes. He wanted to see the parents of Jesus who underwent suffering when they did not find any house for Mary to deliver her son. In this way Chavara narrated the entire mystery of God in poetry and the focus was that he longed to see his loving Jesus with his own eyes in all these dimensions. So intense was his love of God; so strong his urge to be united with him.[26]

His prayer moments were intense. Meditation was for him a conversation with God. "Bound by His love, just as we converse with our friends, we sit and talk to Jesus Christ, to whom we are betrothed."[27] During the meditation times, others often saw him intensely hooked on Jesus so much so that he would forget the time to wind up the prayer as the

26 Z.M. Muzhoor, ed., *Complete Works of Chavara,* Vol II, *Literary Works*, *Atmanuthapam,* III, slokas 1- 68.

27 Z.M. Muzhoor, ed., *Complete Works of Chavara,* Vol III, *Spiritual Works,* 14.

Prior. It was reported that often someone had to nod to him to tell him that the prayer time was up. Tears would run down his cheek as he walked to the refectory at the end of the prayer. Chavara advised his religious daughters to grow in such a divine connectedness. He wrote to the nuns, "I lock up your hearts, in the tabernacle of Jesus, for your sake, I have locked up my heart too there. Stay there until the day of resurrection."[28]

Having familiarised with the qualities that would make Chavara an effective instrument of catechesis, let us now have a look at the catechetical pedagogy he adopted for the faith formation of the people.

4. Chavara's Catechetical Pedagogy

Catechetical Pedagogy involves various means through which catechesis is imparted. It considers the addresses of catechesis, formation of catechists, approaches to catechesis, its content, the locations where catechesis is imparted, the sources of catechesis, etc. We shall see how Chavara employed these aspects of the catechetical pedagogy.

4.1. Addressees of Catechesis

Who were the people to whom Chavara addressed his message? The insightful reply of the Vicar Apostolic Archbishop Maurelius Stabilini to the founding fathers of the CMI congregation, when they approached him seeking permission for going for hermitage gives an exact picture of the situation of the Catholics of that time. He told them, "If you three who are educated to some extent, go for hermitage,

28 A. Mathias Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara,* 453.

who will be here to teach our people?"[29] The catechetical situation of 19th century Kerala church was pathetic. There was not much training being imparted in matters of spiritual, liturgical, and ecclesial life. One of the reasons for such a state was that the Church of Kerala was left without a unifying leadership. There were different contestants for the leadership of this Apostolic Church now lying divided and mutilated due to many historical reasons. There were mainly two contestants for the leadership of the Church, the Western missionaries, and the Prelates from Persia. Chavara mentioned that just as a magnet is oriented towards the North, his people, his blood relatives in the matter of faith, were always looking to the East and it caused some kind of retardation in their spiritual growth. Therefore, so much of Christian legacy and practice of Christian holiness and values were wanting in this land. And so "this land that received the light of Faith from an Apostle himself (Apostle Thomas) remains barren (*machhi*) to this day and at the same time many lands and people who received the Gospel at a later time have produced many saints."[30] As George Nedungatt explains, this Church was practically in a dark age for about thousand years up to the Diamper synod. Nedungatt goes on to explain the condition obtaining in Malabar of those days: there were no Bible translations, no biblical institutes, no catechetical institutes, no original publications, no theological contributions, and no person of world class scholarship in the matter of Christian studies. The

29 Benoy P. Jacob, "Multifaceted Life of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara," in John Mannarathara, ed., *The Life and Legacy,* New Delhi: Viva Books, 2015, 9. See also, A. Mathias Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara,* 70-71.

30 *Complete Works of Chavara: Nalagamangal*, 1981, p. 172. Free translation.

major reason Fr Nedungatt attributes to this situation was the umbilical cord relationship this Church wanted to keep with the Chaldean Church. The problems were not with the Chaldean Church, but with the administrative system in force here. The Church was under the Chaldean Bishops, who came once in a while to Kerala. There were long periods of gap without an episcopal head. Worse, these bishops from Chaldea never took to temporal administration, but attended only to sacramental administration. The temporal administration of the Church was carried out by a native priest who was known as Archdeacon, whereas in the West the Church made great strides in all fields, such as evangelization, Church expansion, theological development, publication of books, pastoral practices, catechetical outreach, seminary training, secular education, social service, etc., under able Bishops. It was in fact the Diamper synod that brought the Church under the jurisdiction of Bishops putting a halt to the Archdeacon's administration.[31]

On the other side, the situation of the society was quite lamentable. Caste system was the rule of life, which divided people into numerous groups of graded inequality. Each caste considered itself superior and maintained a distance from every other. Caste decided everything, one's food, occupation, ownership of land, access to education, dress, habitats, travelling space, etc. Every caste had a dialect of its own, each alien to the other.[32]It was an unequal, largely

31 George Nedungatt, "Liberation from the Dark Ages of the Pre-Diamper Indian Christianity," *Journal of St Thomas Christians* 24, 2 (2013) 11-42.

32 M. Gopinath, "Saintly Voice of Silent Prayer," in John Mannarathara, ed., *Life and Legacy of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara,* New Delhi: Viva Books, 2015, 42.

underdeveloped, poor and illiterate society that Chavara had to address. Even to the very few schools that began to be established from 1817 by the Government only high caste people had access. Swami Vivekananda characterised Kerala of those times as a 'mad house' pained by seeing the atrocities perpetrated by the inhuman caste-system.

In short, it was a Church with an ignorant laity and a society of poor and illiterate people that Chavara had to address with his teaching and activities of development.

4.2. Formation of Catechists

Chavara was quite sure that in order to effect true and authentic catechesis what was of primary need was a band of holy, trained and well-educated priests to take up the role of catechesis. The foundation of two religious congregations by him, for men and women respectively, has to be seen through this angle, that is, to provide trained leaders for the Church. He knew that the secret of the success of the Jesuit, Carmelite as well as Protestant missionaries was that their priests or pastors were well-educated, whereas among the Syrians this was not the case. The seminary formation among Syrians followed the Malpanate system in which a single priest, called Malpan, gave the priestly training to the candidates. Govindappilla, a secular historian says that Malpanates followed something like a feudal system. That is to say, the priests, who normally came from rich families would suggest their relatives for training in Malpanate. These candidates would live with the Malpan in the parish rectories akin to a kind of *Gurukulam*, where they would learn whatever the Malpan would teach them. It was anybody's guess how much a single Malpan, who, in most cases, would be in-charge of the parish as well, could teach the candidates. To remedy this situation and to give effective formation to the candidates for priesthood,

Chavara established seminaries like those of the Western and the Anglican missionaries.[33] Besides, he constantly updated the priests by providing them ongoing catechesis pioneering what is today known as annual retreats for priests.

The prophetic mind of Chavara realized that a religious congregation for women would be an ideal tool in giving formation to women in the matters of integral faith. So together with Fr. Leopold the Italian missionary he founded the first indigenous religious congregation for women in 1866. Its aim was to train a good number of women and make them true instruments of Jesus for disseminating the Gospel in the interior villages and especially among the women and the poor people. He wanted to uplift the society financially by devising schemes for micro financing schemes, such as, rosary making, through the able leadership of these sisters.

4.3. Liturgical Catechesis

Even before the Kerygmatic catechesis was proposed by the Austrian Jesuit Joseph A. Jungmann in 1930s, Chavara had initiated the process here in Kerala. For him liturgy was the chief medium for faith education. Preaching of the Word of God during the liturgy was not common or effective in Kerala before Chavara's time.[34] He propagated the practice of preaching homilies every Sunday during the Holy Qurbana. His homilies were very powerful rendering of God's actions in the human minds and many people were converted hearing his homilies. Using biblical materials as well as stories that he had heard or read from books both from his own land and abroad, he called the minds of the people for conversion

33 P. Govindappilla, "Charitrathenayicha oral," in *SukruthamSmara,* A Beth Rauma Publications, 2012, 55.

34 A. Mathias Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara,* 218.

and adherence to Jesus. He established seven monasteries in prominent places in Kerala which could serve the people through the sacraments and the ministry of the word.

Chavara approached the liturgy itself with a catechist's mind. During his time, liturgical celebrations and the Scriptural readings were not systematized for each day of celebration. He took keen attention in renewing the liturgy by making it more priest and people friendly. Taking sufficient time and consulting original Syriac liturgical rubrics, he prepared a liturgical calendar for the Syrian community of Kerala. His deep scholarship in Syriac, besides Latin, Portuguese, Sanskrit and Malayalam stood him in good stead.

In like manner, Chavara renewed the canonical prayers of the Church, which many priests avoided due to its unscientific composition. The number of Psalms prescribed for each day was numerous. Sundays meant still more groups of Psalms, and Feast days furthermore of them so much so that on Easter Sunday and Christmas all the 150 Psalms had to be recited during the night prayer! No wonder, the priests avoided this kind of prayers. Chavara's spiritual wisdom urged him to compile a canonical prayer book which was affordable for use for all priests on all occasions.[35]

We can say that Chavara brought liturgy out of its mere ritualistic understanding and made it more catechetical by introducing the moment of breaking of the word during a liturgical celebration, which would years later be mandated

35 Lukose Vithuvattickal, ed., *Complete Works of Chavara,* Vol IV, *Letters of Chavara,* Mannanam, 1982, 131.

by Pope Saint John Paul II in 1977 in his catechetical document *Catechesi Tradendae*.[36]

4.4. Biblical Catechesis

Chavara, who was well-versed in Bible, wanted to dispense biblical knowledge with the people. First of all, his liturgical sermons were centred on the events and messages of the Bible. His wished to reach the biblical messages to as many people as possible in as many forms as possible. For this he adopted different methods. He wrote in poetical form the entire story of the New Testament. *Atmanuthapam* contains the description of the events of the New testament period and beyond. He resorted to poetical methodology in biblical catechesis for its power to impress the hearts of people as well as its evocative effect.

He also composed small dramas with biblical themes called eclogues.[37] They were initially composed for his confreres and novices so that they could enact them during the Christmas holidays. Later, after the foundation of the convent for sisters, these eclogues got a wider stage.

His major historical intervention to disseminate Bible knowledge was his mega plan of establishing a printing press which at that time even his confreres considered the ambition of a man gone out of senses. For it was a project incurring

36 Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Catechesi Tradendae*, n. 23 in *The Catechetical Documents: A Parish Resource,* Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1986, 367-416.

37 John Paul (compiler), *Chavara Kuriakose Elias, Idayanatakangal* (Eclogues), Trichur: Kerala Sahitya Academy, 2014; T.M. Abraham, "An Ascetic's Legacy in Theatre," in John Mannarathara (ed), *The Life and Legacy of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara,* New Delhi: Viva Books, 2015, 159-162.

huge costs. Nobody associated with him had any working knowledge of printing presses. Those days, there were only a few printing presses in India, like, the Government press at Goa, the press that belonged to the Church Mission Society at Kottayam and the one at Trivandrum that belonged to the Travancore Government, among others.

But Chavara's determination to supply people with books on biblical messages didn't dissuade him, even though his own people called him mad to conceive of such an ambitious project. He approached the Church Mission Society authorities to have a look at their press at Kottayam for which permission was not however granted.[38] But his resolve was not to be snuffed. He made it to Trivandrum and had a look at the printing press there. Reaching back, Chavara made a form of the Press in plantain stem and engaged his carpenter to make one in wood. This wooden press became successful. Through his contacts with Spain, Chavara arranged for printing ink. He got a person experienced in printing work to set types. The first books printed on this wooden press were all Malayalam translations of spiritual books in Tamil, Italian and Portuguese.

4.5. Popular Catechesis

Chavara's ingenuous spiritual wisdom was quite conversant with the local religious traditions. The Hindu spiritual masters used to give discourses for days together on temple campuses on the occasion of their religious feasts. For ordinary Hindu folks, this was the occasion to gather religious knowledge.[39]

38 P. Govindappilla, "Charitrathenayicha oral," in *SukruthamSmara*, 56.

39 ThichNhatHanh describes large gatherings of Buddhist monks for annual retreats that lasted for 90 days in rainy seasons during

At the same time, Chavara had heard of the missions being carried out in the West chiefly by the Jesuit priests. Combining these, he initiated what is now known as annual retreats or parish retreats for people under the auspices of parish churches. Talks, classes, prayers and liturgy were the different components of these retreats. A very important aspect of this retreat was the family counselling given during these days. Reconciling families, divided couples and broken relationships were an essential feature of these retreats. These retreats worked for effective renewal of personal, familial as well as parish or societal life. Not long before, such annual retreats became a regular annual feature in every parish. Looking retrospectively, one can understand what a farsighted person Chavara was in developing such a useful catechetic methodology, which is now accepted as one of the best tools of renewal of life both by lay people as well as the consecrated, not to speak anything of its impact among people of other religions.

On the methodology of such parish missions, Porukara writes, "These brothers at the order of superiors, preached in different parishes having thousand or two thousand or even five thousand and more faithful, spiritual retreats and missions, taught catechism and heard confessions."[40]

Because of the success of these parish missions, Vicar Apostolic Ludovico Martini officially appointed in 1849 the religious community headed by Chavara as the official preachers of spiritual exercises for the whole of the Vicariate. The Bishop wrote to Syrians and Latins in his Vicariate,

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the life time of Buddha. Cf: ThichNhatHanh, *Silence: The Power of Quiet in a World Full of Noises,* London: Rider, 2015, 177-180.

40 A. Mathias Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara,* 218.

"Therefore, I select and send to you Rev. Fr Kuriakose Malpan Chavara and the other priests at Mannanam. When any of them come to you, the vicar of the church takes care that an eight-day retreat is conducted in a convenient church either for each parish community separately or cumulatively for a few of them… Be diligent to participate in these exercises with good will and reap abundant fruit from them. This we command on precept of charity.[41] It is said that about 30 such retreats were conducted every year.[42]

4.6. Catechumenates

Catechumenate was an institution of the ancient Church that lasted up to the 7thcentury, where potential adult coverts to Christianity were given catechetical and liturgical training. This institution had died a natural death when infant baptism became the practice in the Church. It was revived in the West during the colonial missionary period, when again, adult conversions offered great possibility. The first of sorts in Kerala was established by the missionaries at Varapuzha. Later on there were individual efforts in this regard from different priests. In 1864 Chavara started a catechumenate attached to the Mannanam Monastery. The chronicles reveal that on Sundays and Feast days many boys came to study catechism and remained on the campus till 5 o' clock in the evening. Some of them came from distant places and some others were poor. So these boys were fed at noon time. They were also given clothes and pious articles, like rosaries and scapulars.

41 A. Mathias Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara,* 219.

42 A. Mathias Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara,* 219.

Soon, all the monasteries followed suit and catechumenates were started attached to every monastery. Many adults and children were trained and baptized every year. During the period between 1866 and 1931 more than 20,000 souls were gained for Christ by the missionary zeal of the fathers of the CMI Congregation.[43]

4.7 Family Catechesis

Chavara was deeply conscious of the importance of family in ecclesial life. He never lost a chance to reach families with his catechetical resources. During the retreats, families were one of the focus areas. Even the name he took, Kuriakose Elias of the Holy Family speaks much about his concern for families. Years before the Second Vatican Council called the family a domestic Church,[44] Chavara wrote, "A good Christian family is the image of heaven."[45] Everyone is a product of one's family upbringing. Chavara projected the Holy Family as the model for all families.

Chavara wrote a rather lengthy letter in 1868, a little before his death, addressed to his parishioners, which is now published as a booklet with the title, Chavarul. The content of his family catechesis is summarised in this letter, which can be considered as a 'code of conduct for families' of any religious community.[46] It offers a comprehensive plan for a family to remain and grow in Christian principles. It is a collection of wise teachings on all essential elements of family

43 A. Mathias Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara,* 218.

44 Vatican II, *LumenGentium*, n. 11.

45 Lukose Vithuvattickal, ed., *Letters of Chavara*, *Chavarul*, 133.

46 Jancy James, "A Precious Source of Reference and Assurance," in John Mannarathara, ed., *Life and Legacy,* 134.

catechesis. This book can be considered the first catechetical letter in the Indian Church.[47] Emulating St Paul, who wrote letters to the Churches he established, here Chavara wrote to the members of his Church, his local Church. The catechist in the man comes out shining in the methodology he proposed in this book for the effective spread of its contents. He asked each family to take a copy of this letter, keeping the original in the church and to read the letter every first Saturday of the month with family members assembled together.

This booklet has 24 paragraphs for general family code and 16 paragraphs regarding upbringing of children. Who knows whether it was a coincidence that the number 40 is fulfilled in these codes? The book touches all the aspects of family life, such as, the basic virtue of love that should unite all the family members, relationship between husband and wife, upbringing of children, prayer in families, conversations in families, acceptable visitors and guests in families, children's interactions with servants, children's friendship in the neighbourhood, kind of dress permitted for children at home, children visiting relatives' houses, family financial dealings, taking and giving loans, timely partition of parental properties, duties towards servants and workers, just wages to workers, etc. The letter gives clear indication to respect the developmental stages of children while dealing with them. He illustrates all these teachings with impressive stories and anecdotes. In all these, Chavara articulated the Christian way of maintaining family life. There are many touching expressions

47 Saju Chackalackal, "Foreword, Family as the Heaven on Earth: A Theology of Family in the Chavarul of Saint Chavara," in George Kaniarakath, *Saint Kuriakose Chavara, in A Teacher of family Theology,* Theological Studies on Saint Chavara 2, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2019, 10.

in the book. For example, he said, "Children who go as angels to their own relative's house, sometimes return as devils"[48] alluding to the possible misuse of children even by relatives. He advised the parents not to take upon themselves the minor fights that occurs among children and make a mountain out of them. He advised parents not to allow boys and girls of the same siblings to sleep in one room, because "What they do not know by nature, the Satan will teach them."[49]

4.8 Social Catechesis

"Between evangelization and human advancement - development and liberation – there are in fact profound links," declared Pope Paul VI in his celebrated document *Evangelii Nuntiandi*.[50] Jesus ministry was not restricted to the souls of the people; he addressed to the physical needs of the people as well. The prophets of the Old Testament were keen on teaching the people that covenant life was fulfilled only when they did their duty to the poor, moving away from oppressions of all sorts and attending to the needs of the poor, the orphans, widows and the strangers.

Chavara understood that the crux of all the problems that the society faced was the closed mind, closed in all sorts of superstitions, caste considerations and its consequences, such as marginalization of the lower caste people, untouchability, unseeability, and appropriation of educational facilities to upper caste people. The general public was illiterate and dependant on the rich upper caste people for their livelihood. Only universal education, open to all sections of the people

48 Lukose Vithuvattickal, ed., *Letters of Chavara*, 145.

49 Lukose Vithuvattickal, ed., *Letters of Chavara*, *Chavarul*, 145

50 John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 31, in *The Catechetical Documents: A Parish Resource,*149-200.

reaching to grass roots levels would solve this problem, he understood. He ventured in a large way into this mountainous mission.

4.8.1. Overcome Caste Barrier

All of humanity is but one family. Hinduism proclaims this value loudly through its message of *vasudhaiva kudumbakam'*. But the caste practice in Hinduism that puts up barriers between humans disproves this noble idea. Chavara wanted to create a society that recognized the equal dignity of all. He taught that social values, or cultural assets were not reserved to any castes or religions. To bring this point home into the psyche of the people he started a Sanskrit school at Mannanam in 1846 for Dalits. This step was revolutionary on two counts: first of all, Sanskrit was considered the language of high caste people. Dalits were forbidden to learn it. Secondly, in those times only high caste people had access to education, but here in this school Dalits were the pupils. So in one stroke, he expressed his vision for the society; he wanted an egalitarian society where everyone had access to all of it resources. He made education free of cost for the poor people. He started midday meal for the poor pupils of this school raising funds from different parish churches.

4.8.2. Universal Education: Every Parish Church to Run a School

True catechesis and sustained development of society presuppose a society that values education. Chavara was determined to transform the educational scenario of Kerala. It was a time when the educational mission was just picking up due to the efforts of some well-meaning kings and Protestant missionaries, though access to Government schools were restricted to caste people.

Chavara's spirit was awakened in a great way. In his capacity as the Vicar General of the Syrian Catholics, he embarked upon a ground breaking idea that would in future make history for the entire Kerala society. Chavara issued a circular in 1864 asking every parish in Kerala to open a school attached to it. He hit upon this idea, again, from his contacts with the West, where parish churches ran schools attached to them. The effect was marvellous. This was the moment when the society of Kerala woke up from its long slumber to a new era of universal primary education. Many schools came up attached to the churches. And the trend never lost momentum. Soon other religious communities entered the field of education and all of them together made Kerala a hub of quality education and a place of hundred percent literacy.

Chavara was keen to enrol children from Dalit families in the schools. He sent messengers to Dalit houses asking them to send their children to the church schools. However, there were huge drop outs initially from the part of Dalits who were poor and whose parents wanted their children to go for work. Chavara asked the parishes to circumvent the sorry state by providing midday meal, books and clothes freely to those children by raising funds.

4.8.3. Social Concern: House of Charity at Kainakary

Caring for the sick is an act of mercy. Our catechesis teaches us to see Christ himself in the sick and the suffering. Chavara wanted to open a house to help the elderly and the destitute. To this effect he wrote to his people at Kainakary on 15 October 1869 in which he pointed out how important it was to prepare themselves and others for a happy death as well as to love and care for the sick and the dying. In preparation for opening a house for the destitute people, he started a Confraternity

for Happy death and made arrangements for the collection of funds. He asked the people to keep a charity box labelled, "Happy Death Charity Box" and without being ashamed of it, beg of others and raise funds and build a modest charity home near their small chapel. He asked them to place such charity boxes in the markets of Changanachery and Alapuzha, two major townships teaming with trade. He asked them to carry such charity boxes at the time of harvest around the fields. He encouraged them to begin taking care of at least one or two sick people. In this way he hoped to spread this ministry of compassion in the entire region of Malabar.

So far we have seen the elaborate catechetical pedagogy that Chavara adopted to spread the Good News and educate his children in the tasks that the Good News of Jesus enjoins upon us. Now let's have a look at some of the concrete methods that he used to realize his catechetical pedagogy.

5. Methodological Aspects of Chavara's Catechesis

Chavara's catechetical approaches made use of a variety of methodological aspects, such as, writings, print media, library system, accompaniment, pastoral letters, warnings, storytelling, narration, inculturation, evocation, learning from observation, etc.

- **Writings:**
  - *Dramas and Plays*

    The original and creative mind of Chavara devised a new method for catechesis. It was dramas or plays. He wrote 10 catechetical plays from 1856 onwards[51] with

51 Thomas Panthaplackal, *Snehadoothintenatakasakhyam,* in John Paul (compiler), *Chavara Kuriakose*, *Idayanatakangal* (Eclogues), Trichur: Kerala Sahitya Academy, 2014.

themes such as salvation of man, Christian virtues and moral values. Some of them were centred around the annunciation and birth of Jesus. These plays of catechetical content were written in the form of *eclogues*, and were meant for stage presentation by his confreres as well as novices from Christmas day to the Day of Epiphany. This was his way of celebrating the birth of Jesus and impressing the message of Christmas in the hearts of his seminary students.

In this matter Chavara's pioneering spirit is to be recognized. He was the first to compose original plays in Kerala. The first historically recognized drama in Malayalam language is the translation of Kalidasas's *Abhijnanasakuntalam* which was published in 1882. If we consider the origin of dramas in vernacular languages again Chavara's eclogues come first. As of now, "*Nil Darpan (The Mirror of indigo)* written by Dinabandhu Mitra in Bengali in 1860 is considered to be the first Indian vernacular drama that went on stage."[52] "The Eclogues of Chavara were written and staged well before *Nil Darpan*. They also preceded Kerala Varma ValiyaKoyithampuran's 1882 Malayalam translation of *Abhijnanasakuntalam*."[53]

- *Poetry*

  Poetry attracts people and engages their heart. Poetry is illuminating whereas prose can be boring. What is expressed through poetry lingers in the heart for a longer time than what is conveyed through prose. So, Chavara took the medium of poetry to describe the

52 T.M. Abraham, "An Ascetic's Legacy in Theatre," 161.

53 T.M. Abraham, "An Ascetic's Legacy in Theatre," 161.

entire New Testament history to the people. In like manner, he dealt with different spiritual themes, such as, the role of virtues, the theme of death, the need for praying for the souls in purgatory, courage to witness to faith, etc.,[54] through the medium of poetry. He wrote poems to reveal to people in a language familiar to them the greatness of their faith.

- *Books and Library System*

  Chavara knew that his people had no sources to receive spiritual ideas and insights apart from the homilies and the retreats. Spiritual books were not available to the people. So as we noted above he established a printing press at Mannanam and published many spiritual books. *Jnanapiusham*, a Malayalam translation of a Tamil spiritual book was the first one to be printed. And later on Chavara published many spiritual books translated from Portuguese, Latin and Italian.

  The method he employed to reach these books to people was very ingenuous. He started in those days what later developed into the public library system in India. He opened the libraries of the monasteries he established for the people of the locality so that the latter could read the books there or even take them home, read, and return. In this way Chavara made sure that people had occasion for reading and growing in Christian and spiritual knowledge.

- **Pastoral Letters and Circulars**

  Chavara's close contacts and familiarity with the Western missionaries and their customs, were, perhaps,

54 Z.M. Muzhoor, ed., *Complete Works of Chavara,* Vol II, *Literary Works*, 129ff.

behind his profuse use of letter writing as a means of educating his confreres and people. He wrote in all 86 letters in languages such as, Malayalam, Syriac, Latin, Italian, and Tamil.[55] He used this medium to educate people in faith, inspire them to undertake pastoral initiatives, correct his confreres and request Holy Father's mediation in many of the Church concerns. His letters are an authentic source of information on the situation of the Church and the society of his times.

- **Storytelling:** Chavara was a very effective story teller. In all his writings as well as sermons, he has made use of this method to substantiate his arguments.

- **Narration:** Narration was another means employed by Chavara. He used to narrate different situations with all its possible nuances.

- **Evocation:** His poetic works such as, *Atmanuthapam, Martyrdom of Anastasia and Dirge* are capable of raising the hearts and minds of the readers in sublime spiritual thoughts as they constantly evoke a sense of awe and love and intimacy to the *Appan* of all of us.

- **Inculturation:** Chavara was keen to take good elements from the Indian culture to enhance the quality of spiritual life and liturgical life of the people. First of all, he encouraged the study of Sanskrit for its content of spiritual and devotional writings and hymns. It was in imitation of the twilight singing of bhajans in Hindu homes that he composed some of his poems and songs based on the life of Jesus. Ending the practice of keeping artificial flowers

55 M. Gopinath, "In Pauline Lineage," in John Mannarathara, ed., *The Life and Legacy,* 124.

made of paper and cloth in churches, influenced by the European practice, he insisted on keeping fresh flowers, which was the practice in temples. In like manner, as was mentioned above the retreats he initiated were all original practices in the Indian tradition.[56]

- **Warning**: Just as Paul enjoined Timothy to "warn them before God against quarrelling about words" (2 Timothy 2:14), Chavara used to warn his confreres as well as his readers that whether one wills or not, God will do his will in our life.[57] Many times he warned his confreres that if they didn't practice humility, obedience, love and discipline, God himself would bring an end to their religious congregation, though it was constituted by himself. Seeing the non-exemplary life of the members he once wrote, "Be sure, if we go this way, our monasteries will not last for twenty years from now. The stability of the monasteries is guaranteed not by the thickness of the walls, but by the zeal and virtuous life of their members. How many monasteries, larger than ours existed in different parts of the world! But, they have, we don't know how, now become woods and habitats of wild animals."[58]

- **Accompanying:** The cumulative effect of all the methods mentioned above shows Chavara's intense desire

56 A. Shreedharamenon, "Ghoshikkapedathepoya Charitraparvam," in *SukruthamSmara* (Collection of articles), A Bet Rauma Publication, Kochi, 2012, 19.

57 Z.M. Muzhoor, ed., *Complete Works of Chavara,* Vol II, *Literary Works*, Mannanam, 1981, 13.

58 Lukose Vithuvattickal, ed., *Letters of Chavara*, VI/1, The letter written to members of the Congregation by Fr Chavara and Fr Leopold, 94.

to be with his people in their spiritual journey. Besides, he was a man on continual journey, as well. He established monasteries in many places so as to give access to people of those localities to spiritual and sacramental life. He masterminded their constructions without exempting him from his other tasks such as writing chronicles, poetry, and giving retreats. He even wanted to be with the sick and the suffering. Once during a Small Pox epidemic, resisting everyone's warnings and advices, he went to a small pox patient and gave him holy communion.

- **Learning through Observation**: Chavara was humble enough to accept good and useful elements from any authentic sources. Most of the prayer methods he brought to our land were imitations of the same practice in the West, such as, forty-hour adoration, thirteen-hour adoration, stations of the cross, rosary and devotions to the saints. Similarly, some of the methods he employed in raising funds to help the Vicariate as well as his own projects were imitations of the practice he found in his own confreres or other priests, such as, fixing five percent taxes on the net income of parishes, *pidiyari* and *kettuthengu*.[59]

59 The expenses of the Vicariate were being met by the annual subsidy from France. But this was not sufficient. When Vicar Apostolic Becinelli sought from Chavara regarding means to raise funds for various activities, such as, running of seminaries, and other developmental programmes, Chavara suggested collection of 5% tax from each parish, 5% of the net income of every parish (net income means total income minus expenses). Though the Bishop was sceptical about its success, Chavara was confident considering the esteem he had among the people and because almost all of the vicars were trained in the seminaries at Mannanam and Pallipuram.
Pidiyari: This was another local method employed to augment the income of the Vicariate. *Pidiyari* means setting apart a handful of

- Summing up, we can say that Chavara put to maximum use the time-tested as well as original methods born in his insightful mind to bring people to maturity of faith in life and action. His attention was to reach out to people of all walks of life and of different tastes with catechetical means appropriate to them.

6. Conclusion

Kuriakose Elias Chavara was a man who lived much ahead of his time. His ideas of faith correspond not to his century but to the 21st century. For him catechesis could not be merely doctrinal, but had to be experiential. Catechesis had to influence all the aspects of human life, matters of soul, sacramental life, liturgical life, family life, social life, and interpersonal relationships. It had to bring people to conversion of hearts and greater communion with God and the Church and a holy and virtuous Christian life in families, on the one hand, and address the dehumanizing situations, such as poverty, underdevelopment, and marginalization, on the other. Thus, life of faith was not a matter concerned only with church going, but it was more to be concerned with what sort of a person one becomes and what sort of a society one tries to create. His firm conviction was that faith should lead one to action (James 2:14-17). This led him to greater concerns for social development and transformation. He said that "A

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rice before cooking, especially, to donate for poor people. Though it was originally employed by another priest, Fr Geevarghese Thoppil of his own congregation for the construction of the Pulincunnu monastery as Vicar General Chavara introduced it in the entire Vicariate.

Kettuthengu: Yet another ingenuous method, this time advised by the same Fr Geevarghese, was the *kettuthengu* custom, that is, reserving one coconut tree of a family for church purpose.

day on which you have not done a good deed would not be considered in the Book of Life."[60] His concern for the neglected working class was proverbial. In the 19th century, even before the ideas of Karl Marx in his work *Das Kapital* (1867) could echo in our land, Chavara advocated just wages for workers and to give the same on time.[61] Just as Jesus' ministry involved verbal teaching of faith and signs of the power of faith, Chavara envisaged a catechetical pedagogy that consisted in incessant education in faith as well as untiring work to develop the standard of human life. This he tried to achieve primarily through giving the light of knowledge and fruits of development to the people of the times.

Chavara shows that one teaches primarily through lived examples. No one can be a catechist unless one has a profound experience of God. His life was characterized by a kind of filial love of God. He approached God with the innocent love of a little child calling God 'Dad'. At the same time, he spent the moments of his meditation in sweet talks with God as between friends. Chavara proved himself to be a true catechist, a contemplative in action.

60 Lukose Vithuvattickal, ed., *Letters of Chavara*, *Chavarul*, n. 13.

61 Chavara made this admonition to people in his letter, *OruNallaAppante Chavarul* (The farewell words of a good father) that he wrote to his parishioners on February 13, 1868.

CHAVARA
An Exemplary Liturgical Catechist

Maryann Madhavathu CMC

1. Introduction

Pope John Paul II indubitably teaches that catechesis is one of the primary tasks of the Church. In his apostolic exhortation, he says that "at the heart of catechesis we find, in *essence, a Person, the Person of Jesus of Nazareth*."[1] In addition, Pope declares that "the primary and *essential object of catechesis* is '*the mystery of Christ*.'" Catechizing is a way to lead a person to go deep into this mystery with knowledge about its different dimensions: "to make all people see what is the plan of the mystery...." The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but also in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ. In catechesis, Christ, the Incarnate Word and Son of God, is taught as *a communication of the living mystery of God*. The paschal mystery is the heart of all catechesis, the cornerstone of the Christian faith, and the paradigm of the Christian life. Liturgical catechesis is mystagogy in its strict sense. It should help the disciples of Christ to follow him faithfully, imitating him to grow into his likeness. This study unfolds Chavara's efforts to make the faithful involved in the living mystery of Christ.

2. Chavara: Liturgical Catechist?

The role of a Catholic catechist is to catechize the faith of the Catholic Church, both by word and example. A catechist is

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1 *Catechesi Tradendae* (*CT*) §5. *Catechesi tradendae* (Catechesis in Our Time) is a post-synodal apostolic exhortation of Pope John Paul II, published October 16, 1979. Emphasis added.

someone who lets the word of God echo through their life. Catechists not only teach but also share their faith and guide their students to learn how to apply and live their faith. In that logic, Kuriakose Elias Chavara was a great catechist who taught the Kerala Church about the essence of faith which is the paschal mystery of Christ through his activities as well as through his life example. Thus, he could be rightly called a liturgical catechist. He made concrete efforts for the full, active, and conscious participation of the people of Kerala in the mystery that is celebrated in the liturgy and lived in reality. Orthopraxis cannot be separated from orthodoxy in Christianity. So the life and personality of Chavara became a medium to reveal the mystery of Christ. In his life he could undertake an endeavour to educate the faithful to live as disciples of Christ and to facilitate an in-depth discovery of the mystery of Christ in the history of salvation.

Liturgical catechesis strives to lead the communities and individuals of the Church to maturity of faith through full and active participation in the liturgy. When I call Chavara a liturgical catechist, it seems to be necessary to make clear the meaning of the word liturgy. The word 'liturgy,' originated from a word having very similar meaning as a public ministry for the good of society. One may understand the word 'liturgy' in such a way that it includes all those ministries of the chosen ones for the benefit of the folk under their care. It denotes Jesus' ministry and participation in it by living in union with the mystery of Christ. Subsequently, every priestly function, charitable service to the needy, exemplary service to the community, life of sacrifice, missionary endeavours, pastoral care, guidance, and protection as well as works of justice comes under the umbrella of *leitourgia* or the ministry of the mystery. Therefore, I use this broad meaning of the

word 'liturgy' to call Chavara a 'liturgical catechist'. Chavara recognised that liturgy is powerful enough to transform both the worshipping community and the culture and society in which one lives.

If liturgy is the celebration of the paschal mystery in a common understanding, Chavara celebrated the mystery not only on the altar but throughout his life. Consequently, his entire life became liturgical in the broadest sense of the word. We have heard about the axiom *lex orandi*, *lex credendi*.[2] But this will be complete only by adding *lex vivendi*.[3] The law of prayer is the law of belief. However, the law of one's belief is reflected in one's law of living or ethical life. The law of living includes both the law of being and the law of doing (*lex entis et lex agendi*) for a person. Let us examine how Chavara

2 This prominent formula appears to have originated with Prosper of Aquitaine (d. after 455), a fifth-century Church father who engaged in a controversy on grace in a treatise formerly attributed to Pope Celestine I, *the Capitula or Praeteritorum Sedis Apostolicae episcoporum auctoritates, de gratia Dei et libero vuluntatis arbitrio*: Let the rule of prayer lay down the rule of faith, *lex supplicandi statuat legem credendi*. Paul De Clerck, ""Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi": The Original Sense and Historical Avatars of an Equivocal Adage," *Studia Liturgica* 24, no. 2 (1994), 181.

3 The third term *lex vivendi* was added to this relationship by Kevin Irwin in his book *Models of the Eucharist*. Kevin W. Irwin, *Models of the Eucharist*, New York: Paulist Press, 2005, 29-30, 294. This term points to the connection between the practices of prayer, belief, and the ethical actions of a person. This means that Christian liturgical practice is not only oriented toward Christian belief but also toward the lives of Christian persons and communities in and with the world. See also E. Byron Anderson and Bruce T. Morrill, eds., *Liturgy and the Moral Self: Humanity at Full Stretch before God: Essays in Honor of Don E. Saliers*, Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998, 4-5.

could live out the tension and rhythm inherent in the paschal mystery.

3. A Man of *Pascha* – Dying and Rising

Chavara's encounter with the saving mystery in meditation led him to intense involvement in the mystery. To be a Christian implies that one participates in the death of Christ to rise with Him into eternal life.[4] Personal and internal death is necessary to live the paschal mystery. Chavara meditated on the divine mystery and lived the gospel values in the paschal rhythm of dying and rising. He could accomplish the paschal mystery in his life by practising the heroic virtues in an exemplary way.

The Church unremittingly invites its members to live this mystery in their earthly lives by following the example of the saints. Chavara grew in divine wisdom through his contemplation of this mystery and acquired experiential wisdom of the same mystery by delving into the passion of Christ and carrying the cross with him for the Church. The contemplative and pastoral involvement of Chavara in the paschal mystery may be seen as two dimensions of the catechesis of the mystery. The divine wisdom attained by Chavara through his meditative life educates the Church. At the same time, the participatory wisdom displayed in his active life and services edifies the Church. Let us briefly examine the nature of that wisdom.

3.1. Living in Peace and Unity with Humility

To live in peace and harmony with one's fellow beings demands occasions of dying to self through forgiving and forgetting other's faults. This is the genuine participation

4 Alexander Schmemann, "The Mystery of Easter," *St. Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly* 2/ 3 (1954), 17.

in the paschal mystery. Forgiving Chavara is found in the case of Kudackachira Antony, bishop Roccos, and Mattan Manjooran.[5] Chavara instructed all to forgive each other, reminding them "Otherwise what is the difference between you and the Gentiles".[6] In his Testament, he says: "Even animals retaliate against those who resent them. The ability to overlook faults in others and to forgive them is possible only for those who are strong, prudent, and honourable."[7]

Chavara always stood for unity and peace in his life and maintained these virtues in his personal life, by dying to his egotistic inclinations. Also, we know that only a truly humble person can acknowledge the favours they received. Chavara praises and gives thanks to God and his other benefactors for

5 On several occasions, Kudakachira had created troubles for Chavara. Still, Chavara writes very carefully about him in the Chronicles so as not to affect his reputation. Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara (CWC),* vol. I: *Chronicles*, Trans. P. J. Thomas, Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Blessed Chavara, 1990, 154-159. Chavara behaved very kindly and politely with Bishop Roccos and negotiated his return to Bagdad from Kochi. Chavara, *CWC* vol. I: *Chronicles*, 91-92. In his testament to his religious community, Chavara asked to help Manjoor Kalapurackal Mathan (who filed a fraud case in the court of Alapuzha against Chavara) if he was in financial strain. The Hindu judge, who dismissed the case, was greatly impressed by Chavara's noble and forgiving personality. Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara (CWC),* vol. IV: *The Letters*, Trans. Mary Leo, Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Blessed Chavara, 1990, 73.

6 Chavara, *CWC* vol. IV: *The Letters* X/6, 104. Mt 6:14-15; Mt 5:46-47.

7 Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Chavarul: Testament of a Loving Father*, Trans. Saju Chackalackal. 150th Year Revised and Updated Edition, Kochi: Chavara Central Secretariat Chavara Hills, 2018, 12-13.

all the gifts he received throughout his life in his writings.[8] Chavara says:

> For is it because of my power and skill that I did things whatsoever? How is it that you came hither? Who called me from home? How did I become a priest? How could I join the community and become a member of the congregation? Why should anyone address me as Prior? How did I become so come by the present status? Do you think I deserve any one of these favours? Not at all, to be sure. If so, remember that it is God's will that is being accomplished.[9]

The whole Eucharist is an *anamnesis* of and *Eucharistia* for the salvation mystery. Following the Eucharistic liturgy, Chavara's thoughts were filled with *anamnesis* and *Eucharistia* in the real meaning of the words. He remembered and rendered gratitude for the endless mercy and providential love of God in each event during his early life. Chavara had a gratitude-filled mind and was aware that all that he had belonged to God. Whatever he received from God, he offered to God so that He could use it for the service of others. Thus Chavara could live the paschal mystery.

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8 His gratitude for God's gift of human vocation, parents, childhood, family, protection from epidemics, and call to priesthood are seen in the first two parts of the *Ātmānutāpam*. Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara (CWC)* vol. II, *Compunction of the Soul, Dirge, Anasthasia's Martyrdom,* Trans. Mary Leo, Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Blessed Chavara, 1989, 1 and 2, pages 1-16.

9 Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara (CWC)* vol. III: *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 1.

3.2. Complete Obedience and Humility

Chavara surrendered to the will of God without any compromise. In his opinion, "the significant mark of a true religious is a total negation of their self-will and perfect obedience as though he had no eyes or ears of his own."[10] We see this kind of obedience manifested in his life, even when the Vicar-Apostolic transferred him contrary to his cherished desires.[11] Chavara could graciously accept adverse situations as paternal corrections. Conforming one's will to God's will, as made known through the superiors, was very much part of his consecrated and priestly life.[12]

Chavara wrote: "A devotee used to say: 'In this world, everything happens according to my wish; for, I wish only that which is willed by God.'"[13] It is not difficult to identify this devotee as Chavara, who said when asked about his wish on his sickbed:

> Do I have a will of my own? I do not desire either to go and stay there or to stay here. I am ready to do as I am told. I do not wish to do anything according to my own will. I am ready to do only what I am asked to do.[14]

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10 Chavara, *CWC* vol. IV: *The Letters* (Testaments), 70.

11 Chavara, *CWC* vol. I: *Chronicles*, 24.

12 In his colloquies with the heavenly Father, Chavara says; "remember it is God's will that is being accomplished" and "O my Lord, from now on, I resolve to die to my own will and submit myself always to your holy will. I seek not to follow anybody's will except your own." Chavara, *CWC vol. III: Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 1 and 7.

13 Chavara, *Chavarul*, 27.

14 *Chronicles of Koonammavu Convent*, vol. II, 10.

He could set a good example to the other religious as he wanted to give up his will completely. This is a perfect example of the mediation of the mystery of Christ, who "humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross" (Phil 2:8). During his illness and when he lost his eyesight, he expressed exemplary patience and perseverance.[15] Chavara had the great conviction that everything he has is given or a free gift from God and this marks a sure sign of humility. Humbly, he acknowledged that every favour he received in his life was from the infinite mercy of God, who poured gifts on an ungrateful soul.[16]

There is a special rhythm to the paschal mystery. It is the rhythm of nature, like the setting and rising of the sun, dying and rising with Jesus Christ. One dies to one's self by forgiving, accepting faults, tolerating humiliation, and surrendering one's plan to God's will. It includes trusting God in each step of one's life, showing faith in the providing God. Like the grain of wheat (Jn 12:24), Chavara died to his own will and so could bear much fruit for the Church.

4. Spreading of Divine Wisdom through Liturgy

Chavara was a man who integrated the paschal mystery into his life, gained deep experiential knowledge of it and became a model for the people of his Church to accomplish this

15 The sisters wrote: "He suffered all the above mentioned diseases with great patience and resignation for three months. But one thing that surprised people was this. When people lose their eye-sight normally people become irritated and very sorrowful. But this was not seen in our *Priorachan*. He was always pleasant with a smile on his face. Looking at his face, no one would understand that he was suffering much. On the other hand, he looked joyful." *Chronicles of Koonammavu Convent*, vol. II, 11.

16 Chavara, *CWC* vol. II: *Ātmānutāpam*, II, 60.

salvation mystery in their own lives. Liturgy could also be seen as the ascending action of the Church with praise and thanks or an answer to the saving action of God, who descended mercifully to her. Liturgy is a meeting between God and humankind, and the meeting point is Christ. Still, it is not a face-to-face meeting with the Father, but a meeting under the veil of signs.[17] The Eucharist is the sacramental re-enactment of Christ's all-sufficient atoning sacrifice. However, its perennial efficacy is independent of the dispositions of the faithful, but its full impact on the persons and its power to transform lives depends on the degree of personal involvement. That necessitates liturgical catechesis.

4.1. Liturgy as the Space for Pedagogy of Faith

In Chauvet's words, liturgy is the "symbolic space" par excellence, which fulfils a powerful and indispensable role in developing "a pedagogy of the faith."[18] For lively liturgies, burning faith is necessary. It is the word of God that makes hearts burn with the love of God. Liturgical catechesis takes place within a celebration of the word.[19] Chavara longed to bring renewal in the Christian life of the faithful and, soon after

17 Ambrosius Verheul, *Introduction to Liturgy: Towards a Theology of Worship*, Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1968, 19.

18 *Louis-Marie Chauvet, Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*, trans. Patrick Madigan and Madeleine Beaumont, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995, 189.

19 International Commission on English in the Liturgy, *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1988, Nos. 85–89.

his ordination, started to preach homilies during liturgical celebrations.[20] Fr Leopold writes,

> The young priest preached sermons in many churches, at a time when preaching was very rare and performed many other pastoral services with great zeal. During his time he preached a retreat in the parish of Pulinkunnu at the request of the parishioners. Those who participated in the retreat were moved by it, and derived great spiritual benefit, as is testified by many who still retain fresh memories about it.[21]

Chavara's enthusiasm for the salvation of souls is clear in his conducting a retreat at Thekke Angadi, which is the filial church of Pulinkunnu.[22] Chavara also initiated retreat preaching in parishes on an annual basis, which was later followed by the members of his congregation. Chavara was aware of the power of the living and dynamic word of God which animates and activates the Church as a worshipping community.[23] Preaching the word of God in the liturgy as homilies helped Chavara to lead the people to the truth of the gospel and it was a pioneering step in the history of the Church of Kerala.

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20 In the chronicles of Mannanam monastery we see, "In the new chapel, here at Mannanam, Mass had to be said on Sundays, and High Masses with preaching on feast days and this could not be let off." Chavara, *CWC* vol. 1: *The Chronicles*, 22.

21 Leopold Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Original Malayalam in 1871. Trans. Lucas Vithuvattical, Mannanam: Saint Joseph's Monastery, 2003, 6.

22 Chavara, *CWC* vol. 1: *The Chronicles*, 22.

23 "Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart"(Heb 4:12).

Chavara could proclaim the bible from the pulpit with vigour and guide the Christian life of the faithful. Being a powerful and effective preacher known as the "lion of the pulpit," he could instruct the faithful during liturgical celebrations. Slowly, the Sunday liturgical gatherings became the ideal places for religious and social instruction.

Chavara was a visionary who recognized the power of homilies in catechesis and introduced it in the Church of Kerala. *CT* 48 elucidates that the homily takes up the journey of faith put forward by catechesis, and brings it to its natural fulfilment. Pope John Paul teaches that,

> The catechetical teaching finds its source and its fulfilment in the Eucharist, within the whole circle of the liturgical year. Preaching, centred upon the Bible texts, must then in its own way make it possible to familiarize the faithful with the whole of the mysteries of the faith and with the norms of Christian living.[24]

4.2. Cultivating Holiness

Chavara participated in the mystery of salvation by dying to himself and to self-will and by glorifying God in his body with holiness. He paved the way for others and prepared them for this participation by setting an example through his life and heroic apostolic works. The Second Vatican Council teaches that the Church is the body of Christ (*LG* §7).

Liturgy is defined by Pope Pius XII as "whole public worship of the mystical Body of Jesus Christ, Head, and members."[25] It is in Christ that the Church offers praise and worship to God. He is the meeting point of God and humanity.

24 *CT* §48.

25 Pope Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis Christi* (25 June 1943), § 20.

It is his incarnated and risen body that mediates temporality and eternity. The body of Christ provides the context for true and real worship. He has united all in his body.[26] The most acceptable sacrifice to God is the sacrifice of His only begotten Son, and the whole Church joins in this once and forever sacrifice in each liturgical celebration. Chavara held this wisdom about the mystery of the Church in his mind, which was later taught explicitly in the constitution of Vatican II.[27]

St Paul urges us to offer our bodies as a true living sacrifice, which is pure and pleasing to God (Rom 12:1-2). Elsewhere, the apostle clarifies that human bodies are the temple of God where the Holy Spirit dwells (1 Cor 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16). Consequently, we may conclude that holiness in the body and mind of human beings is the most perfect worship presented to God. In this way, Chavara offered his own body and life as a fragrant oblation pleasing to God as he testified on his deathbed.[28] Chavara also taught families to respect our human body, which is the temple of God. He wrote: "Be exceedingly careful to be chaste and modest in all your postures, whether sitting or walking, lying or playing.

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26 "But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive *together with Christ* – by grace you have been saved – and raised us up *with him* and seated us *with him* in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us *in Christ Jesus*" (Eph 2:4-7) [emphasis added].

27 *LG* §32 and §7.

28 "By the Grace of God and help of the Holy Family baptismal grace I could preserve the purity throughout my life." Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Blessed Chavara*, 17; C.D. Valerian, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Cochin: K.C.M. Press, 1986, 37-38.

Immodesty is reprehensible both before God and the world."[29] He was very diligent in keeping and growing in the holiness of mind and body. He worshipped God not only in his body with holiness but also in the community of believers, which is the mystical body of Christ.

4.3. Building up the Church

Liturgical celebration is ecclesial in nature and it is the celebration of relationships: relationship to God and to one another in Christ through the Spirit. The liturgy celebrated by the Church community here on earth is a prophetic sign and image of the heavenly Church. The liturgy constitutes the Church and the Eucharist has a community-forming power.[30] It is the word of God that calls all people together and keeps them together in the *ecclesia*. Thus, they grow together in the unity of faith and build up the Church. In the liturgy, the Church realises the fullness of her inner being and becomes intensely conscious of her calling.

Chavara wanted to glorify God and build up the Church by cultivating virtuous lives. In order to remind the people of God about holiness and help them to grow in it, Chavara dreamt of and later established abodes of holiness for men and women in the form of religious orders. The aim of founding a women's religious congregation was threefold – personal

29 Chavara, *Chavarul*, 26. He also asked parents: "Don't let your children move around naked even inside the house." Chavara, *Chavarul*, 35.

30 Pope John Paul II asserts that "the Eucharist builds the Church and the Church makes the Eucharist." Encyclical Letter (17 April 2003) "Ecclesia de Eucharistia," §26. Available at https://www. vatican.va/holy_father/special_features/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_20030417_ecclesia_eucharistia_en.html [accessed 22 June 2020].

sanctification, the salvation of souls, which means holiness of others, and the integral growth of women and children. To offer true worship through holy lives, Chavara urged the members of the Church to attain perfection of love in their lives. He shared the pioneering inspiration of his teachers in setting up a religious community for men. He could give shape to the life and activities of a religious community, its identity, and charism.[31] His motive behind the foundation of the religious community is clear in the following statement: "It is necessary that in this territory, there are persons who are continuously engaged in prayer and good works for the greater glory of God and the edification of the Church."[32] His greatest pain was the absence of canonised saints among the Malabar Church Christians, who had been following Christ from the very first century. 1 Pet 2:5 mentions pleasing sacrifices offered to God through Christ Jesus by the holy priestly people. This is done by building up the Church as a spiritual home using the living stones, which are the members of the Church. The respect for human beings in the image and likeness of God made Chavara restore the dignity of the marginalised and the poor in the society of his time.

4.4. Orienting the Faithful to Heaven

Worship of God is not confined to a space or a few regulations. The Church participates in the heavenly worship, where angels and saints join the earthly beings in the worship of God, the Father, with Christ, the Son. Chavara had a profound belief

31 Kuriakose Elias Chavara, a Carmelite religious priest founded the indigenous religious congregation for men, namely CMI (Carmelites of Mary Immaculate), in collaboration with Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara in 1831.

32 Mathias A Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 2nd Edition, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2020, 72.

about this dimension of the Church's worship. For example, he advised the members of the first convent about the recitation of the canonical prayers (the Liturgy of the Hours) as follows:

> When you go to recite canon prayers, you have to keep in mind that all the angels and saints of heaven, all the holy souls on earth, and all the guardian angels of the sisters in the prayer room praise the Lord. You should join your voices with theirs and praise Him.[33]

On the earth, we have a foretaste of the eschaton during the liturgical celebration. Chavara had a profound eschatological vision about life and wanted to join the wedding banquet of the lamb of God. He recalls the parable in the gospel where the king's invitee was found without a wedding garment. Chavara was always very vigilant in keeping the robe of holiness received in baptism very clean with him. Chavara says that the "gift of contemplation is the wedding cloth," which Jesus refers to in the parable of the wedding banquet of the king and it is given freely to all who ask for it.[34] Chavara kept his white robe of holiness washed in pure tears of deep contrition. He exhorted his fellow beings to protect this white robe of the holy life. Chavara was sure that good examples and zealous leaders could guide a large group on the right path toward the participation of the heavenly banquet. Participation in the earthly liturgy, being the foretaste of the heavenly liturgy, nurtures the hope of the faithful in life after death.

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33 The convent mentioned here is the Koonammavu convent of TOCD Sisters (now CMC) founded by Chavara and Leopold Beccaro. More about its establishment is found in later chapters. *Chronicles of Koonammavu Convent*, vol. I, 77.

34 Mt 22:1-14; Chavara, *CWC* vol. III: *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 1.

5. Preparation Towards Mystagogical Catechesis

Liturgical catechesis is mystagogical[35] and so it is sacramental. It aims to initiate people into the mystery of Christ "by proceeding from the visible to the invisible, from the sign to the signified, from the sacrament to the mysteries."[36] The salvation of humanity achieved by the paschal mystery of Christ is received through the sacraments and liturgical celebrations of the Church. This demands full, active, and conscious participation (*SC* §14) in the mystery of salvation.[37] Full, that is complete, and perfect worship happens only in the totality of the mystical body of Christ. It occurs when the body of Christ is whole. It must be dynamic with each member free enough to grow and enjoy equal status. Participation leads to mediation and it requires correct knowledge of what is happening in the liturgy. It necessitates a freedom that comes from the knowledge of the truth.

5.1. United, Complete and Inclusive

A prerequisite condition for one's participation in the salvation mystery is one's incorporation into the body of Christ. Liturgy produces the desired fruits only when the whole body worships God in Spirit and Truth. Also, there should be unity among the members of the body. It is to this unity, with Jesus as the head of the body, that all Christians are invited. To achieve the goal of perfect and real worship, Chavara wanted to make

35 The Greek word has the meaning 'to lead through the mysteries.'

36 Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Revised ed., London: Chapman, 1999, no 1075.

37 SC repeats its call for active and full participation and there are twenty instances in the document where the call for quality participation in the liturgy is explicitly mentioned. See SC §§ 11, 14, 17, 18, 19, 21, 27, 30, 41, 48, 49, 50, 59, 79, 90, 113, 114, 118, and 121.

the Malabar Church integral, inclusive, and comprehensive in nature. To this end, he fought to eradicate the different strata that existed in his community. He endeavoured to make each member of the Church full and complete with the integration of body, mind, and soul ready for the worship of God.

The long-cherished dream of Chavara, who dedicated his whole life to the service of the Church, was to bring unity and prosperity to the Church of Kerala. He believed that the people of God form a single body of Christ and so everyone should join in His mystical body to offer real worship to God. Since every part of this body is significant, he respected even the least ones among his fellow beings and strived to make them recognise their own dignity as the children of God and an integral part of Christ's body. In Galatians, we read: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). This unity or communion with Jesus forms a very delightful oblation for God, the Father. With this unifying vision of humanity, as a family or one sheepfold or one body, Chavara toiled to uplift and emancipate the marginalised members of his Church community and secular society at large. This is clear from his efforts for the education and edification of low-caste people and women.

Chavara struggled to bring all his siblings home, who were still running after the pods of pig's food. He tried to remind them of the festivity and richness in the Father's house by enlightening their minds. In the Testament of Chavara to his parishioners, he writes about his vision of family as a miniature of heaven. He quotes Mark 3:24-25: "If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand." God calls for reconciliation (Is 1:18), and, as a sacrament of

unity on earth, the Church is struggling to attain unity within and communion with God through perfect worship.

5.2. Dynamic and Living

If the members of the body are slaves of evil and live in sinful conditions, the active worship of the Church is not possible. True worship happens in the mystical body of Christ and it brings salvation to humanity. To achieve freedom in worship, liberation from Egypt, the land of slavery, is necessary. The people of Kerala were slaves to the ignorance and injustice of the caste system at the time of Chavara. As a new Moses for the people of Kerala, Chavara led them out of slavery to the mountain of divine presence for the true worship of the real God. To ensure dynamic participation in the paschal mystery, which affects the identity of the community, Chavara took daring steps.

CT 54 says about popular devotions that "Underlying most of these prayers and practices in popular devotion, there are other elements which could serve very well to help people advance towards knowledge of the mystery of Christ and of His message." St. Chavara promoted some special devotions in order to help the faithful grow in the knowledge and experience of the mystery of Christ. He popularised the forty hours of adoration of the Eucharist in Kerala.[38] Later, it quickly spread to other parishes. He promoted daily participation in

38 It was Pope Clement VIII who issued a historic document named *Quarant' Ore* (forty hours) on the forty hours continual prayer before the exposed Blessed Sacrament in 1592. For a history of this devotion, John A Hardon, *The History of Eucharistic Adoration: Development of Doctrine in the Catholic Church*, Oak Lawn: CMJ Publishers, 1997, 10. Though introduced by Bishop Roz after the Synod of Diamper, Chavara popularised this devotion in the Malabar Church. John Moolan, *The Period of Annunciation-Nativity*

the holy *Qurbana* among families and among the faithful. He advises in his testament of a good father:

> As much as possible, participate daily in the holy Mass. If it is difficult, take part in the Masses on Mondays for the souls in purgatory, on Fridays in commemoration of the passion and death of the Lord, and on Saturdays in devotion to our Lady of Sorrows. If all members of a family cannot attend daily Mass together, let them take turns, ensuring that one or two attend Mass every day.[39]

He also gave due attention to the sacrament of reconciliation. He had a contrite heart that is clear in his 'Act of Contrition'[40], 'Reflections on Mortal Sin'[41] and 'The Work of Two Priests'.[42] He advised families to prepare children for confession at the age of seven[43] and insisted that they receive the sacrament of reconciliation at least once per month.[44] Chavara and the religious priests of *Koventa* were known as retreat preachers and confessors. Catechesis, which is growth in faith and the maturing of Christian life towards its fullness, was the objective of all these efforts of Chavara.

5.3. Freed by True Knowledge

Worship is not a mere collection of liturgical actions or ceremonies but is, at its core, perfect love from a heart directed

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in the East Syrian Calendar: Its Background and Place in the Liturgical Year, Kottayam: OIRSI, 1985, 4.

39 Chavara, *Chavarul*, 25.

40 Chavara, *CWC* vol. III, 18.

41 Chavara, *CWC* vol. III, 57.

42 Chavara, *CWC* vol. III, 60.

43 Chavara, *Chavarul,* 25.

44 Chavara, *Chavarul*, 36.

by the Spirit and illuminated by the true knowledge of God. Worship must be properly informed, otherwise, it will be reduced to emotional exercise and superficial acts. Chavara realised that "the lack of monasteries and convents cause the failure of many virtues and so, there should be a house of vision at least for the ordained."[45] Fr Leopold underscores that Chavara had a zealous mind "which directed all of his existence to the one thing which is essential, the salvation of souls"[46] Chavara's great wish was the formation of saints in the Kerala Church, and he was ready to co-operate with anyone for the good of human beings. Chavara was a true disciple of Jesus and one taught by the Father and Holy Spirit to perform true and real worship. No doubt, he was known as one with the signature of the Holy Spirit in his heart, as witnessed by his contemporaries.[47] He desired to impart real wisdom, which he received directly from God, to his fellow beings and to bring them to the true worship of God. Worship of God without actual knowledge will end up in sensitive experience alone and, without spirit, can result in a form of mere legalism. After gaining genuine knowledge of God, one can render true worship to Him and glorify Him through a life of worship. An in-depth understanding of truth alone can direct the emotions and hearts of humans and thus lead them to actual and worthy worship.

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45 Chavara, *CWC* vol I: *The Chronicles*, 1.

46 Lucas Vittuvattical, *Perspectives of a heroic Christian life*, Mannanam: K.E.C. Publications, 1988, 28 and 18.

47 We see this expression 'one filled by the Holy Spirit' for the first time in a comment of Mathew Kurian Madathikunnel from Muttuchira. See, in this regard, John Romeo Pattassery, *Vazhthappetta Chavarayachan Vyakthiyum Veeshanavum* (Malayalam). vol. 1, Alwaye: Chavara books and Publications, 1989, 146-147.

6. Being and Becoming the Mystery

Liturgy is experiential and liturgical catechesis opens up and brings to awareness what is known intuitively. The most prominent way of participating in the mystery of salvation is the liturgy of the Church. In liturgy, the redemption of humanity is celebrated. To experience and engage with the mysteries, a deep conviction of faith in Christ's mystery and in the mystery of the Church is essential. Unless one is aware of the mystery of Christ and the economy of salvation through Christ, it would be impossible to meet God in the liturgy. Chavara was a man of prayer. He lived the faith that is celebrated and explained in the liturgy of the Malabar Church. Thus he could impart the right teaching for the Church. His holy being was the end product of his liturgical life. He could live out what he believed and celebrated in the liturgy. Thus, he displayed the right living, which is *lex vivendi,* the third operational principle of the liturgy.[48] He tried to bring all his fellow beings into that fulfilment through his ministries of diverse nature. In his writings, he expressed what he experienced and believed. He lived what he experienced and believed in the liturgy. He shared his wisdom through his acts for the good of others, especially for developing their faith. All saints are lived models of the paschal mystery. The exemplary imitation of Christ by Chavara motivates believers to practise the virtues of this saint and live according to gospel values. Thus he could be aptly called an exemplary liturgical catechist.

48 Kevin W. Irwin, *Context and Text: A Method for Liturgical Theology,* Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1994 & 2018, 81.

FAMILY CATECHESIS IN THE *CHAVARUL*

Ann Mary Madavanakkad CMC

1. Introduction

According to Vatican II, "family is the first and vital cell of society."[1] Pope John Paul II says, "the strength and vitality of any country will only be as great as the strength and vitality of the family within that country. No group has a greater impact on a country than the family. No group has a more influential role in the future of the world."[2] The mutual love, union of mind and heart, and fidelity of a couple offer stability and hope to a world torn by hatred and division. By their lifelong perseverance in lifegiving love Catholic couples show the unbreakable and sacred character of the sacramental marriage and promote the dignity and worth of human life.

Today, families are at crossroads due to rapid changes. The ethical issues in contemporary families are complex and multifaceted, as they are often shaped by evolving societal norms, technology, and cultural changes. According to Pope Francis, contemporary society, with the explosion of the media and globalization, has made itself vulnerable to various vices and their consequences. As a result, the role of the family in building up a just, emotionally stable, and healthy society has gained attention and is a topic of concern for people of all religious backgrounds. The metaphor of "domestic church" stands as one of the sources of renewal for a Christian theology of family. St Kuriakose Elias Chavara, a visionary saint of the 19th century Kerala, was a promoter of the family values

1 Vatican II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 11 (*AAS* 58: 848).

2 John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 42 (*AAS* 74: 134).

and tried to impart an ethical vison helpful for the families through his "*Chavarul.*"[3]

Family catechesis has the potential to transform not only individual families but also the entire faith communities. When families actively engage in their faith together, they become witnesses to the power of God's love in their lives. The impact ripples out into the society as the families rooted in faith bring about positive change, foster moral values, and contribute to the building of a just and compassionate world. As part of his family catechesis, Chavara proposes an emphatic definition on family in the *Chavarul* which includes various aspects that are inevitable to make a family as the image of heaven. This definition highlights the purposes of family such as, the unity of the family members, the love and affection shared by parents and between parents and children, the respect and obedience the children should have towards their parents, the harmony they should uphold with God and the people, and their duty to seek eternal salvation of all. To set the context for the discussion, first we look into the challenges and prospects that the families face currently and the relevance of Chavara's definition of the family in the present socio-cultural context.

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3 *Oru Nalla Apante Chavarul* (Malayalam) or "The Testament of a Good Father," or *Chavarul* was written by Kuriakose Elias Chavara of the Holy Family (1805–1871), on 13 February 1868 to his native parishioners at Kainakary. He was an ardent devotee of the Holy Family and the founder of the CMI and CMC Congregations. *Chavarul* gives concrete suggestions and proposals regarding how to lead a good Christian family life in the context of Kerala society. It was published in English in 1910 under the title "Testament of a Good Father." The title *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul* though not formally given to the letter by the author himself, affirms that this letter should be accepted as coming from a loving father, as his Testament. See Leo, trans., *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara,* Vol, IV*: The Letters*.

2. Theology of Marriage and Family

The theology of marriage and family evolved over the centuries from the time of the Fathers of the Church to later theological development and the magisterium. Ephrem (306–373 ACE) exalts the intimate relationship of the first couple.[4] Following St Paul, John Chrysostom gives instruction to the parents and the children. He exhorts, the husband should respect wife and *vice versa*. He says, "as the partner of one's life, the mother of one's children, the foundation of one's every joy, one ought never to chain down by fear and menaces, but with love and good temper. For, what sort of union is that, where the wife trembles at her husband?"[5] Chrysostom advises the parents to discipline their children gently without provoking them.[6] Augustine teaches that marriage is good.[7] According to him, marriage is good *a priori* as it is instituted by God,[8] and it is also good *a posteriori* because of its three observable goods such as *proles* (offspring), *fides* (fidelity), and *sacramentum*

4 Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis*, Translated by Edward G. Mathews and Joseph P. Amar, Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1994, 2:12.

5 John Chrysostom, "Homilies on Ephesians," Vol. 13 of *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Homilies on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, Edited by Philip Schaff, Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1994, 20.

6 John Chrysostom, "Homilies on Colossians," Edited by Philip Schaff, Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers Inc., 1994, 10.

7 John M Rist, "Saint Augustine: Virginity and Marriage–2," *The Canadian Catholic Review* 5. 2 (1987): 57–64, 57.

8 Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, Vol. 7 of *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series 1, Edited by Philip Schaff, 1886–1889, 14 Vols. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1994, 9.2.

(sacrament).[9] In Augustine's opinion, *bono fides* refers to marital faithfulness. He encourages the spouses to refrain from engaging in sexual activity outside of their marriage. *Bono proles* refers to the acceptance of a child in love, nurturing in affection, and upbringing him or her in the Christian formation.[10] In his words, "no relationship which lacked this intent could be called marriage."[11] He gave priority to *proles* than the other two.

Thomas Aquinas, one of the leading theologians of medieval period, discusses the essence of marriage. According to him, developing an intimate relationship between the couple is the essence of matrimony, and monogamous indissoluble marriage is the demand of human nature.[12] For him, their intimate and inseparable union leads to their mutual affection, by which they enter into the intimate sexual expression of their mutual love through which God blesses them with children. The responsibility of the upbringing of children is a divine assignment to the spouses, which should be accomplished with mutual help.[13] There are several prominent figures from eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, including Alphonsus

9 Augustine, *De Genesis ad litteram,* In *PL*, 34:245–486, Vol. 2 of *The Ancient Christian Writers*, Books 7–12, Edited by Johannes Quasten, Walter J. Burghardt, and Thomas Comerford Lawler, Translated by John Hammond Taylor, New York: Newman Press, 1982, 9.7.12.

10 Augustine, *De Genesis ad litteram,* 9.7.12.

11 Rist, "Augustine: Virginity and Marriage–2," 59.

12 Aquinas, *Summa Theologica: Supplementum*, New York: Benziger Brothers, 1922, q. 44, art. 2.

13 Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 3 vols, Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, New York: Benziger Brothers, Inc., 1946–1948, III, q. 29, art. 2.

Liguori and Chavara, who taught on marriage and family. Alphonsus Liguori has given comprehensive instructions on how to lead a good life which is applicable to all families.[14]

3. Family in the Context: Challenges and Prospects

Families today face a wide range of challenges that can vary depending on cultural, socio-economic, and individual factors. Economic pressure, including unemployment, low wages, and rising the cost of living, may create financial stress within families. It may further lead to conflicts, anxiety, and strained relationships. Balancing the demands of work and family life may sometimes lead to ethical dilemmas, such as deciding between career advancement and spending quality time with children. Long work hours, inflexible work schedules, and the blurring of boundaries between work and personal life due to technology can strain family relationships. Parenting is increasingly complex, with parents facing issues such as finding quality childcare, helping with remote learning, and navigating the digital world's impact on children's development and safety.

Mental health problems within the family, including anxiety, depression, and addiction have a profound impact on family dynamics and require significant support and resources. High rate of divorce and separations create emotional and financial challenges for families. Co-parenting, child custody, and maintaining healthy relationships after separation can be difficult. Caring for aging parents or relatives, known as the "sandwich generation," can be challenging, particularly

14 Alphonse De Liguori, *The Great Means of Salvation and of Perfection*, *The Ascetical Works*, vol. 3 of *The Complete Works of Saint Alphonsus De Liguori*, Edited by Eugene Grimm, Brooklyn: Redemptorist Fathers, 1927, 355–56.

when trying to balance caregiving with one's own family and career responsibilities.[15] Excessive screen time and technology use lead to issues like screen addiction, reduced family communication, and concerns about online safety. Navigating the education system, addressing learning disabilities, and ensuring access to quality education are common concerns for many families. Rising healthcare costs and concerns about access to quality healthcare put financial strain on families, particularly if they face chronic illness or unexpected medical expenses.

Looking into these factors, sometimes, we might think that family gets the least attention today. It does not mean that family had no challenges in the past. Though gravity and magnitude vary, as in our time, during the time of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara as well, family had to face several challenges. *Chavarul* continues to inspire the Church's vision of the family. Its significance must be understood in the light of Chavara's profound knowledge of the challenges that the families had to face at that time, and his fatherly concern and love for the families. It is noteworthy that his instructions and advice to the families are relevant and helpful for the present-day families, though the context is different, and the problems they face are diverse. Moreover, we may be amazed to see how the *Chavarul* reflects the modern theological insights on

15 By "sandwich generation," it means caring for individuals at both older and younger life stages. J. Bourke, *Elder Care, Self-Employed Women and Work-Family Balance*, Palmerston North: Massey University, 2009; T. Cook, *The History of the Carers' Movement*, London: Carers U. K., 2007; M. Raschick & B. Ingersoll-Dayton, "The Costs and Rewards of Caregiving Among Aging Spouses and Adult Children," *Family Relations* 53, 3 (2004): 317–325; E. P. Stoller, "Parental Caregiving by Adult Children," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 45, 4 (1983): 851–858.

the family. Thus, we may say that the *Chavarul* goes ahead of its time in many respects, though it is deeply rooted in its historical and socio-cultural context. The *Chavarul* can be called a unique document in many ways: it presents the Christian theological vision of the family and indicates various challenges and problems the families face; it offers guidelines to lead a family life rooted in love; it inspires the families to be nourished by prayer and spiritual practices.

4. An Overview of the *Chavarul* and the Family Catechesis Envisioned by Chavara

The present article focuses on the *Chavarul* of Kuriakose Elias Chavara, his teachings on marriage and family are studied in detail. It consists of spiritual instructions, theological visions, moral principles, psychological insights, social norms, corrective measures, and practical suggestions for the sound growth and development of the family toward its original vision in the plan of God—"the image of heaven."[16] Exhortations to Christian families are presented in the form of family catechesis embedded in the Word of God, as well as a practical interpretation of the Ten Commandments on how to live the family life as envisaged by God the Father. The following paragraphs deal with an overview of the *Chavarul* and discuss the definition of family given in the *Chavarul*.

4.1. An Overview of the *Chavarul*

Kuriakose Elias Chavara had written many letters to different groups of people including the ecclesiastical authorities,

16 *Complete Works of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, vol. 4: *The Letters*, translated by Augustine Keemattam, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2020, "Introduction," 184. Hereafter it is referred as *Chavarul*.

priests, sisters, families, and individuals. Among them, eighty-eight letters are available, of which one is known as *Chavarul*. The *Chavarul* is one of the most significant contributions of Chavara to the family. It contains a set of guidelines based on the Christian concept of the family as well as practical wisdom that mirrored the vision he had for a truly happy, peaceful, and blessed family life. The *Chavarul*—a catechetical text—contains forty precious instructions addressed to the parishioners of Kainakary. It remains as a relic of the sacred memories of the saintly life of Chavara. It comprises an introduction and the main body of forty instructions in two parts. Twenty-four precepts in the first part discuss the characteristics and mode of conduct of a good family, while sixteen precepts in the second part are solely dedicated to the spiritually balanced and morally healthy upbringing of children. Although there is no proper conclusion, an appendix serves that purpose.

In the introduction, Chavara gives a brief description of the Christian family, and in the appendix, he notes that he was impelled by a sense of justice and love to his relatives by flesh and entrusted this work to them, saying, "this is my last testament [Will or *Kudumbachattam* or family code] given to you"[17] and "this script will not perish even when I am dead and gone."[18] Chavara instructs them that this family code should be read every first Saturday of the month.[19] Here the author makes reference to his death, though not imminent, and describes the letter as the 'Testament.' A majority of the

17 *Complete Works of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, vol. 4: *The Letters*, translated by Augustine Keemattam, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2020 [hereafter used as *Chavarul*], "Epilogue," 201–202.

18 *Chavarul*, "Epilogue," 201.

19 *Chavarul*, "Epilogue," 202.

forty exhortations are elaborated with a good number of didactic stories, allegories, historical episodes, and biblical events or words.[20]

Chavara believed a family that functions according to its original vision must strive to be impeccable. The original divine plan for marriage and family is clearly outlined in the creation account of Genesis. We understand God's purpose of marriage as one of companionship, marital union, indissolubility, and procreation (Gen 1:27–28; 2:23–24).[21] Taken up by this biblical understanding of family, Chavara took a keen interest in developing healthy relationships in families and penned down the *Chavarul*. It is unique and notable for being a treatise on family, issued by an ecclesiastical leader,[22] directly addressing Christians for the upbuilding of God-fearing families and the upbringing of children.

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20 Benny Nalkara, "The Guidelines for the Formation of the Youth as Reflected in the *Chavarul* (*Testament of a Loving Father*) by St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara," *Vinayasādhana* 9. 2 (2018): 35–42, 35.

21 Patrick Mathias, "No to Divorce (Mt 19:3–9): An Exegetico-Theological Perusal," Pages 33–58 in *Marriage and Family at the Crossroads*, Edited by Patrick Mathias, Chennai: Don Bosco Publications, 2017, 35.

22 On June 8,1861, the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly, Msgr. Bernardino Baccinelli, appointed Chavara as the Vicar General for the St. Thomas Christians, and he continued in this office until his death in 1871. See A. Mathias Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications & Chavara Central Secretariat, 2020, 224–26; Mathias Mundadan, *Indian Christians: Search for Identity and Struggle for Autonomy*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2003, 81. During the time of Chavara, there was no appointed bishop for the Syro-Malabar Church.

4.2. Family Catechesis Envisioned by Chavara

The term catechism is derived from the Greek word "*katecheo*," meaning "to instruct" or "to teach."[23] It refers to the systematic and intentional process of educating individuals about the beliefs, doctrines, rituals, and moral principles of a particular faith tradition. The origins of catechesis can be traced back to the early days of Christianity when the disciples were instructed in the teachings of Jesus Christ. The practice evolved over centuries as the need for a structured approach to religious education. The primary objective of catechesis is to provide individuals with a solid foundation in their faith, enabling them to understand and articulate their beliefs effectively. Catechetics seeks to deepen spiritual awareness, foster moral development, and encourage active participation in religious practices.

In the introduction of the *Chavarul*, Chavara gives a sound definition of a Christian family involving its social, spiritual, and interpersonal dimensions. According to Chavara, "A good Christian family is the image of heaven. The raison d'être of a family is that the members live together by the bond of blood and affection, with children duly respecting and obeying their parents, walking peacefully before God and each one, seeking eternal salvation according to his or her proper state of life."[24]

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23 *Katecheo* means to teach orally, to instruct. https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/kjv/katecheo.html, Accessed on 25.09.2023.

24 *Chavarul*, "Introduction," 184. *Chavarayachante Sampoorna Kruthikal*, Vol. 4: *Kathukal* (Mal.), 133. Nalla Kristyānikudumbam ākāsmōkshathinte sādrisyamākunnu. Kudumbathinte nyāyam enthennāl chōrayālum, snēhathālum thammilthammil kettapetta pala ālukal kāranavanmārude nēre āchāravum kēzhvazhakavum anusarichu thampurānōdum manusyarōdum samādhānamāyi nadakayum, avaravarude anthasinu thakathinvannam

This definition of family, which is condensed into six clauses, contains the core of Chavara's family catechesis.

4.2.1. A Good Christian Family is the Image of Heaven

The divine dimension of the family is stressed in presenting it an "image of heaven."[25] This statement underscores Chavara's emphasis on the family as a reflection of the Triune God's nature as a communion of love. The Holy Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—exists in a perfect communion of love. By calling "family is the image of heaven,"[26] Chavara highlights the idea that the love and unity found within a family mirror the divine love and unity within the Holy Trinity. In this context, the family is seen as a sacred institution where love, mutual support, respect, obedience, and selflessness are ideally practiced, echoing the love that exists within the divine community of the Holy Trinity. The family resembles heaven when its members are intimately related to each other and are ready to fulfil their responsibilities with respect and loving service to each other.[27]

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nithyagathiye prāpikunnathinu prayatnam cheythu kūtamayi jeevikukayum cheyyunnathākunnu. *Chavarayachante Sampoorna Kruthikal*, Vol. 4: *Kathukal* (Mal.), 133. Hereafter *Chavarayachante Sampoorna Kruthikal* is referred to as *CSK*.

25 *Chavarul*, "*Introduction*," 184; *CSK*, Vol. 4: *Kathukal* (Mal.), "Introduction," 133; Mampra, "*Chāvarul* of Chavara: A Precious Gift to Families," 10.

26 *Chavarul*, "Introduction," 184. *Chavarayachante Sampoorna Kruthikal*, Vol. 4: *Kathukal* (Mal.), 133.

27 Thomas Mampra, "*Chavarul* of Chavara: A Precious Gift to Families," *Vinayasadhana* 9. 2 (2018): 7–13, 10.

Chavara believed that the family is the *sanctum sanctorum* of society.[28] This perspective reinforces the significance of family life within the Catholic teaching and underscores the importance of nurturing and supporting the families the Church and society. His definition of the ideal family is based on this theological vision of the family. For him, God is the Father of the family of humankind.[29] In the spiritual family of Chavara, the mother's place was taken by the Blessed Virgin Mary, to whom his earthly mother had dedicated him[30] and the entire humankind as his own brothers, sisters, and children.[31] Thus, a Christian family is envisioned to be a kingdom where Christ reigns supreme—for Jesus has come to take us into the family of God (Jn 14:1–3). He gives us a share in the sublime communion of the Trinity. We are called to be in communion with God and one another in imitation of the communion of the Divine persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Jn 17:11–21). This active and dynamic communion is seen in its deeper

28 Latin word *sanctum sanctorum* refers to 'holy of holies.' See Ann Elizabeth, "Chavara: Visionary and Karmayogi of Families," *Herald of the East* 10. 1 (2014): 119–32, 124.

29 *CWC*, Vol. 3: *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, Edited by J. Chirayil and George H. Ambooken, Translated by Jose Chittilappilly, Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Bl. Chavara, 1990, 9–12. "Father, I did sin against your goodness. Punish me as you will. The love of my corrupt body was instrumental in disfiguring your whole body." *CWC*, Vol. 3: *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 11. Here, Chavara calls Jesus as Father.

30 *CWC*, Vol. 2: *Compunction of the Soul, Dirge, Anastasia's Martyrdom*, Translated by Mary Leo, Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Bl. Chavara, 1989, 4–8, 6. See also Thomas Kochumuttam, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, (Theological Studies on Saint Chavara - 1), Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2017, 390–93.

31 Kochumuttam, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 396.

sense in the Holy Family.[32] Chavara, on his deathbed, looking at the picture of the Holy Family, confessed,

> Throughout my lifetime I have spent the life in this Holy Family. I have put on the name Kuriakose of the Holy Family for this memory. My devout parents made me remember the great family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, and I have always seen it in my heart, remembered it, and venerated it. Because, their grace has always protected me, I could, by the divine grace, dare to say that I have not lost the baptismal innocence."[33]

Vatican II exhorts that God's eternal plan (Eph 1:3–13) for all men and women is their participation and sharing in the divine life (Jn 1:3; 2 Pet 1:4). The Father summons people to realize this plan in union with their fellow human beings to form the wider family of the People of God.[34] The mutual love between the couples that results in procreation explicitly portrays a true and living image of God, the Creator and Saviour.[35] This fruitful love which represents God's inner life helps us to understand and describe the mystery of God himself; for in the Christian vision of the Trinity, God is

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32 Sebastian Athappilly, *Christian Images of Salvation*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2016, 33.

33 *Positio Super Introductione Cause et Super Virtutibus ex Officio Concinnata* (Cause of St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara), Vatican: 1977, 548; C. D. Valerian, *Malankara Sabhā Māthāvinte Oru Vēra Santhānam*, (*A Heroic Son of the Malabar Church*) or *Vannya Divya Sree Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan* (*Reverend Fr. Chavara Kuriakose Elias*), Mannanam: St. Joseph's Press, 1939, 315; Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 349.

34 Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 9 (*AAS* 57:12–14).

35 Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 11 (*AAS* 108: 315).

contemplated as Father, Son, and Spirit of love.[36] Pope Francis' insights on the Trinity and family give us the same idea: "The Triune God is a communion of love, and the family is its living reflection."[37] In this respect, with a gaze of faith and love, grace and fidelity, we need to contemplate the relationship between human families and the Holy Trinity. Pope John Paul II sheds light on this when he said, "our God in his deepest mystery is not solitude, but a family, for he has within Himself fatherhood, sonship, and the essence of the family, which is love. That love in the divine family, is the Holy Spirit."[38] The family is thus related to God's very being;[39] His presence in the family makes it an image of the Holy Trinity in the world.

A Christian family is blessed by sacramental grace, and it is because of this sacramental grace that the family becomes a witness of the presence of the mystery of the Trinity. The dynamism of love between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the source of the love and communion within family life.[40] Thus, this Trinitarian dimension, which is found in the Pauline theology of family, expresses the mutual love between

36 Michael J. Himes and Kenneth R. Himes, "Rights, Economics, and the Trinity," *Commonweal* 113 (1986): 137–41, 139; Richard M. Gula, *Reason Informed by Faith: Foundations of Catholic Morality*, New York: Paulist Press, 1989, 65.

37 Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 11 (*AAS* 108: 315).

38 John Paul II, *Homily at the Eucharistic Celebration in Puebla de los Ángeles*, *AAS* 71 (1979): 184.

39 John Paul II, *Homily at the Eucharistic Celebration in Puebla de los Ángeles*, *AAS* 71 (1979): 184.

40 Antony Chundelikkat, "Sacrament of Marriage and Family as Domestic Church," *Indian Journal of Family Studies* 5. 1 (2007): 38–57, 54.

the couples as the "mystery" of the union of Christ and the Church (Eph 5:21–33).[41] Pope Francis says,

> The Word of God tells us that the family is entrusted to a man, a woman, and their children, so that they become a communion of persons in the image of the union of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit…The family is called to join in daily prayer, to read the Word of God and to share in Eucharistic communion, and thus to grow in love and become ever more fully a temple in which the Spirit dwells.[42]

This same aspect of the Trinitarian family is reflected in Chavara's definition of family in the *Chavarul*. It invites the families to witness heaven in their lives by growing in love, compassion, and human virtues to find fulfilment and self-actualization.[43] It recommends that the families reflect on God's creative work by praying together, meditating on His Word, and sharing in the Eucharistic communion to nourish the family bond. This in turn will enable the families to serve as the temples where the Holy Spirit makes His dwelling place. The Spirit transforms it into an ever more authentic image of the Holy Family of Nazareth, directing everyone in the world evangelistically towards Jesus. In this way, the family becomes a true and living image of heaven.

4.2.2. Unity of Mind and Heart

In the definition of family in the *Chavarul*, Chavara exhorts "that the members live together"[44]— *"kūtamāyi jēvikukayum*

41 Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 11 (*AAS* 108: 315).

42 Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 29 (*AAS* 108: 321).

43 *Chavarul*, I:1, 185.

44 *Chavarul*, "Introduction," 184.

cheyyunnathākunnu."[45] He focused his attention on the fact that the supreme rule of the Christian family is mutual love and the consequent unity of mind and heart. When we reflect on unity based on biblical texts, the Yahwistic account of creation (Gen 2:24b–25) clearly affirms that the union of man and woman as husband and wife is the basis for any human family. The Priestly account of God creating man and woman equally in his own image and likeness (Gen 1:27) entails the purpose that they live in harmony as husband and wife, by respecting their equality and celebrating their differences. Every marriage needs to be centred on this reality of communion and companionship. The first man Adam gazed at the first woman and said, "This, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen 2:23). This physical commonality is the reason for which the Scripture says, "a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Gen 2:24). Firstly, becoming one flesh points out clearly God's purpose of marriage, namely the union of a man and a woman as husband and wife, as ordained by God Himself.[46] Secondly, the aspect of procreation and the continuation of human race is an important part of marriage. After the creation of man and woman, God blessed them saying, "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (Gen 1:28). This is yet another purpose for which God has ordained marriage right at the beginning of creation itself. Thirdly, the creation of the woman from man's ribs (Gen 2:21-23) is a symbolic gesture, which reveals the intimate relationship between man and woman and their union. Man and woman are made for each

45 *Chavarul*, "Introduction," 184. The word unity is not mentioned in the English translation. But it is cited in the original Malayalam version. *CSK*, Vol. 4: *Kathukal* (Mal.), 9/6, "Introduction," 133.

46 Mathias, "No to Divorce (Mt 19:3–9)," 35.

other.[47] Since marriage is originally designed by God, it is intended to be heterosexual and monogamous.[48]

When Chavara focused on the need to have the union of heart and mind, he wished to emphasize the union of the spouses and the intimate relationship between the parents and the children in the family life as one of its most important virtues. Chavara's special devotion to the Holy Family led him to understand the secrets of unity in the family. In the Holy Family, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph had certainly personal differences in terms of age, gender, temperament, needs, likes, and dislikes; but despite of these differences, they were perfectly united by love.[49] Chavara's focus on the requisite of living together in the union of mind and heart necessitates the union of the spouses and the intimate relationship among all the members of the family as one of its most imperative virtues.

4.2.3. Bond of Blood and Affection

The definition of family as "living together" of the members is complemented by the "bond of blood and affection": "The raison d'être of family is that the members live together by the bond of blood and affection."[50] For Chavara, family is a *koinonia* of members bound together by blood and love. This explains the importance of communion in the family; an

47 Mathias, "No to Divorce (Mt 19:3-9)," 35.

48 Kenneth O. Gangel and Stephen J. Bramer, *Genesis*, in HOTC, Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002, 30.

49 Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 54–55.

50 *Chavarul*, "Introduction," 184.

incredible and unbreakable bond created by those who are related by blood.[51]

In the context of consecrated life, Chavara has a beautiful instruction to his confreres regarding the kind of love that should exist among them. He advises them to be like the children born of the same mother. He says, "the number of monasteries be any, you must have a genuine love for one another, as if, born of the womb of the same mother, nurtured by the milk of the same mother. This should never weaken instead it should become stronger daily. Remember this as a special piece of advice."[52] It indicates the kind of love that the members should adopt in their relationship with one another. They ought to be like siblings who know how to make the happy times even better and hard times easier. Although there can be a lot of friction among them, they play a unique role in one another's lives to strengthen the bond and celebrate life. He continues, "the strength of a monastery does not consist in the thickness of its walls, but in the virtue and religious zeal of the monks who dwell in them."[53] Here, Chavara implies that the community is strengthened by the virtuous life of the

51 George Thekkekara, "Degeneration of Family and Familial Bond Today," *Encounter: A Journal of Interdisciplinary Reflections of Faith and Life* 9. 2 (2018): 69–82, 69.

52 *Complete Works of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, vol. 4, *Letters*, Translated by Augustine Keemattam, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2020, 6/5, 115. Hereafter it is referred as *CWKEC,* Vol. 4: *Letters*; *Chavarayachante Sampoorna Kruthikal*, vol. 4. *Kathukal*, Edited by Lucas Vithuvattickal, Mannanam: St. Joseph's Press, 1982, 6/3, 100. Hereafter it is referred as *CSK*, Vol. 4: *Kathukal*,

53 *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara*, vol. 4, *The Letters*, Edited by Lucas Vithuvattical and K. C. Chacko, Translated by Mary Leo, Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Bl. Chavara, 1990, 6/1, 65. Hereafter it is referred as *CWC*, vol. 4: *The Letters*.

monks lived in mutual love and communion. It is fraternal love that gives us a sense of belongingness to our community. Pertaining to this family spirit in the religious life, Chavara constantly addressed his fellow members at the monastery as "beloved brethren," "loving sons," and "sons"[54] and he addressed sisters as "my dear little children".[55]

Chavara states that the essential purpose of family is realized when the members live in union with each other by the bond of blood and affection.[56] The family originates in marriage, which is not a mere external union of two persons, not a union merely for the continuation of the human race or the family, rather, it is first of all the union of a man and a woman in their totality, a total and mutual sharing in every dimension of their life. Through their mutual love and sharing of life, they become channels of sanctification for each other.[57] In Catholic sacramental theology, the highest meaning of marriage is love.[58] Marital love affects all the other aspects of marriage, including marital sexuality and procreation. The love between married Christian partners reflects God's love towards humankind. For this reason, Walter Kasper says, "the love that exists between man and wife is an epiphany of love and faithfulness of God that was given once and for

54 *CWC*, Vol. 4: The Letters, 6/1, 61; 65; 66.

55 *CWC*, Vol. 4: The Letters, 7/2, 76; 7/7, 83.

56 *Chavarul*, "Introduction," 184.

57 Shaji George Kochuthara, *The Concept of Sexual Pleasure in the Catholic Moral Tradition*, Roma: Editrice, Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2007, 104–105.

58 Bernard Häring, *Free and Faithful in Christ*, vol. 2 of *Moral Theology for Clergy and Laity*, New York: Crossroad, 1978, II, 534.

all time in Jesus Christ and is made present in the Church."[59] In marriage, the communion of persons occurs when two people freely give themselves to each other and accept one another in love. The fruit of this union is their offspring.[60] This communion is found in its most sublime form in the Holy Trinity. According to the Christian belief, God is the Trinity, a community of persons, and each of the three persons in the Trinity is said to be related to each other in boundless charity and unites them together to be a single unity.[61] It is this pattern that is replicated in a finite and limited way, in the community of humans, particularly in the community of the family. True love consists precisely of spouses' mutual self-gift.[62]

According to Chavara, the ideal of unity in the Holy Trinity is the ideal that is to be replicated, realized, and personalized in our families. True love consists precisely of spouses' mutual self-gift to one another.[63] This self-giving love begins in the sacrament of marriage, which is understood as a communion of life and love experienced as a covenant for the realization of total personal completion.

4.2.4. Respect and Obedience to Parents

Chavara affirms that a good Christian family is a community of a few people joined together "with children duly respecting and

59 Walter Kasper, *Theology of Christian Marriage*, New York: Crossroad, 1981, 30; Kochuthara, *The Concept of Sexual Pleasure in the Catholic Moral Tradition*, 387.

60 Charles E. Curran, *The Moral Theology of John Paul II*, 164–65.

61 Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 54–55.

62 Curran, *The Moral Theology of John Paul II*, New York: T & T Clark, 2005, 164–65.

63 Curran, *The Moral Theology of John Paul II*, 164–65; Kochuthara, *The Concept of Sexual Pleasure in the Catholic Moral Tradition*, 434.

obeying their parents."[64] This clause – 'respect and obedience to the parents' – of the definition of the family is a reflection of the fourth commandment of our Lord. Chavara's obedience to his parents and to the authorities he was entrusted with can be traced in his writings addressed to his fellow religious. He instructed them: "The only mark of a religious is that one totally giving up one's will and obeys as if one does not have eyes and ears. One who does so is a true religious. Those who practice perfect obedience [to ecclesiastical authorities, major superiors, local superiors, and one another] will enjoy heavenly peace already here in the monastery which is a miniature heaven."[65] For Chavara, obedience to his parents, superiors, and equals was his hallmark. This obedience is explicit in his life as we see him submissive to his authorities even when his health was deteriorating towards the dusk of his life. In that situation, when he was asked whether he would be shifted to Mannanam or stay at Koonammavu, he responded, "do I have a will of my own? I do not wish to do anything according to my own will. I am ready to do only what I am asked to do."[66] This is an edifying example of his spirit of humble submission to the superiors, which remains

64 *Chavarul*, "Introduction," 184.

65 *CWC*, Vol. 4: *The Letters*, 6/3, 70–71; *CSK*, Vol. 4: *Kathukal*, 6/3, 99–100.

66 *CKC*, Vol. 1, 10. Another example of Chavara's obedience on his sickbed was marvellous. During his last illness, as insisted by Fr. Philip OCD, Pro-Vicar Apostolic in the absence of Vicar Apostolic Mellano, he was shifted from his living room to an out-house on the campus. Though it was painful for him, he quietly obeyed the order of his superiors. *Positio*, 546–547, Leonard Moolayil, "An Account of the Illness and Death of Chavara, September 1869 to January 1871," (Malayalam Manuscript in AMSJ), 5; Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 142.

as a source of inspiration to his fellow religious and each one of us.

According to the biblical perspective, respect and obedience to the parents are connected with the fourth commandment in the Decalogue. Similar norms with regard to respect and obedience to parents exist in all cultures and religions because the relationship between the parents and the children is one of the most fundamental and universal relationships experienced by human beings.[67] Unlike other commandments, it has a specific promise attached to it, namely, "long life and general well-being" (Ex 20:12; Deut 5:16).[68] It explains the basic reason why one must be particular in their faithful observance. Children and adults are both obliged to their parents (Mk 7:9–12). Hence, this command is meant not only for the children but also for the adults. The commandment required the adults to provide physical and material support, honour, love, and care for the elderly.[69] Chavara advises the children: "You are bound by the commandment of God to respect your parents and to ensure that their minds are not burdened or aggrieved. If you violate the fourth commandment of God, it will bring down God's curse not only in afterlife but also in the present."[70] The book of Sirach outlines the ways and means that the children must follow to care for their parents

67 Andrew Anil Sequeira, *Living Christian Life*, 5 vols., Bangalore: Claretian Publications, 2015, *Living Christian Life: Christ, Law and Ten Commandments*, Vol. 3, 165.

68 David Clyde Jones, *Biblical Christian Ethics*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1994, 156.

69 Raymond F. Collins, "Ten Commandments," Pages 383–87 in vol. 6 of *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Edited by David Noel Freedman, New York: Doubleday, 1992, 385.

70 *Chavarul*, II:16, 41.

(Sir 3:1–16). Respecting or honouring the parents implies giving them their rightful place and honour in return for their significant role in God's continuation of life by giving birth to the children, nurturing, and educating them, and providing material and spiritual support to them. The children too when they are grown up, are obliged to help the parents with their material and spiritual necessities, look after them in times of sickness and affliction, provide for their healthcare, whenever necessary, and make them feel happy and contented.

4.2.5. Harmony with God and the People

The definition further explains the purpose of the family as the members who "walk in peace before the Lord and the people."[71] The longing of Chavara to be at peace with God can be seen in his meditations: "Here I come before you, O my Heavenly Father, with a heart full of repentance and firm purpose of amendment to feel your peace in my heart."[72] Chavara's distress about the lack of peace in the families is tangible through his letter, wherein he expresses his grief on the families that become the cause of sin, dissensions, conflicts, destruction, and death. The ultimate purpose of writing the *Chavarul* to the families was to enlighten them from this gloom of tumult and give them divinely inspired clarity and peace of mind.[73] In one of his letters to his confreres, Chavara ascertains: "Those who practise perfect obedience will enjoy heavenly peace already here in the monastery, which is a miniature heaven."[74] It implies that submission to God's will

71 *CWC*, Vol. 4: *The Letters*, 9/6, 102.

72 *CWC*, Vol. 3: *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 3.

73 *Chavarul*, "Introduction," 184–85.

74 *CWC*, Vol. 4: *The Letters*, 6/3, 70–71; *CSK*, Vol. 4: *Kathukal*, 6/3, 99–100.

as well as that of the will of parents and elders will bring true peace in the family, and such families will become heavenly abodes.

Through the life of Chavara, it can be comprehended that he is a role model for everyone to imitate, both in family and religious life. Chavara, a peace-loving person, took all the care to ensure that this peace and harmony were always maintained in his community. Whenever he gave any directions, he never used an authoritative tone. Each one felt that they were equally loved and respected by him. His gentleness and sweet temper made him easily approachable by all. He was exceptionally kind to the sick and oppressed. He lightened the burdens of all who suffered by demanding nothing of them that was beyond their capacity. He could win the hearts of many with his affectionate, compassionate, quiet, and simple nature.[75]

In ordinary usage, peace denotes the absence of conflict. In Christian understanding, it refers to a positive state of life, both individual and communal.[76] The concept of peace in the Old Testament is derived from the Hebrew word *šālôm* which comes from the root *šlm*, meaning to be complete or whole. It denotes the social and personal well-being of everyone in the widest possible sense. It refers to the prosperous and harmonious functioning of the whole personality, its well-being, and keeping up good relations between persons or

75 Z. M. Moozhoor, *Blessed Chavara: The Star of the East*, Translated from Malayalam by Sheila Kannath, Kottayam, 1993, 105.

76 James F. Childress and John Macquarrie, eds., *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986, 460.

groups.[77] A prominent teaching in the Old Testament is that God is the giver of peace in all its fullness (Lev 26:6; 1 Chr 12:18). Peace reigns in a community when there is harmony between God and His creatures (Isa 27:5) and among His creatures themselves (1 Sam 16:4–5; Job 5:23). A community is active when people treat one another with goodwill and love, but no peace is possible where there is malice (Gen 37:4; 2 Sam 3:21–23; 1 Kings 2:13; 2 Kings 9:17–22; Ps 120:6–7). When a community is at peace, its members can experience safety and prosperity (Isa 26:3). Peace is found by doing good.[78]

In the New Testament, peace is considered a gift from heaven, brought to the earth by the angels: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours" (Lk 2:14). It is the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22) that enables us to become children of God, for Jesus Himself said: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God" (Mt 5:9). Just like the angels gave the good news of peace by announcing the birth of Jesus, so too His departure from this world with the mandate of spreading the good news was accompanied by his memento of "peace be with you" (Lk 24:36–43; Jn 20:19–22, 26); "peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you" (Jn 14:27); "I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace" (Jn 16:33). It helps us to enjoy the fruit of the Holy Spirit and makes us partakers in the kingdom of God (Rom 14:17). Therefore, we are exhorted

77 M. Rodri'guez, "Peace in the Bible," Pages 37–38 in vol. 11 of *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America, 1967, 37.

78 Konrad Schaefer, "Psalms," Pages 663–710 in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary for the Twenty-First Century*, Edited by John J. Collins, Gina Hens-Piazza, Barbara Reid, and Donald Senior, London: T & T Clark, 2020, 679.

to pursue this peace (Heb 12:14; 1 Pet 3:11) and allow the sovereignty of Christ in our hearts (Col 3:15), and maintain the unity that we have in Christ, the "one body," that is controlled by Christ's peace.[79]

When Chavara advises the families to maintain peace with God and people, he intends that the family members should respect and love each other by sharing the burdens, accepting the differences, guiding and directing each other gently; keeping a clear conscience and leading a disciplined and orderly life, which would bring peace and harmony to the families. In a world full of sorrows, Chavara desires for families to be an abode of sweet consolation, peace, and order.

4.2.6. Seeking Eternal Salvation

In the *Chavarul*, Chavara stressed that each one should "seek eternal salvation according to one's own proper state of life."[80] He further penned down his sorrow over the family's ignorance towards the pursuit of their own salvation as: "It is most distressing for members to live in a family where no one is concerned about the service of God and their own eternal salvation."[81] Throughout Chavara's writings, we find that the primary purpose of all his activities was driven towards the intention of the salvation of souls. Chavara's spiritual director, Fr Leopold Beccaro testified that Chavara never held himself back from any kind of work, for he was always prompted by the salvation of souls.[82] Chavara, in his testament to his fellow

79 McDonald, "The Letter to the Colossians," 1712.

80 *Chavarul*, "Introduction," 184.

81 *Chavarul*, "Introduction," 184.

82 Leopold Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Blessed Chavara*, Edited by Lucas Vithuvatical, Mannanam: St. Joseph's Press, 2003, 12.

priests, exhorts the purpose of founding the congregation, "God has willed to found this congregation for the salvation of our Christian brethren."[83] Aiming at the salvation of souls, Chavara founded the Confraternity for Happy Death.

From his discourse on discernment, we understand Chavara's quest for the salvation of souls and the means to attain it. He says,

> The body is more precious than the clothes it wears; the soul is more precious than the body. If both the body and clothes are threatened with danger, save the body and let the clothes perish. If both the body and the soul are in danger, sacrifice the body and save the soul. The body will perish today or tomorrow, but the soul will live forever. Hence, all the work done in the world should be directed towards the benefit of the soul.[84]

Chavara reminds us to keep two important things in mind. The first one is not to forget at any time that we will die at the most unexpected moment and that death will creep on us like a thief, and so we must remember the words of our Lord: "Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour" (Mt 25:13). And the second is to keep away from mortal sin that engenders fear of death. When we realize that we have sinned mortally, we must at once make a perfect act of contrition and seek pardon for our sins through confession before going to sleep.[85] Another quote from Chavara's writing sheds light on this understanding of salvation. Regardless of how great a sinner is, if a person repents of his or her sins at the

83 *CWC*, Vol. 4: *The Letters*, 6/3, 71.

84 *CWC*, Vol. 4: *The Letters*, 9/7, 120.

85 *CWC*, Vol. 4: *The Letters*, 9/7, 119.

moment of death, like the good thief who was hanged on the right side of the Lord, the gates of heaven will automatically be opened to him or her. This is the greatest happiness a person can have. Of all the help given to a person, the greatest is given to him or her at the moment of his or her death.[86]

When we turn into the Bible, we observe that salvation is one of the key concepts of God's revelation to humanity.[87] In the song of confidence, the psalmist praises God's providence. Based on the faith in God, "my rock and salvation, my fortress" (Ps 62:3), the psalmist exhorts the faithful to trust God and divine *hesed*.[88] It is therefore crucial to be united with God.[89] The core of apostolic preaching was that Jesus alone saves (Acts 4:9–12; Lk 4:17–21). Jesus, the good shepherd, came to seek and save the lost, to heal the sick, to cleanse and wash away sins through His blood, to enlighten the confused, and to correct the wrong (Jn 10:11; Mt 8:7; Rev 7:14; Jn 8:12). He is the victorious liberator who defeated death, the world, and Satan through His death and resurrection to liberate humankind (Acts 26:18; Rom 5–8; 1 Jn 3:8; Col 1:13; 1 Tim 2:5; Rom 5:10). The human beings are redeemed and purchased by His blood and entitled to be the heirs of heaven, His children (Rom 8:17; Titus 2:14; 1 Pet 1:18; 1 Cor 6:20).[90]

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86 *CWC*, Vol. 4: *The Letters*, 9/7, 118–19.

87 Walker, "Salvation," 1435. "For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by His life" (Rom 5:10).

88 Schaefer, "Psalms," 687.

89 Athappilly, *Christian Images of Salvation*, 27.

90 W. G. Topmoeller, "Salvation," Pages 994–95 in vol. 12 of *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America, 1967, 995.

Chavara instructs the people to entrust themselves to God Almighty and strive for their salvation by preparing themselves to receive the effects of Christ's earthly acts. He continues this mission in each individual soul through the operation of the Holy Spirit in the Church, particularly through the sacraments, the liturgical re-enactment of His sacrifice and confession, the preaching of His Word, and the personal inspirations of His Spirit in the hearts of every human being.[91] In order to be saved, everyone must respond with faith and reception of baptism (Mk 16:16), detachment (Mt 16:25), good works (Jas 2:14), and the practise of the virtues (1 Thes 5:8). Chavara exhorts the parents to serve as role models for their children by practicing detachment, charity, kindness, and faith in God. So that they might set a good example for children and live virtuously. If not, they may be lost in hell due to the negligence of their parents. If this is the case, the parents may be punished, and their own salvation might even be threatened.[92]

In short, the *Chavarul* gives a precise definition of family taking into consideration the relationship with God, with oneself, and with one another, that is, trans-personal, intra-personal, and inter-personal relationships.

5. Conclusion

In this article, we have explored the vision of the ideal family as the image of heaven. Here, the family locale is deliberated as the most natural environment for a child's formation and overall development. In Chavara's viewpoint, a good Christian family is the image of heaven, and he insists that every family

91 Topmoeller, "Salvation," 995.

92 *Chavarul*, II:1, 196.

should reflect the qualities of heaven. There should be unity of mind and heart, as well as a strong and stable bond among parents and between parents and children. They should respect and obey each other, maintain peace with people, and do everything possible to ensure the eternal salvation of all. The *Chavarul* highlights the parental responsibility to mould and shape the minds and hearts of the children and build their character by acquiring virtues, norms, and manners that would enable the children to stand in good stead for the rest of their adult lives and allow them to contribute to an orderly and peaceful society. This kind of upbringing would make both the parents and the children worthy of the eternal salvation promised to all who remain faithful till the end.

The remarkable definition of family envisioned by Chavara in the *Chavarul* is an effective guide for family catechesis that recognizes the family as the fundamental unit of faith formation. Parents as primary educators have a great responsibility in the upbringing of the children and their faith formation, for their involvement and commitment to the same strengthens family bonds, nurtures personal faith, and enables a deeper understanding of religious teachings. As the families grow in their faith together, they become a powerful force for constructive change in the world, embodying the transformative power of God's love.

CHAVARA
A Saintly Father and an Orthodox Teacher

Alex Sebastian Kollamkalam

1. Introduction

Though the great Greek and Latin Fathers (St Basil the Great, St Gregory of Nazianzus, St Athanasius of Alexandria and St John Chrysostom from the Greek side and St Augustine, St Ambrose, St Jerome and St Gregory the Great from the Latin side) had been already renowned as the Doctors of the Church, it was Pope Benedict XIV (1740-1758) who systematized the criteria for a person to be called so – Holiness, Erudition, Orthodoxy and Explicit Approval by the Church. When Pope Francis declared Kuriakose Elias Chavara one among the saints of Catholic Church on 23rd November 2014, sixty six years (1805-1871) of incomparable holiness and non-compromised orthodoxy also had been universally accepted. The pioneer of consecrated life in the Indian Church – both for men (Carmelites of Mary Immaculate) and for women (Congregation of the Mother of Carmel) – is also noted for his pioneering efforts in the reformation of the Church and the society in Kerala. This article is a humble attempt to analyse how Kuriakose Elias Chavara's social as well as ecclesiastical endeavours never compromised with his craving for holiness and how his erudition stuck always to the orthodoxy of the Church.

2. A Man of Holiness

Chavara ever wished to be the beloved son of God, calling him *Appa* (Father). He never tried to establish his own plans and programmes but always submitted himself to the divine

decisions. Holiness was not something added to him from outside, but the breath of his life from cradle to grave. That is why he could confidently declare at the time of death that he has never given up the Grace received during baptism.[1]

2.1. Family: the School of Holiness

The basis of Chavara's family vision is his vision on Holy Trinity. The loving communion of Trinity is lived on the earth by the Holy Family which is the model and motivation for all the families in this world.[2] The inspiration behind his letter to his own parishioners in Kainakary, *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul*, is none other than the positive experiences from his own family. According to him, the real wealth of a family is its fear and devotion to God. And any family living in the fear of God will be rewarded here on earth as well as in the eternal life.[3] It was his conviction that a family gets happiness and peace not from the wealthy relatives but from those with fear of God and discipline of life.[4] The most important duty of the parents is to bring up their children well because they are the most valuable treasures entrusted to them to be cared according to the will of God. If the parents do not show love

1 Canisius, *Visudha Kuriakose Elias Chavarayude Sukrtavazhikal* (Malayalam), Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2020, 15.

2 Sophy Rose, *Prabodhanangalum Darsanangalum* (Malayalam), Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2020, 38.

3 Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan, *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul* (Malayalam): Kudumbachattam 18, Kochi: Education and Media of Communication, 2004, 9.

4 Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan, *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul* (Malayalam): Kudumbachattam 9, Kochi: Education and Media of Communication, 2004, 7.

and respect between them, the children will not respect them.[5] Chavara also warns the parents that if their children do not enter heaven because of their irresponsibility, they also will never attain heavenly glory.[6] He gives clear directives for the formation of children:

> When the Children begin to speak itself, teach them recite 'Jesus, Mary, Joseph'. Show them their statues and train them to kiss them, revere them and thus to love the Holy Family. Show them through your words and deeds that the parents represent Joseph and Mary. As they grow up the prayers like 'Our Father', 'Hail Mary', 'Glory to Father', etc. may become natural to their tongues.[7]

2.2. Life Oriented to Heaven

The life of Chavara was a life of tests and trials which he successfully overcame with his unshakable faith in God. His parents and his only brother passed away when he was in the seminary. Since only his sister in law (brother's wife) and her daughter remained in the family, the young Kuriakose was strongly persuaded by his relatives to abandon the seminary studies. But he never gave up his hope in divine providence and became priest on 29th November 1829.[8] It was this hope

5 Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan, *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul* (Malayalam): Makkalude Valarthal 1.9, Kochi: Education and Media of Communication, 2004, 12.14.

6 Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan, *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul* (Malayalam): Makkalude Valarthal 1, Kochi: Education and Media of Communication, 2004, 12.

7 Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan, *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul* (Malayalam): Makkalude Valarthal 2, Kochi: Education and Media of Communication, 2004, 13.

8 Jacob Aluckal, *Indian Saints and Blesseds*, Shillong: Archbishop's House, 2016, 45.

in the eternal life that made him start an organization called *Nanmarana Sabha* to help the faithful prepare for a blissful death.[9]

For him, meditation is a dialogue with God where God and himself would be like close friends.[10] He had an incomparable devotion to the Most Holy Eucharist. In order to propagate this devotion he translated ceremonies for forty hour adoration from Latin rite to Malayalam. He also encouraged the devotion to Mary in the month of May, to Joseph in March and to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in June.[11] As Leopold Beccaro witnesses, "he had a son-like love towards the Blessed Virgin Mary."[12] On the days of obligation, a mere participation in the Holy Qurbana was not enough. According to him, those days should be spent in reading good books, visiting the sick and listening to spiritual homilies.[13]

2.3. Education for Spiritual Illumination

The establishment of schools, in Chavara's vision, were not merely for giving secular training but above all to give a renewed spiritual orientation. According to him, in order to know and experience God, wisdom is indispensable. So good

9 Sophy Rose, *Prabodhanangalum Darsanangalum* (Malayalam), Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2020, 113.

10 Chavara Kuriakose Elias, *Dhyana Sallapangal*, in *Chavara Achante Sampoorna Kruthikal* vol 3, 14.

11 Francis Kanichikattil, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara: The Wise Liturgical Reformer of Thomas Christians of Malabar*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2020, 32-33.

12 Canisius, *Visudha Kuriakose Elias Chavarayude Sukrtavazhikal*, 78.

13 Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan, *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul* (Malayalam): Kudumbachattam 22, Kochi: Education and Media of Communication, 2004, 11.

books are the great treasures to be acquired for the children. Keeping bad books in house is like keeping fire inside the straw.[14] He underlines:

> As those who have no eyes are called 'blind', so those who have no learning should be called 'spiritually blind'. Thanks to the latter kind of blindness, although we Nazarenes (in Kerala) claim to be Christians of ancient origin, we do not have the seeds and sprouts of saints. Our Lord Himself has taught that if one blind person leads another, both fall into the ditch.[15]

He was not satisfied with the Sanskrit school founded in Mannanam. In 1853, he started a centre for faith formation in Mannanam, the first in Kerala Church. And when he was appointed as the Vicar General for the Syrian Catholics by Archbishop Bernardine Baccinelli, he strictly instructed that each parish should open a school attached to it.[16] He also showed his far-sightedness in founding the first press and first publishing house at Mannanam in 1846 which in course of time became the birth place of Rashtra Deepika (the newspaper of Marthoma Nazranis) in 1887.[17]

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14 Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan, *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul* (Malayalam): Kudumbachattam 22, Kochi: Education and Media of Communication, 2004, 11.

15 Francis Kanichikattil, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 15; Chavara Kuriakose Elias, *Letters* IX,2 in Sophy Rose, *Prabodhanangalum Darsanangalum*, 69.

16 Sophy Rose, *Prabodhanangalum Darsanangalum*, 14.15.

17 Francis Kanichikattil, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 17.

2.4. Priestly Formation: Training to Holiness

In 1833, Chavara gave leadership in the foundation of a common seminary for the Syrian Catholics.[18] And in 1844, the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly, Francis Xavier OCD appointed him the examiner and *malpan* of the priestly formation of the Malabar clergy.[19] He envisaged the seminaries not only for the formation of the candidates but also for the on-going formation of priests. He composed canonical prayers from the existing manuscripts; he conducted annual retreats for clergy at Mannanam every year. Renewal in the Spiritual and Pastoral life of clergy, for him, was the best means for the spiritual renewal of the faithful.[20] He was fully convinced that it was the duty of the priests to teach the faithful and of the parents to teach their children.[21]

Chavara also realized that the leadership of prayerful priests was necessary for the people to be oriented to prayer. With this intension he started seminaries attached to the monasteries.[22] Jossy Veliyan CMC establishes this fact in the context of Roccos schism: "Even after Roccos departed from Kerala in 1862, they had to concentrate on healing the wounds inflicted by him in the community. An immediate step suggested was to give proper theological training to the

18 Sophy Rose, *Prabodhanangalum Darsanangalum*, 14.

19 Francis Kanichikattil, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 15.

20 Francis Kanichikattil, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 15-16.

21 Chavara Kuriakose Elias, *Letters* IX, 2, in Sophy Rose, *Prabodhanangalum Darsanangalum*, 34.

22 Canisius, *Visudha Kuriakose Elias Chavarayude Sukrtavazhikal*, 21.

priestly candidates of Syro-Malabar Christians who were affected by the Roccos schism."[23]

2.5. Universal Love: Actualization of Holiness

Chavara who called God 'my father' has never excluded anyone from the circle of his love. His desire to establish the Kingdom of God here on earth by uniting everyone in God, prompted him to give caring love to all.[24] In 1846 a Sanskrit school attached to Mannanam monastery was opened by Chavara for all without any caste discriminations. Sanskrit being the language of the Brahmins, his decision to give Sanskrit training to Christians and lower caste people was also an attempt to break the prevailing social barriers.[25] Chavara stood for this revolutionary beginning when the poor and the untouchable were not permitted to enter even the Government schools. In order to make sure that the 'Dalit' students should attend the classes regularly, he has provided them with free text books, food and dress.[26] It was Chavara who started the

23 Chavara was in serious preparation for starting a convent for women religious. A convent was almost built in Puthenpally. But as long as Bishop Roccos remained in Kerala, the leaders of the Christian community could not give attention to the foundation of a convent. Since well-formed priests became the utmost necessity of the time, the convent almost built in Puthenpally was converted as a seminary. And the actual founding of a woman congregation happened only in 1886 at Koonammavu. Jossy Veliyan, *St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara: The Founder of the Women TOCD in Kerala*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2015, 29.

24 Sophy Rose, *Prabodhanangalum Darsanangalum*, 32.

25 Francis Kanichikattil, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 17.

26 It was inspired by Chavara that Sir C. P. Ramaswamy proposed to the King to provide free lunch for the students in Government schools on 26th November 1936. Sophy Rose, *Prabodhanangalum Darsanangalum*, 34-35.

first boarding house for girls in Koonammavu on 2nd January 1868.[27] And in the letter addressed to the faithful of Kainakary Church dated 15th October 1869, Chavara asked them to open an *Upavisala* for the sick and the orphans which became the mother of all Christian Orphanages.[28] He even says that the days not used for helping others would not even be counted as part of our life.[29] He wished that let there be no day in our life in which we did no good to others. And so "even the secular society admires his contributions in pioneering a set of revolutionary changes in uplifting people on the margins and those who were socially ostracised through educational and social initiatives."[30]

"Chavara's inspiration to found a religious institute came from his gaze fixed on the Church and the society that surrounded him, namely, the particular historical situation of the St Thomas Christians of the 19th century and the socio-religious condition of Kerala women."[31] The first members of the Congregation for women founded by St. Chavara were two widows and two young women. In a social scenario where women were considered second grade citizens and where the widows were not even let live after their husbands' death,[32] he

27 Sophy Rose, *Prabodhanangalum Darsanangalum*, 16.

28 Sophy Rose, *Prabodhanangalum Darsanangalum*, 112.

29 Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan, *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul* (Malayalam): Kudumbachattam 13, Kochi: Education and Media of Communication, 2004, 8.

30 Francis Kanichikattil, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, vii.

31 Jossy Veliyan, *St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara,* 304.

32 The practice of *Sati* – the wife burning herself in her husband's death fire – was followed in India.

showed the guts to accept two widows to be the pioneers of a revolutionary beginning. [33]

2.6. Call to Monastic Life: Call to Holiness

On 8th December 1855, when he took the religious vows, he also took a new name 'Kuriakose of Holy Family'[34] realizing that it is a new beginning in his desire for holiness. It was not merely an attempt to attain personal holiness but the means to spread the stream of holiness to the faithful. This is clear from the very foundation of the CMI congregation. When Fr Palackal and Fr Porookara came to meet bishop Stabilini to get permission to lead a monastic life, bishop asked them to start a monastery that would help the people to get trained in faith.[35] According to Chavara, the monasteries are founded by God in order to be the mirrors virtues and the house for saints.[36] He was always lamenting inside that the Thomas Christian Church, though with a history of 19 centuries, was a barren Church, having produced no saints for the universal

33 Sophy Rose, *Prabodhanangalum Darsanangalum*, 35. When Leopold Beccaro and Chavara were attempting to found a religious convent for the women religious, a widow, Eliswa Vakayil (34 years of age) and her daughter Anna (18 years) expressed their desire to lead a chaste life. Eliswa's sister Thresia (18 years) also joined them. And another widow Eliswa Puthanangady (37 years) completed the first community. On 13th February 1866, they were given a small brown scapular in a very simple ceremony. Jossy Veliyan, *St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 31-34.

34 Pauly Payyappilly, *Anusmriti* (CMI History), Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2020, 61.

35 Mani Pius, *Daivavum Manushyarum Ivarkku Swantham* (Malayalam – History of CMI Congregation), Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2020, 37.

36 Chavara Kuriakose Elias, *Letters* VI,1, in Sophy Rose, *Prabodhanangalum Darsanangalum*, 61-62.

Church. The reason, according to him, was the absence of monastic communities. And all his attempts to start religious congregation for men and women were actually the attempts to prepare the field for the birth of future saints.[37] He writes:

> In the land of Malayalam (Kerala) even though the true Christian religion was in practice from very early times, there existed no monasteries or convents. The people had heard of men and women who practised religious virtues but they did not have living examples of religious virginity [...] As for women even those who desired to live a virginal life, had no way of embracing such a life style. They had no option. They had to accept marriage and live as worldly women and they were living in this sad plight for a very long time.[38]

3. A Teacher of Orthodoxy

As Francis Kanichikattil puts it, "he [Chavara] articulated his views and perspectives primarily based on his personal encounters with Jesus."[39] His faithfulness to the universal Church and to its teaching authority is none other than an extension of this personal attachment to Jesus. Both in the context of Roccos schism and Padroado schism, his first concern was the decision of the Holy See.

3.1. Faithful to the Church

He always attached the attribute 'holy' to the Universal Church.[40] "His love towards the Universal Church and its head

37 Canisius, *Visudha Kuriakose Elias Chavarayude Sukrtavazhikal*, 30.

38 Jossy Veliyan, *St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 19.

39 Francis Kanichikattil, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara,* vii.

40 Sophy Rose, *Prabodhanangalum Darsanangalum*, 61.

the Holy Father, on the one hand and the Malabar Church of Thomas Christians, on the other knew no bounds."[41] The First Vatican Council (1869-70) was a very good occasion that concretized his faithfulness to the universal Church. He has recorded every minute detail of the council in the Mannanam Chronicle and gave proper information to the priests about the important decisions made by the council fathers. He also collected Rs 32007/- from the *Suriyani* priests for the expenses of the council and sent it directly to the Pope.[42] He had a special love towards the western missionaries, since they were the apostles of the universal Church and they have suffered a lot to bring thousands of people to Christian faith.[43]

The Thomas Christians ever wished to get bishops of their own rite. So the decision of the Synod of Diamper (1599) to place them under a Latin bishop was really heart-breaking for them. In spite of sharing the same emotions with his fellow Thomas Christians, Chavara was not ready to use 'non catholic' means to get 'same rite bishops'. Though he later proposed to the Propaganda Fide that it was better to have two separate bishops here, one for the Latin faithful and the other for the Syrian faithful, he stood strongly against Bishop Roccos who came from the Syrian Patriarch without the approval of the Holy See.[44] In his circular against Roccos sent to the Thomas Christians, Chavara makes it clear that he did

41 Francis Kanichikattil, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 13.

42 Sophy Rose, *Prabodhanangalum Darsanangalum*, 56-57.

43 Canisius, *Visudha Kuriakose Elias Chavarayude Sukrtavazhikal*, 59.

44 Sophy Rose, *Prabodhanangalum Darsanangalum*, 58.

so for the salvation of their souls so that they may not fall into a new schism.[45]

3.2. Faithful to the Supreme Pontiff

Chavara is also known for his extra ordinary reverence to the Supreme Pontiff. It is interesting to note that in his letters to Pope Pius IX he addresses him "the one who holds the keys of Peter."[46] He concludes the letters requesting Pope's paternal blessings for all, including the country, the king and his ministers so that their hearts may be turned to faith.[47] When the Archbishop of Verapoly appointed Chavara as Vicar General of the Syrian Christians to solve the 'Roccos Schism', the first thing he did was to write to the Supreme Pontiff to know the canonicity of Roccos' jurisdiction. As he realized that Roccos came without the permission of the Holy See, he wrote circular letters to the faithful to ask them to give up the schism. And on 30th November 1861, Roccos was excommunicated and more than 116 parishes came back to communion with the Pope.[48]

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45 Chavara Kuriakose Elias, *Letters* IX,4 in Sophy Rose, *Prabodhanangalum Darsanangalum*, 61.

46 Chavara Kuriakose Elias, *Letters* I,1; I,2 in Sophy Rose, *Prabodhanangalum Darsanangalum*, 59.

47 Chavara Kuriakose Elias, *Letters* I,1 in Sophy Rose, *Prabodhanangalum Darsanangalum*, 60.

48 As an answer to the request from the Thomas Christians, Patriarch Audo consecrated Thomas Roccos and sent him to Kerala just to study the situation of Kerala Church. But it was Bishop Roccos who started to interfere in the internal matters of the Church without the permission of the Holy See. Pauly Payyappilly, *Anusmriti* (CMI History), Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2020, 88-90.

And again when the Goan Archbishop Antonio Feliciano was not ready to accept the apostolic letter *Multa Praeclare* (suspending the Padroado jurisdiction in India except in Goa) of Pope Gregory XVI, St. Chavara wanted all to be under legal authority, the Supreme Pontiff.[49] Fr Leopold Beccaro testifies: "Among the virtues of this father, his faith, his strong love to Catholic Church and his devotion to the Holy Father shine in a special way [...] whenever he hears of the Holy Father, tears come out of his eyes because of devotion and joy."[50]

3.3. Faithful to the Orthodox Worship

Placid J. Podipara CMI, the Church historian of the Syro-Malabar Church, enumerates Chavara's liturgical contributions: "His work consisted in the organization of Liturgical books, the rubrics of the Eucharistic celebration, the books of the Divine office, the Office for the Dead, and the Liturgical Calendar."[51] The Missal of Thomas Christians had been already printed in Rome in 1774 and 1844. But the

49 The Padroado schism caused another problem in Kerala Church, dividing the faithful between the Padroado and Propaganda jurisdiction even in the same parish. It was Chavara's insistence to be faithful to the Holy See that helped the Church overcome the schism. Pauly Payyappilly, *Anusmriti*, 91.

50 Canisius, *Visudha Kuriakose Elias Chavarayude Sukrtavazhikal*, 60.

51 Placid J. Podipara, *Our Rite* (Malayalam), Mannanam: St. Joseph's Press, 1997, 132. There is an allegation that he was only a follower of Latin rite and encouraged Latin customs in the Thomas Christian Liturgy. After a serious study on the liturgical reforms of Chavara, Francis Kanichikattil concludes that though "he borrowed certain liturgical practices from the Roman tradition, bearing in mind that it would help the faithful of the Malabar Church to increase their spiritual life," he mainly concentrated on the existing manuscripts of the Chaldean rite. Francis Kanichikattil, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 16.23.

rubrics and the calendar indicated in the text were too brief and imperfect which caused embarrassment to the people, as the celebration of the Holy Mass varied from place to place. This situation made Chavara prepare the order of the Mass.[52] The *Thukasa* (the order for the clergy) prepared by Chavara for the uniform celebration of the Holy Mass represents his faithfulness to the tradition of the Church.[53]

The Thomas Christians were following the Chaldean (East Syrian) Calendar till the Diamper Synod, and the same Synod imposed on them the Latin Calendar. Since the faithful were not satisfied, Chavara prepared a liturgical calendar following the East Syrian system of being divided into seasons, incorporating into it the feasts of the Latin calendar. The Divine Offices, the Office of the Dead and the Funeral Services were compiled from ancient manuscripts, while the Funeral Service for the Children, the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Lectionary were adapted from the Latin rite.[54]

3.4. Faithful to the Correct Faith

One of the intensions behind the foundation of the schools was to protect the children from pagan formation. His own experience of primary education in a non-Christian atmosphere (*Asan Kalari*) must have surely influenced him to stand for the Christian schools.[55] As the Vicar General of the Thomas Christians, St. Chavara was behind the circular of Bernardine Baccinelli to all the parishes to start schools attached to the churches. His intension was to protect the future generation

52 Francis Kanichikattil, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 25-28.

53 Francis Kanichikattil, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 13.

54 Francis Kanichikattil, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 25-28.

55 Canisius, *Visudha Kuriakose Elias Chavarayude Sukrtavazhikal*, 29.

from the pagan and non-catholic influences. He also wished that the Catholics may not join the English medium schools run by non-Catholics that they may not be influenced by the protestant ideas.[56] During the time of Roccos schism almost all the wealthy parishes were on the side of the schismatic bishop. Even the civil authorities favoured Roccos. They even tried to make Mannanam and Elthuruth Ashrams, centres of the schism.[57] But Chavara stood firm in his stand, because he was convinced that he was fighting for the orthodox faith. He even gave up the offer to be ordained as a bishop by the schismatic group in order to stand for the genuine and orthodox faith.

3.5. Faithful in His Own Writings

In the midst of his innumerable responsibilities, Chavara has never put down his responsibility as a teacher. He was a gifted writer with many pioneering attempts. The *Biography of Palackal Thoma Malpan* written by Chavara is the first biography of a Malayali written by another Malayali. His work, the *Martyrdom of Anastasia* is considered the first *Khandakavyam*[58] in Malayalam. The Ecologues, *Shepherd Plays* were the first attempts of that kind in the Indian drama field. The spiritual work – *Dhyana Sallapangal*, the liturgical contributions – *Thukasa*, *Liturgical Calendar*, *Liturgy of the Hours for the Priests*, *Office for the Dead*, *Small Office for St. Mary*, etc. are worth mentioning. *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul*, the paternal letter written to the parishioners at Kainakary is influential in every walk of family life.[59]

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56 Francis Kanichikattil, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 16-17.

57 Canisius, *Visudha Kuriakose Elias Chavarayude Sukrtavazhikal*, 65-66.

58 *Khandakavayam* is special literary genre where prose and poetry are intermingled.

59 Sophy Rose, *Prabodhanangalum Darsanangalum*, 177-178.

4. Conclusion

Fr Mathai Mariyam Kappil during his funeral speech on 4th January 1841 said, "Today the flag of Malayalam has fallen down."[60] Now we realize that the flag has fallen down in order to be re-hoisted above the world. As one of the Kerala historians M. Sreedharamenon concludes, St. Chavara is a social reformer who did not get proper acceptance from among the historians of Kerala, since the Christian reformers were unfortunately avoided by them in their historical narrations.[61] Even today there are deliberate attempts from certain groups of people with vested interests to keep away his contributions. The removal of his name from the list of social reformers by the text book revision committee is a recent example. But history proves that holiness can never be hidden. As his holiness, let his erudition and orthodoxy also be universally accepted. Because as the famous Malayalam writer, Sukumar Azhikode[62] underlines, Chavara is one among those few historical figures whose fame and influence easily surpass the temporal and territorial boundaries. He, who lived in the 19th century, strengthening and illumining the Kerala community, is still a shining star for us in this 21st century. It will continue so for future generations, for his holiness and orthodoxy knows no boundaries.

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60 Mani Pius, *Daivavum Manushyarum Ivarkku Swantham*, 17.

61 M. Sreedharamenon, "Kalathinumumpe Nadanna Navodhana Nayakan Chavarayachan", quoted in Sophy Rose, *Prabodhanangalum Darsanangalum*, 32.

62 Sukumar Azhikod, "Kalatheethamaya Mahajyothissilek", in *Sukrtam Smara* (Malayalam), Kochi: Beth Rauma Publications, 2012, 21.

THEOLOGY OF MARRIAGE IN THE *CHAVARUL*

Jipson Joseph Edappulavan

1. Introduction

Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul or *The Last Testament of a Loving Father*[1] is a noteworthy contribution of Kuriakose Elias Chavara to the Christian families. He is undoubtedly one of the most noble and holy personalities of the Syro-Malabar Church. His contributions to the Catholic Church do not confine to the foundation of indigenous CMI and CMC congregations for men and women religious respectively, but extends to a broader horizon of his loving commitment to the life and mission of the Church. He was the first vicar general of the Thomas Christians after the period of the Archdeacons. He was also one of the most prominent social reformists of the Kerala community. He was a visionary with the zeal of an apostle, a revolutionary with the heart of a priest, and a reformist with the spirit of a prophet. Besides all other contributions, his commitment in preserving the original identity of the Thomas Christians is to be acknowledged and appreciated. Chavara was a staunch promoter of the indigenous customs and traditions of the Syrian Christian community in Kerala even when he affirmed his spiritual and liturgical affinity with the Syrian liturgical tradition.

Chavara's literary contribution to the growth of Mar Thoma tradition inspires many. *Chavarul* is the epitome of his fatherly concern for the Christian families in Kerala. It was a testament of a loving father to his family, mainly addressed to

1 It is an 'instruction manual' wrote in Malayalam on 13 February 1868.

the people at Kainakari. The people at Kaiankari were chosen as an image of the entire Thomas Christians. It was a testament of the first vicar general of the Thomas Christians to the families entrusted to his spiritual care. His awareness of the issues and difficulties of the then Christian families and his interest for their renewal is explicit in this short and beautiful epistle to the families. It is not only a spiritual advice of a pastor to his people, but rather, also a testament of faith, hope, and service of a man of divine inspiration and blessings. It is a testament of his spiritual conviction presented in the form of practical knowledge for the revival of the marital and family life of the people of God strongly based on the apostolic tradition. Most of the authors and researchers on *Chavarul*[2] try to identify its contributions only to family life in general. The present article is an attempt to expose the theology of marriage depicted in this testament to the families.

2. Spouses, the Primary Addressee of *Chavarul*

Chavarul consists of two parts. The first part deals with certain precepts for the orderly life in the family and the second part is an instruction to the parents consisting of the guidelines for the upbringing of their children. In the first part, Chavara focuses on the essentials of family life; and in the second part, he emphasizes the importance of good parenting. According

2 Mathew Ulakamthara, "Vision of the Family in Chavara Testament," *Journal of St. Thomas Christians,* 16, 1 (2005), 73; George Kaniarakath, "Chavara's Vision of a Christian Family according to his Epistle to the Community at Kainakary," *Christian Orient* 8, 3 (1987), 124; Jossy Maria, "The Spirituality of Marriage and Family," *Herald of the East* 14, 1 (2018), 19-34; Thomas Kallukulam, "Appropriation of St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara's *Chavarul*: Testament of a Loving Father to Families Today," *Encounter* 10, 1 (2019), 86-87.

to him, the family is the most essential and decisive element of the Church.[3] At the very beginning of his last testament, Chavara defines family with clarity and understanding. Family is a community of some people joined together either by blood relation or bond of love.[4] Family is identified with two kinds of relationships: blood relationships and love relationship. The intimate and covenantal love-relationship (marriage) is the very source of blood relationship. Children are born through the love-relationship of the spouses. Procreation marks not only the birth of children but also the birth of parents. While marriage points to the birth of covenantal love-relationship, procreation pinpoints the birth of blood relationship. In sum, relationship is the central element of any family and all the relationships in the family are centred on the spousal relationship.

Chavara's definition of family/spousal relationship surprises the readers. He defines it as the community of love. It is evident in the Vatican II's definition of marriage, '*communitate amoris*'.[5] It shows that Chavara was a man of divinely inspired knowledge and foresight. He tried to see marriage and family as a community of love. He proposed a theology of *koinonia* and love to the marital and familial life of the Thomas Christians, which, later on, the Vatican II highlighted as the core of Christian marriage. Procreation was the main thrust of the theology of marriage before Vatican II and the 'ethic of love' was not properly celebrated in the

3 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2017, 389.

4 Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Chavarul: Testament of a Loving Father*, 150th anniversary, Kakkanad: Chavara Central Secretariat, 2018, 9.

5 Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 47 (*AAS* 58:1067).

discussions of marriage. But Chavara took the courage to define family from the spousal point of view as it is the community or bond of love refurbishing the horizon of spousal relationship from the traditional procreational perspective to the biblical perspective of love and communion. His background of *Mar Thoma Marga* (Way of St Thomas) which affirmed the communion dimension of the disciples of Christ and the typical indigenous understanding of family also prompted him to develop such a theology of marriage. While defining marriage as a communion of love, he enlarges the horizon of spousal relationship from the procreative dimension to all the aspects of their intimate relationship. It helps to understand marriage not from a restrictive perspective but from a wider perspective of love and communion.

Blood relationship originates from the love-relationship of the spouses. The intimate covenantal love-relationship of the spouses motivates them to partake in the creative work of God and they become parents originating the blood relationships. Procreation is the point wherein the love-relationship gives birth to the blood relationship. Love-relationship remains intact even after procreation, but at the same time, it gives birth to another beautiful relationship of parents-children. Thinking in this line we can say that the primary addressee of *Chavarul* is the spouses who are united in love. Husband and wife are the head of the family and the precepts of the family are given to them to transform the entire family into the image of heaven. Upbringing of the children is primarily the responsibility of the spouses, and hence, Chavara in his testament also entrusted this assignment to them. His primary focus was on love-relationship than blood-relationship because the second revolves around the first. He tried to convince his spiritual children that the spousal intimacy and

their mutual understanding are the real inspiration for the entire family.

3. Practical Theology of Marriage

Chavara did not intend to develop a logical or systematic theology of spousal relationship and it was not the aim of *Chavarul* either.[6] It was purely a practical instruction manual wherein a loving father desiring to empower his children to face the problems and challenges of marital and family life instructed them in a language understandable to them and in a manner acceptable to their way of life. Before leaving this world, Christ instructed his disciples and also assured his continuous guidance. Biblical tradition affirms the practice of last blessings and instructions of the fathers to their children. Thomas Christian tradition also attests to this rich ethos of last advice and blessings of the father to the children assuring the continuance of divine blessing. Chavara being a spiritual father realized his responsibility to remind the perils of this world that may challenge the marital life of the Thomas Christians, and so, he took up the initiative to advise them appropriately. He discerned the lack of educational and religious training of the Thomas Christians, which may force them to disorient themselves from fully grasping a systematic theology in depth, and hence, he tried to convey his scriptural, theological and spiritual depth in simple terms. But at the same time, he tried to present these practical guidelines well founded in Scripture, Fathers, and theologians intending to give them a sound theology in coherence. He applied all the precious sources that were available to him. He enriched the Thomas Christians with the rich biblical and theological tradition in simple terms. Instead of the sophisticated

6 Kaniarakath, "Chavara's Vision of a Christian Family," 119.

medieval theological approach, Chavara tried to incorporate the simple scriptural theological approach. Simplicity was the *modus operandi* of his practical theology of marriage enshrined in *Chavarul*. It was pastoral than doctrinal. Accordingly, every person could easily understand the intention of the author and make changes in their marital life of love.

Chavarul's theology of marriage is purely practical than theoretical or systematic. Though Chavara was a man of great wisdom and extensive reading, he was a practical man who knew well the audience. He tried to speak and write in a language that was understandable to them. He tried to conscientize about the importance of practicalities of a successful marital life to enrich their marital ethos. The following points enlist the various elements of Chavara's practical theology of marriage depicted in *Chavarul*.

3.1. Mutuality of Love and Respect

Love and respect are the two substantial elements upon which every marital relationship grows into perfection. St Paul exhorts the married to model their intimate relationship grounding on the mysterious Christ-Church relationship. He wants them to follow the love-respect model of divine relationship in their human relationship.[7] The husband is instructed to love his wife just as Christ loved the Church. He is given an assignment to follow Christ in loving his wife. He is given the highest of all the models of love to be followed. In loving his wife, the husband should imitate Christ's love towards the Church, wherein there is no limit for love. A limited human person is asked to practice limitless love in his relationship with the wife. The wife, on the other hand, is

7 John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan*, Boston: Pauline Books, 1997, 351.

exhorted to obey her husband just as the Church obeys Christ. A wife should respect her husband as the Church respects her Lord. The conditions and peculiar demands of human persons with regard to marriage become meaningless in this surprising novelty of divine-human comparison and Paul's terming it as mystery (Eph 5:24-32). The patriarchal mindset of Paul forced him to demand love from the husband and obedience/respect from the wife. But in reality, his Christian spirit demanded that both love and respect should be mutual in marriage. It is visible when Paul speaks of mutual subjection in 5:21.[8] Hence, it can be said that just as Christ loves the Church both husband and wife should love each other without any limit and just as the Church respects Christ both husband and wife should respect each other without any gradation. Mutual love and mutual respect thus become the key principles of marriage in the Lord.

Building in this Pauline line of thought *Chavarul* affirms that 'the mother should set an example to the children in respecting and honouring the father; so shall the father teach the children by his example to love and respect the mother'.[9] Chavara wanted the husbands and wives to become exemplars of love and respect in their family life. They should not compromise their love and respect for each other. They are asked to transform their human love into covenantal love. Their children should learn from them the essentiality of marital love and marital respect. Marriage is proposed as a practical lab wherein the children should learn the depth of love and respect from their parents. When the parents

8 Xavier Edayodil, "Theology of Marriage and Family in St Paul," *Khristujyoti* 24, 1 (2008), 234.

9 Chavara, *Chavarul*, 2:9.

through their life-model teach the children the value of love and respect, they in turn, will love and respect their parents and their siblings. It will become a strong inspiration for their future marital life too. Hence, this love-respect model will continue like a chain of divine blessing coupled with human initiative. Chavara does not confine himself in demanding love from husbands to wives but explicitly affirmed the duty of the father to respect the mother. It was a novelty in those times. At that period of history no one dared to instruct the husbands to show respect towards their wives. Husbands were considered 'lords' of the wives than companions. But Chavara realising the biblical ideal exhorted that respect also should be mutual in spousal life. Both husband and wife should love and respect each other. Mutuality of love and respect helps them to foster their relationship into the real image of Christ-Church relationship.[10] Mutuality of love cannot substitute mutuality of respect. Both are equally important to transform one's intimate spousal relationship into the image of divine relationship.

Love is 'a basic good of marriage'[11] but it was largely used with the individualistic and instrumentalist mentality so as to endanger its real nature. It needs to be altruistic and mutual. Spousal love should transcend all the egoistic boundaries of both the husband and wife leading them to communion. When the love is mutual, the spouses realize their innermost calling to come out of egocentrism. It helps them to become

10 Jipson Joseph Edappulavan, *Celebration of Mutuality in the Sacrament of Covenantal Love-Relationship: A Study Based on the Syro-Malabar Liturgy of Matrimony*, Bangalore: Omega Book World, 2022, 149.

11 Karol Wojtyla, *Fruitful and Responsible Love*, Slough: St Paul Publications, 1978, 18.

protagonists of 'the logic of the sincere gift of self'.[12] The true and meaningful gifting of one person to another in its full sense 'requires that it should be reciprocal, and should exist at least between two equals'.[13] Equality needs to be the hinge upon which the paradigm of mutuality of marriage should function. *Chavarul* promotes the paradigm of mutuality of love and respect in marriage grounding on the equality of both the partners. It suggests a model to be followed in the contemporary marriages where the pillars of love and respect should be built on the foundation of equality for an inspirational marriage.

3.2. Celebration of Forgiveness

Chavara was well aware of the main challenge faced by many marriages and families during his life-time. According to him, unforgiveness is one of the important issues that troubles the peaceful living of many marriages. Unforgiveness causes the silly issues to grow to such an extreme level as they become difficult to handle. In the absence of forgiveness spouses try to win over the other without even considering the feelings and thoughts of each other. Instead of addressing the issue at hand, they desire to subjugate the spouse. When they try to win over the other, unfortunately they lose the depth and meaning of spousal oneness. Such a mentality of winning over the spouse than celebrating the uniqueness of love and forgiveness is active in the present times also. Accordingly, the instructions of *Chavarul* have great relevance even for the present generation couples.

Forgiveness is a virtuous attitude of the spouses to consider each other's failures and emotional imbalances with

12 John Paul II, *Gratissimam Sane*, 11 (*AAS* 86:884).

13 Thomas J. Gerrard, *Marriage and Priesthood: The Catholic Ideal*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1911, 70.

an open-mind. It is the willingness to show love than hatred towards the shortcomings of the spouse. It is a positive attitude wherein they understand the weaknesses of each other with the compassionate heart to excuse them.[14] 'Readiness to mutual forgiveness is indispensable for the stability of the marriage bond'.[15] The patriarchal society could not think of a wife who forgives the mistakes of her husband, for she was considered inferior to the husband, who only had the power to forgive. The ascription of mutual forgiveness in marriage was an appreciable move from the part of *Chavarul* as it tried to enhance the position of women in the society. While establishing the forgiving role of wives, it affirms the mutuality of forgiveness. Without having the readiness to forgive the mistakes of each other, the stability of marriage bond will be doubtful.[16] Marital forgiveness insists that the 'thirst for vengeance' should be substituted with the desire for love and communion for a peaceful living of the sacramental marital life.[17] Once the couple shows the willingness to forgive the mistakes of each other, they affirm their divine call to be positioned in the image of Christ. Through the act of forgiveness, they share the Christ-experience with each other.

Chavara warns that a marriage which experiences discord and fight among the spouses will perish without any delay.[18] There may have differences of opinion and small conflicts in any marriage but that should not become grave

14 Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 105 (*AAS* 108:353).

15 Mathew Vellanickal, "Family Life in the Bible," *Biblebhashyam* 3, 3 (1977), 201.

16 Vellanickal, "Family Life in the Bible," 201.

17 Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 105.

18 Chavara, *Chavarul*, 1:1.

as to trouble marital love. Unwillingness to forgive forces the spouses not to compromise and accommodate each other. The continuance of fighting spirit and discords will ruin the beauty of marriage. Chavara thus exhorts them to 'forgive the mistakes and shortcomings of each other'.[19] Mistakes and shortcomings are part of any person's life but when the spouses show the capacity and disposition to love and respect each other than those undesired elements of one's personality and help each other to correct them, then those marriages will become exemplars of mutuality. The most essential thing in any fruitful marriage is the capacity of the couple to overlook the faults of each other with the mind of Christ.[20] Christ is always ready to forgive others and we experience it in the sacrament of reconciliation. When both the husband and wife accomplish the forgiving-mind of Christ, they become Christ-like-husband and Christ-like-wife. This is how a marriage becomes the image of Christ-Church relationship in its practice.

Chavara further notes that 'woe unto those who cause quarrels in families'.[21] Marriage is a God-made relationship. God is the author of marriage. From the very beginning God planned human nature in such a way that the male and female counterparts should be joined as one for a life of love and communion. But at the same time, Christ reminds us that 'what God has joined together, let no one separate' (Mk 10:9). The human nature, after the fall, is under the clutches of sin and so it can take the control of human behaviour. It may even cause discord in relationships. Hence, the words and deeds

19 Chavara, *Chavarul*, 1:1.

20 Chavara, *Chavarul*, 1:1.

21 Chavara, *Chavarul*, 1:1.

and even the presence of some persons can cause quarrels in marital relationship. Spouses need extreme care and attention to avoid such kind of persons who can cause damage in their love-relationship. A jealous friend can cause damage to a beautiful marriage. *Chavarul* in this same line exhorts the Thomas Christians that they should not cause quarrels in any marriage, and at the same time, it also demands the spouses to be cautious against those persons who may cause disturbance in their spousal relationship. There is no place for quarrels in spousal relationship and no person should ever try to cause such a scandal in any marriage. It implies that everyone has a God-given responsibility to protect the serene atmosphere of family.

3.3. Disciplined Economic Life

Discipline in economic matters is the cornerstone of a successful marital life. Many families lose their peaceful living and meaningful celebration of marriage due to economic mismanagement. Chavara says that 'both extravagance and miserliness are sinful',[22] and so, he instructs not to spend beyond one's means.[23] Spending beyond one's capacity is an attempt to catch up with the wealthy persons of the society. They try to show that they are also rich sacrificing the future of their family. Extravagance is a self-imposed burden at the cost of life. It is nothing but an 'extra-thing' added to the inferiority-superiority syndrome of certain human beings. They try to upturn their economic inferiority by living a luxurious life without having proper means. They unnecessarily borrow money and finally will reach to a point where they even fail to satisfy the necessities of life. Debt not only troubles the

22 Chavara, *Chavarul,* 1:15.

23 Chavara, *Chavarul,* 1:6.

economic life of family, but it also affects and confuses its every aspect. *Chavarul* thus states that the 'wealthiest family is the one which is not in debt'.[24] Wealth was identified with 'debtlessness'. Unmanageable debt may even force persons and families to anguish and suicide. Debt-free family was the aim of Chavara for giving such a beautiful instruction.

Chavara realized that the economic mismanagement and luxurious life of many families cause issues to their existence. Economic mismanagement creates unparalleled issues among the spouses. Mostly, the wealth of the family was handled by the husband as the head of the family and if he is not strict in financial matters then it will ruin the entire family structure and will cause pain and mental agony to the wife. It disturbs the day-to-day functioning of the family. It will affect their love-life. *Chavarul* instructs the spouses that there should be a disciplined economic life for the survival of marriages and families. Economic discipline echoes the discipline in the family. Chavara counsels them that debt causes tension in marriage, and hence, the absence of debt is the real asset for a successful marital life.[25] Proper and prudent management of wealth and the daily life is an essential requirement for celebrating marriage in its depth.

Chavarul though written in the 19th century is still relevant where the management of money has become so precious in every step of life. It suggests developing a new lifestyle of openness and simplicity in economic matters as the hallmark of Thomas Christian families.[26] Christian spouses should be

24 Chavara, *Chavarul,* 1:4.

25 Edappulavan, *Celebration of Mutuality*, 150.

26 Josin George Kaithakulam and Thomas J. Parayil, "St Kuriakose Elias Chavara's Vision of the Family in *Chavarul*," in Shaji George

known not for their luxurious lifestyle but for their simplicity and modesty. In the present world, the Thomas Christian families are known for their big houses, costly weddings, luxurious vehicles, precious ornaments, and delicious food habits. Baptism, first communion, marriage, and Holy Orders have become celebrations of luxury rather than celebrations of faith. Millions are spent unnecessarily for many family functions. Even the poor families try to compensate many of their basic wants to have a luxurious function for the marriages of their children. Status has become the catchword of the Thomas Christians than faith in the contemporary world. But unfortunately, this 'thirst for status' compels them to compensate their desire for happy life. Wealth cannot bring happiness to any marriage if it is not properly managed. The appropriate management of wealth and modest way of life enhances the couple's mutual understanding and sharing leading them to perfect communion.

3.4. Beware of Trespassers

Trespassers can fabricate confusion and damage any relationship. Trespassers are the intruders into the specific zone owned by others. They enter the valuable possession of others without availing proper permission, and slowly, they try to own them and their space causing serious issues for the real owners. In many unoccupied properties in cities and towns we see boards with the reminders: 'trespassers are prohibited' or 'trespassers will be prosecuted.' These reminders affirm that trespassers are not lawful persons, and they should not enter the zone occupied by others. The

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Kochuthara, ed., *Vocation and Mission of the Family: Reflections on Chavarul and Amoris Laetitia*, Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2020, 92.

most valuable possession of a couple's life is the sacrament of marriage received at the altar of Christ and the family created in love for life, and so, they must protect it with utmost care from all trespassers. Chavara thus reminds the spouses that they should 'accept only those who are well-mannered and God-fearing'[27] into their home. If they permit all sorts of people to enter the sanctity of their marital relationship and family, then there is every possibility of having troubles. Every spousal relationship has its own rhythm and when someone trespasses into it then there is high chance for unintended and undesired incidents causing unpleasant noises in marital bond. Once the rhythm is lost then it also damages their harmony of life. *Chavarul*'s instruction is noteworthy, if the spouses permit only well-mannered and God-fearing people into their families, their presence can help them to grow in love and communion; and if the indecent persons are allowed into the families, they may cause disorder in their space of love and life.

3.5. Do not Peep into other Marriages

Comparison with the other pairs is one of the serious drawbacks of many marriages. Each marital relationship is unique in its own kind, and it cannot be compared with other marriages which are unique in their own nature. Two different personalities through the sacramental grace of marriage become one in body, mind and soul, and this union of two is different in its substance and nature from the other union in another marriage. Hence, it will be a meaningless attempt to follow the other pair's way of life in one's own marriage. Each couple has its own unique way of marital life. But they can incorporate good things from the other spouses. Chavara thus

27 Chavara, *Chavarul,* 1:9.

instructs that the spouses should not 'go from door to door seeking news about others'.[28] A couple should focus more on their relationship, and instead, if they peep into the affairs of other couples that will blight their marital intimacy.[29] Peeping into other marriages will ruin the uniqueness of one's own marriage and it will disturb their attention. As a loving father, Chavara instructs the spouses to focus on their own marriage than the positives and negatives of other marriages. They should not be so much interested in other marriages than their own. They can be inspired by other couples, but they cannot be confused by their way of life. Chavara tries to affirm a culture of sacredness of marital and family space wherein the spouses should have the freedom and focus to live their life of love without any deviations and perversions.

3.6. Unfailing Relationship with Christ

Christian marriage is a union of male and female in the Lord. This union is given the capacity and blessing to become the image of the divine covenantal relationship of Christ and the Church. Human marriage thus must be continuously inspired by the divine covenantal relationship. Christ is the *sine qua non* element of both the divine and human relationships. Christ is the bridegroom of the divine relationship whose bride is the Church. Christian marital relationship is nothing but a relationship of man and woman in Christ. The divine marriage is a Christ-Church union, and the Christian marriage is a union in Christ, which is the replica of the divine marriage. Since Christian marriage is a relationship of a Christ-bearing-man with a Christ-bearing-woman in Christ, its endurance depends on their relationship with Christ. Chavara thus says that 'the

28 Chavara, *Chavarul,* 1:7.

29 Chavara, *Chavarul,* 1:7.

most valuable possession of a family [marriage] consists in fear of and devotion to the Lord'.[30] He exhorts them to depend on God when they 'are faced with trials and tribulations, disease and difficulties' of life.[31] These are the moments wherein they feel troubled and confused and if they rely on Christ, they will be able to overcome those uncertainties in mutual love and God-given-hope. Divine providence will continue to instil the required strength in the God-fearing couple, so that, they will be able to face and sort out any difficulties of life. Chavara instructs them to participate in the Eucharistic celebrations on Sundays and on the days of obligation and advises them to participate fruitfully in 'the virtuous act of family prayer' daily.[32] Fruitful celebration of the holy Eucharist and the daily participation in family prayer will enhance the Christ-awareness of the spouses. He tries to communicate 'the capability and the naturality of family prayer in inculcating lasting values'[33] in spousal relationship. Only when the spouses show the willingness to unite themselves and their love-union with Christ in Eucharistic celebration and prayer, their union lasts forever.

4. Conclusion

Chavara's *Chavarul* is a unique contribution to the Thomas Christians as it expounds the practical theology of marriage

30 Chavara, *Chavarul,* 1:19.

31 Chavara, *Chavarul,* 1:20.

32 Chavara, *Chavarul,* 1:22, 24.

33 Paulachan Kochappilly, "The Ethical Legacy of Chavara for Our Times," in Paul Kalluveettil and Paulachan Kochappilly, eds., *The Lord of Heaven and Earth: Chavara Studies in Honour of Fr. Lucas Vithuvattickal, CMI*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2004, 245.

strongly rooted in Scripture and the Fathers of the Church. It tries to present the depth of the essentials of Christian marriage in simple terms realizing its necessity for the indigenous people. But at the same time, its vision is universal in nature. The presentation of marriage as a communion of love is its core and it extends beyond time. *Chavarul* enriches the couples to face the uncertainties of marital life with a positive mind and faith in Christ. The key principles of *Chavarul* are applicable to any generation in any part of the world as they are closely connected with the daily life of married people. A torchlight is given to the spiritual children by a visionary father in faith with the conviction that marriage and family are the very base of the Church (*ecclesiola in ecclesia*).[34] These guidelines are given to strengthen the marital relationship of the Thomas Christians desiring to transform their families into the images of the Holy Family of Nazareth. As these guidelines are specifically pastoral and practical in their nature and spirit, they can be incorporated into the daily life of any couple in any part of the world.

Spouses are the primary addressee of the *Chavarul* than the family in general as Chavara was very much aware of their primordial role in forming a culture of love and communion in the family. Marital relationship is the cornerstone upon which all other relationships in the family is built on, and hence, the celebrative functioning of marital union will fortify the entire family structure. According to him, love and respect should not be one-sided in marriage but mutual reinforcing their communion. The virtue of forgiveness is to be celebrated as the essential quality of marital wellbeing. He motivates them to focus on a disciplined economic life as its absence will

34 Walter Kasper, *The Gospel of the Family*, New York: Paulist Press, 2014, 23.

endanger their peaceful living. He warns them to be cautious of the trespassers and further exhorts them not to peep into the life of others. Unnecessary interference into the life of others and permitting others to trespass the boundaries of one's own marital space are perilous for the beauty and sanctity of marriage. Besides, he advises them to be focused on love of God to live an ideal Christian marriage.

Chavarul's visionary positioning in proposing a practical and pastoral theology of marriage enriches not only the married persons but also the theologians and other specialists who actively engage in the discussions and marital enrichment programmes. The couples need to be enriched with the practical steps that originate from a pastoral approach of the Church leaders. The Church must come close to the fundamental situations and issues of the married. A sound theology of marriage necessitates to concentrate on and address the practicalities of marital life within a scriptural and theological framework. Both these elements are necessary for developing a real theology of marriage and they are presented in this outstanding work of Chavara.

CONCLUSION

Pastoral Personality and Catechetical Visionary

Naiju Jose Kalambukattu CMI

Kuriakose Elias Chavara, a pastoral personality characterized by empathy, genuineness, compassion and openness to all, was a prominent figure in the Syro-Malabar Church, and he was instrumental in spearheading renewal in the Church. He addressed both internal and external challenges, promoted unity and cohesion in the Church ensuring the community stays strong in faith, and urged its members to deepen their faith through his loyalty to the Church and its liturgical life, theological heritage and spirituality. He embraced a life of asceticism, holiness and personal sanctification, for asceticism was a dominant feature of Christian life in the Syriac tradition to which he belonged to and a motivational force of the ecclesial life. He regarded the purity of heart as the basic virtue, and the abiding compunction of heart prompted him to compare himself to the prodigal son (Lk 15:11-24)[1] and lament his sins and plead for God's mercy.

Nevertheless, Chavara, a brilliant paradigm of virtues[2] and holiness of life, believed that each Christian at baptism is betrothed to Christ the bridegroom; and he could maintain

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1 Joel Chiramal & Joy Philip Kakkanatt, "The Parable of the Prodigal Son in *Dhyānasallāpaṅṅal*: An Example for the Hermeneutics of Chavara, *Herald of the East* 16, 1 (January-June 2024), 107-111.

2 Mareena & Benny Thettayil, "Sanctity and Virtues in the Life of a Saint," "Theological Virtues in the Life of Chavara," "Cardinal Virtutes in the Life of Chavara," "Evangelical Counsels in the Life of Chavara," in Benny Thettayil & Naiju Jose Kalambukattu, ed., *Father and Doctor of the Church: A Theological Reading of the Life and*

the purity of the robe of glory put on at his baptism. He stated at his deathbed: "By the grace of God, I dare say that with their [Holy Family] help never had I experienced an occasion where I was deprived of the grace received in baptism."[3] At the passing of Chavara, the sisters wrote about his holy and inspiring life in their chronicle: "This Father of ours was a model and guiding light to all the Christians in Kerala. Moreover, he was a pillar that supported the Catholic Church because of the zeal he evinced in its expansion and in the protection of faith."[4] He mirrored Christ and established the convents and the monasteries to remain as "the mirror of virtues and the "abode of saints."

Chavara's writings urged the people to say united with the Church and grow in holiness. The biblical simplicity is perfectly echoed in Chavara's writings, and they are steeped in the tradition of the Scripture, Fathers of the Church and the symbolic-poetic style of thought with a lot of symbolism, imagery and types. The symbolic-poetic approach of Chavara with the *heart's eye* (Eph 1:18) attempts to wonder at and be grateful to the mystery of Christ in the history of salvation. Kochumuttom expounds that for Chavara, faith is *the heart's eye*,[5] and he advises: "Falling prostrate in the holy presence of God Almighty you must look at Him with *the eye of your*

Writings of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara, Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications & Kochi: Chavara Central Secretariat, 2024, 265-318.

3 Moolayil, *Positio*, 548. Quoted in A.M. Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, revised edition, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2020, 392-393.

4 *The Chronicles of the Koonammavu Convent*, Vol. 2, 2002, 23.

5 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Kochi: Chavara Central Secretariat & Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2017, 235.

heart and worship Him."[6] Chavara had *the eye of his heart*, and he could see God's providence in everything, and experience and enjoy the uninterrupted vision of God,[7] for the *eye of the heart* suggests profound comprehension of the mystery of God beyond mere intellectual understanding of the depths of inner being. As a man of prayer, Chavara prayed truly, for according to the famous aphorism of Evagrius, "If you are a theologian, you will pray in truth; if you pray in truth, you will be a theologian."[8] For Evagrius, true theology is not merely intellectual exercise but it is deeply rooted and grounded in an authentic life of prayer and communion with God. What made Chavara a unique pastoral person is his rootedness in Christ's love (Eph 3:17) through prayer and communion with Him.

Chavara's actions supported prayer and his prayer supported action. In the words of Pope Francis, the blending of both prayer and work is the ability to cultivate an interior space which can give a Christian meaning to commitment and activity (*EG* 262).[9] Chavara could blend the contemplative life of Mary, who sat at the feet of the Lord (Lk 10:40) and the active service of Martha well in his life. As Pope John Paul II teaches, "The missionary must be a contemplative in action. He finds answers to problems in the light of God's word

6 *Dyanasallapankal* in Chavara Achante Sampurna Kritikal, vol. 3, Mannanam, 1981, 25.

7 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 235.

8 Evagrius Ponticus, *Chapters on Prayer*, 60, in J.P. Migne, ed., *Patrologia Graeca* 79, col. 1180B.

9 https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html; accessed on 16.01.2025.

and in personal and community prayer" (*RM* 91),[10] Chavara urges every Christian disciple to take up the challenging task of combining prayer with activities and activities with prayer, one leading to and enriching the other. Pope Francis reiterates, "Without prolonged moments of adoration, of prayerful encounter with the word, of sincere conversation with the Lord, our work easily becomes meaningless; we lose energy as a result of weariness and difficulties, and our fervour dies out" (*EG* 262). Chavara, even in adverse and difficult moments of life, never lost the energy or fervour because he recognized the significance of deeper union with the Lord in prayer and adoration, and hence, he amalgamated both prayer and work. Though Chavara, during his era, felt the urgent need of throwing himself into the *work of the Lord*, he always gave priority to enter into communion with the *Lord of the work* in prayer. Through the life-example, he taught his followers that a true disciple needs to be both Martha and Mary, and he challenged their priorities so that the fellowship with the Lord was ensured by being with the Lord and hearing his Word before the work for the Lord was done.

A careful study of his spiritual experience and the general picture of his writings, be it historical (*The Chronicles*), literary (*Compunction of the Soul, Dirge, Anastasia's Martyrdom*), spiritual (*Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*) and the *Letters*, reflect and reveal the nature of his theology and spirituality. He was an apostle of the Eucharist who urged his confreres to love Jesus present in the most Holy Eucharist with all their hearts.[11] As the Eucharist was the source, centre and the strength of

10 https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio.html; accessed on 16. 01.2025.

11 *Positio*, 548.

his life and mission, he preferred to shup himself up in the tabernacle with Jesus. He wrote to the sisters, "Behold I have locked up your hearts in the tabernacle of Jesus. I have done the same with mine as well. Let us stay there until the day of resurrection."[12] The zeal for the eucharistic Lord urged him to work for the liturgical renewal, and launch several pastoral and catechetical initiatives such as preaching Sunday homilies, annual retreats in the parishes, and pastoral care for the people, especially the sick and the poor. With ardent love and deep faith, he longed to see the Lord and to have an enlightened understanding of the history of salvation and truth explained through his poetic logic and vision, committed to the service of the Church and its pastoral concerns, had tender devotion to Mother Mary and proudly described himself as a servant of Mary, and sought God's will always and everywhere.

Chavara's writings demonstrate his deep trust in God's providence, especially in the face of challenges. He exhorted, "Entrust yourself to the Divine Providence when you are faced with trials and tribulations, diseases and difficulties".[13] His letters and spiritual writings are full of exhortations for moral integrity and sanctification. "God's will always and everywhere," was the watchword of his spirituality. Chavara wished to be conformed to the will of God, for he was convinced of the fact that "God's will be done and will be performed."[14] He realized that the discipleship demands

12 Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Letters*, trans. Mary Leo, Ernakulam: KCM Press, 1990, 85.

13 Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Chavarul: Testament of a Loving Father*, revised and updated edition, Kochi: Chavara Central Secretariat, 2018, Part 1:20.

14 *CWC*, Vol. III, *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, Mannanam: St Joseph's Press, 1990, 1.

denial of one's self and will (Mt 16:24; Mk 8:34). His letters register the same, "Our task is only to arrange for the work to be done. God will give us the money for it, because all this is God's work our competence here is only to work."[15]

Chavara's motto, "The Lord is my portion" (Ps 16:5), was a profound declaration of faith, devotion and commitment to the Lord. As the Psalmist experienced, he trusted and believed in God as his ultimate treasure, surpassing all earthly possessions and desires. To phrase it differently, for Chavara, God's love and promises outweighed all earthly possessions and desires, for the Lord himself was his portion and inheritance (Sir 45:22). As his motto denoted, the Lord was his supreme good and he found his satisfaction and fulfilment in the Lord, and his detachment from all that is not God was key to his life. It also meant for him that God was the source of his happiness and blessing and the foundation of Chavara's life and ministry was the complete reliance on God.

Chavara firmly believed that God was the source of his security, hope and inheritance; and his own words expressed the same: "Oh my God: You are my love, my joy, and all my fortune. If not in you, how could I live my life? You are my breath, my food and my drink. What a solace have I in you!"[16] These musings of Chavara may have their basis on the Jesuan words: "Apart from me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5), and practised detachment from all that is not God. Kochumuttom comments: "Having God as one's possession, naturally one

15 *CWC*, Vol. IV, *Letters*, VII/5, 81; Lucas Vithuvattickal, "A Life Full of Virtues," in P. Kalluveettil and P. Kochappilly, ed., *The Lord of Heaven and Earth*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2004, 103.

16 *CWC*, Vol. II, *Atmanuthapam* (Malayalam), trans. Mary Leo, *Compunction of the Soul*, Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Bl. Chavara, 1989, 2:141-146.

does not need anything else; in and through Him one indeed has everything. Hence, all else other than God become quite insignificant, and one spontaneously becomes detached from them, which certainly is the real spirit of poverty."[17] Possessions constitute a formidable obstacle in a disciple's bid for the crown of salvation. Jesus reiterated: "So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions" (Lk 14:33). Jesus implies that to be his disciple is to relativise every other thing in life: family or wealth, prosperity or health or fame. He means that Kingdom of God must come first in the list of goals and priorities in a disciple's life.

Giving up the family inheritance and possessions, Chavara wished to be a genuine follower of the Lord and practiced the instruction: "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell all your possession, give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, and follow me" (Mt 19:21). Chavara exemplifies himself to illustrate the seriousness and urgency of the teachings of the Lord and shows us how absolute and radical are the demands of discipleship.

Chavara's readiness to cater for the spiritual needs of the people entrusted to his care even in the life-threatening situations[18] reveals not only his spirituality of contemplation and action but also his close imitation of the Good Shepherd. Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep (Jn 10:11). It is central to the pastoral vision of Jesus and it conveys the themes of care and protection, self-sacrifice and intimate relationship between Jesus and his disciples, for Jesus further says, "I know my

17 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 111.

18 Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 7.

sheep and my sheep know me" (Jn 10:14). Chavara's life and mission reflect the above qualities of self-sacrificial love, care for the flock, leadership and inclusivity. He dedicated his entire life to the spiritual and social uplift of the people, especially the marginalized, which reflected a shepherd's concern for the well-being of the flock. He understood the needs of the people and worked for their realization, protected and guided the Church during the time of crisis ensuring that his flock remained within the true fold.

Chavara urged the people to imitate Christ's teaching to "Love one another" (Jn 13:34) and exhorted them to be charitable and respectable and to forgive the shortcomings of fellow brethren. He admonished, "Forgive the mistakes and shortcomings of each other. If you do so, you will experience peace on earth and eternal reward in heaven."[19] His love knew no limits and condition, for he did not nurse any grudge against anyone, and in case, someone insulted him he made it sure that they were treated with love and respect (Mt 5:39, 41-42). An example of his heroic practice of the virtue of love was, as mentioned above, the administration of the sacrament of anointing of the sick to a person suffering from small-pox, although many dissuaded him from doing so due to the fear of contagion.[20] He advised: "Days on which you have not rendered any good to others will not be reckoned in the book of life. Be desirous of others' love and respect than they becoming fearful of you. Let no beggar leave your home

19 *Chavarul*, 1:1.

20 Mareena & Benny Thettayil, "Theological Virtues in the Life of Chavara," in Benny Thettayil & Naiju Jose Kalambukattu, ed., *Father and Doctor of the Church: A Theological Reading of the Life and Writings of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications & Kochi: Chavara Central Secretariat, 2024, 285.

empty handed; likewise, don't hesitate, as much as you can, to give alms."[21] Chavara longed to be conformed to Christ who emptied and humbled himself (Phil 2:6-7) and became poor for the sake of the humanity, and to imitate Christ he had taken humility as the fourth vow.

Chavara's life and works displayed the biblical invitation to imitate Christ (1 Cor 11:1) and to live a life of Gospel values, love, humility and service. His life reflected Christ's forgiving love, sacrifice and obedience and his various ministries and initiatives of charity namely, old age homes, orphanages, and schools, embody the Gospel message to love and serve one's neighbour (Mt 25:35-40). The founding of two indigenous congregations for men and women as *Besrauma,* a house built on a hilltop for all to see,[22] a *spiritual resort* or *a mirror of virtues* was a creative and positive response to the biblical ideal of Christian perfection (Mt 5:45: 1 Pet 1:16). He encouraged the faithful to read and meditate the Word of God regularly, for he understood the transformative power of the Word in personal and communal life; he insisted on the family prayer where all the members participate actively that echoes the biblical ideal of unity in worship.

Chavara had a pastoral personality and was a true catechist at heart, for he wished to serve others with the heart of Jesus, the Good Shepherd. As a visionary in catechetical ministry, he focused on family-centered faith formation, Sunday schools and structured catechism programmes, education as a means of evangelization, training of priests, religious and lay people.

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21 *Chavarul*, 1:14.

22 Benny Thettayil, "Rising Mountains and Proximity to the Divine: Biblical Ideal of *Bes-rauma*," *Herald of the East* 16, 2 (July-December 2024), 187.

His methods remain relevant even in the present times when faith formation faces challenges such as declining family prayer, secular influences, digital distractions, etc. Chavara who lived out the pastoral vision of Jesus the Good Shepherd by caring for his flock, guiding them in truth and sacrificing his life for their wellbeing, urges us to form a pastoral personality being rooted in prayer, remaining faithful to the call, staying close to Jesus and the Church, and serving the flock with compassion. In a nutshell, Chavara inspires us to make his pastoral heart that reflected the heart of Jesus alive in the Church's mission in our own times which necessitates a *re-imagination* of mission in the new paths and paradigms to uphold the vitality and power, life-giving and transformative nature of the Gospel (Heb 4:12).

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