

# HERALD OF THE EAST



## EDITORIAL

*Fr Joseph Kunnath C.M.I.*

## BLESSED CHAVARA A MAN OF DEEP VISION

*Shri P. Ramachandran, Former Governor of Kerala*

## FATHER CHAVARA THE PIONEER OF KERALA RENAISSANCE

*Fr J. Chirayil C.M.I.*

## BLESSED CHAVARA : A PERSONALITY OF 'EXPERIENTIAL' ENTRY

*Fr Albert Nambiaparambil C.M.I.*

## BLESSED CHAVARA : A MAN OF GOD WITH A SENSE OF HUMOUR

*Prof. A. P. Mathai*

## DOCUMENTATION

## FAVOURS RECEIVED : THE MIRACULOUS CURES OBTAINED

BY BLESSED ALPHONSA

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## Editorial

Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara was a man of wholeness, opposed to which is fragmentation which limits one's possibilities, restricts perspectives and the tendency of which is to exclude, rather than to include. Wholeness is open to reality in all its aspects. The multifaceted personality of Bl. Chavara is accounted for by his wholeness. Because of his wholeness, he was holy, he was sensitive to the problems of the society and was a challenge of his times. He alchemised everything he touched and in fact he left nothing untouched.

Blessed Kuriakose Elias had only been able to touch the tip of the iceberg of social reforms, intuitively exposing to posterity the magnitude of problems hidden under the existing social complacency about social justice and poverty. Since then, social action has had many transformations. Today it is more of working with the underprivileged rather than of working for them. The implications are three fold: The first is the kenotic experience. It is a rebberly to be privileged. Emptying oneself is essential to working with the underprivileged. Secondly it helps one cast one's lot with the inheritors of the Kingdom of God. Thirdly it helps to pull the underprivileged out of the slum ghettos of privation to work for their liberation, development and happiness, enabling them to share the privileges of this beautiful world.

"Act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with our God", says Prophet Micah (6:8). The three are intrinsically complementary. The communist experiment was or was claimed to be a revolution for justice; however, it was lacking in the elements of love and humility. Naturally it ended up in totalitarian, fascist



and suppressive domination over the toiling millions. Loving the poor without a sense of justice, is the usual social service of the 'crumbs'. Here there is every likelihood of glorifying poverty as a blessing exclusively reserved for the underprivileged. The privileged ensure that the poor are always with them, heaping sermons on them about the blessedness of poverty, appropriating meanwhile all the blessings of this world to themselves.

The challenges continue to demand delinking ourselves from supporting the oppressive structures, and emptying ourselves of the vulnerabilities that insulate us from the pinch of poverty and oppression. The demand is for integration and wholeness.

**Fr. Joseph Kunnath C.M.I.**

## Blessed Chavara a Man of Deep Vision

I consider it a privilege to associate myself with the national commemoration of the late Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara. It is a happy thought that the first public function of Dr Venkataraman in Kerala after assuming the august office of the President of India should be the present one where a unique honour is being conferred on a saint among men who was blessed and is a blessing. We thank our beloved Rashtrapathi and extend to him a welcome to Kerala.

Father Chavara is the pride not only of Kerala, but of entire mankind. It is rare indeed where so many sterling virtues have blended so perfectly in one individual. Father Chavara was born a mortal, but the good he did over a span of six and a half decades cast him in the mould of immortal of humanity. Yesterday, today and forever to the last syllable of recorded time this God-realised soul will remain among mankind's most cherished possessions.

Father Chavara's life is an inspiring and edifying saga. From the day he was ordained priest the father dedicated himself wholly to God and worked piously for the social, cultural and educational uplift of his fellow men. Unlike lesser mortals he did not seek pomp and fame, or worldly riches, or acclaim.

Father Chavara was a man of deep vision who thought and acted far ahead of his times. He had a sure grasp of spiritual verities as well as social realities. There is the wooden printing press preserved at Mannanam as eloquent witness to the Father's pioneering efforts to educate the people through the printed word. His awakened social conscience would stop nothing short of communicating enlightenment and comprehension to others. This is the true stamp of those who belong to the blessed community.

The house of charity was started at Kainakary by Father Chavara in 1869 as an institution to receive sick, poor and destitute people. It was the first of its kind in India. The



Carmelites of Mary Immaculate and the Sisters of the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel are two other organisations inspired by the Father. The members of these two organisations honour the memory of their founder by means of the dedicated social and educational work they are carrying out in various parts of the country.

There are today several colleges and schools, technical institutes, homes for the aged, the blind, the deaf and the physically handicapped, and hospitals and clinics, which owe their origin to the Father's vision and zeal for educational and social uplift of the community. If the test of true faith is the extent to which it transforms the individual and the social order, we must say that Father Chavara and generations of the dedicated band of missionaries he animated have stood this test with eminent success.

Religion as Father Chavara exemplifies it, is the fulfilment of life. Those who are devoid of religion, those who have missed the comforts and consolation of religion are incomplete human beings. The aim of a truly religious being is to serve God by serving mankind. He aims at completeness by enlarging the object of sympathy and compassion. This is the eternal truth which has been affirmed by all our seers and saints through the ages. Father Chavara also reaffirmed this verity by his selfless service to the lowly and the lost.

The Catholic Church has honoured Father Chavara by enlisting him among the holy men of the Church. It is a fitting gesture on the part of the Postal Department to honour the Father by issuing a commemorative stamp. I would like to utilise this opportunity to congratulate the postal authorities. The presence of the Rashtrapathi here to release the stamp is yet another token of recognition of the saintliness and greatness of this son of Kerala. May I also pay my own tributes to this great servant of the Lord who endeavoured throughout his life to fulfil the real mission of the Church.

**Shri P. Ramachandran**  
*Former Governor of Kerala*



## Fr Chavara the Pioneer of Kerala Renaissance

In spite of political convulsions and economic retrogression, by the second half of 19th century there occurred a remarkable outburst of intellectual activity and a radical sociocultural transformation in India. It was as if the dawn of a New India was breaking in, Raja Rammohan Roy, Keshab Chandra, justice Ranade, Swami Dayananda Saraswathi, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Annie Besant etc, with their followers and organisations, were behind this social and religious revolution. On the whole they struck the true keynote of social reform in India by upholding the cause of women and denouncing the evils of regorous caste system, the two main lines on which all social reforms have proceeded since.<sup>1</sup>

This North Indian phenomenon has had no great impact on Kerala, though Kerala has been an integral part of the Indian subcontinent, owing to its peculiar isolation from the rest of the country. Its unique geographical position, particular physical features, and centuries long trade with Europe and Asia have invested Kerala with a distinct individuality. This has created a kind of political, cultural, economic, and a socio-religious isolation from the rest of the country, especially North India<sup>2</sup>. With a very few exceptions, such as the advent of the Arians and the itinerary of Sri Sankara Acharya in North India, the state in the past, enjoyed this insularity which has given it a welcome immunity from political upheavels and drastic socio-cultural changes that shook the Indo-Gangetic plain. Paradoxical though it may seem, Kerala has been influenced more by the western world than by north India. Moreover, this

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1. R. C. Majumdar: *An Advanced History of India*. p 822-825

2. Elankulam Kunjanpillai: *Studies in Kerala History* p. 331

Also, A. Sreedhara Menon: *Social and Cultural History of Kerala* p. 65

part of the land was able to evolve its own unique way of life and sociocultural institutions.

At the dawn of the 19th century the caste system was playing havoc in Kerala. Originally Kerala was a casteless society. But Arianization with its basic principle of Chaturvarna had imposed caste system on the casteless Dravidian Society even in pre-Christian times. The fate of the lower castes like Ezhavas and Nadars, and of the outcastes like Pulaya, Paraya, etc. was horrible as well as inhuman. The government and the caste Hindus oppressed them. They were considered polluting classes. Pulayas and Parayas were slaves of the high castes and were bought and sold as cattle. The people of the slave castes were obliged to "give the road to and keep a specific distance from free men, more especially persons of high caste, in order to avoid pollution of the letters."<sup>3</sup> These people were not allowed to wear gold or silver jewellery. The women of these classes were not permitted even to cover their breasts. We may briefly describe the pitiful plight of these human beings in the words of S. Mateer: They were bought and sold like cattle, starved, flogged like buffaloes, made to work all day for a little rice and kept a distance as polluted".<sup>4</sup> They were totally banned from having any education. In fact the upper castes, did not tolerate the educational development of these castes, especially that of their women.

If a man was born into these castes he was destined to leave as a slave. "If the owner of the slaves happened to die without heirs" says J. W. Gladstone, "the slaves would become government slaves".<sup>5</sup> In order to avoid polluting 'respectable' people, they had to live in dingy huts put up on the fringes of paddy fields or on far away hillocks. Their clothes were filthy as no one is willing to wash for them and they have no washermen of their own like other castes", says S. Mateer.<sup>6</sup> Even in 1843 there were many millions of slaves in India.

3. Charles Mead: *The Constitutions of Slaves in Travancore and Cochin*, quoted by J.W. Gladstone, *In Protestant Christianity and People's Movements in Kerala (1850-1936)* 1984 p. 34.

4. S. Mateer: *Pariah Caste in Travancore* quoted by J. W. Gladstone. Ibid p. 38

5. J.W. Gladstone: Ibid p. 34

6. S. Mateer: *Native Life in Travancore* p. 41



Even though the Christian way of life was received by Indians in the second half of 1st century (AD 52) itself and was accepted as an indigenous faith, St Thomas Christians were not 'missionary' in the strict sense of the term. They belonged to the higher strata of Kerala Society and were converted from Namburis and Brahmins. Hence they also retained almost all the evils of Chaturvarna and Untouchability.

Then the missionaries from the west came in the 15th & 16th centuries, and their work was concentrated on coastal lines and among the seafaring people. The so-called Harijans and Chandalas were slowly taken care of and converted to Christianity by LMS & CMS missionaries. Although the 1st LMS Missionary, Tobias Ringeltoube, came to Mayiloudy in 1806 and the 1st CMS Missionary Thomas Norton was in Kochi in 1816, on account of opposition from 'Orthodox Hindus' they could do very little but translate the Bible and start a few schools. The synod of Mavelikara (1836) brought their activities to a standstill. But afterwards it gathered momentum and slowly yielded sufficient fruit. J. W. Gladstone says: "By the middle of the 19th century this selfawareness became very strong in the society of Kerala. During the second half of the 19th century the impact of this consciousness expressed itself in various ways and led to movements of various types".<sup>7</sup>

In this context we may recall the activities of stalwarts like Chattampi Swamikal (1854-1961), Sri Narayana Guru (1854-1924), Swami Agamananda (1896-1961), and Ayyamkali (1863-1941).

But decades before the work of these great men, in the 1st half of the 19th century, Father Chavara appeared as a solitary star (1805-1871) on the socio-religious horizon of Kerala. Kerala was then really in the birth-pangs of a socio-religious revolution to emancipate the oppressed and the suppressed. Father Chavara was a man of God, an ascetic, a visionary and the only leader of St Thomas Christians of the whole of Kerala. This activist started an awakening and a silent but effective revolution in the socio-religious field.

After he had been ordained priest in 1829 he started a 'bhakti movement' throughout Travancore. Together with his

7. J. W. Gladstone: Ibid p. 75



colleagues he preached retreats and effected a spiritual renaissance, all through the country, among Christians. Thousands and thousands listened to his talks, experienced Jesus, and were thus won over to the authentic teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. He instructed the faithful to see Jesus in the outcasts of the society and embrace them as their brothers and sisters. He founded the 'Darsana Bhavanam' (Monastery-1831) at Mannanam to be the power house of this Bhakti Movement where from his followers (CMIs) had to disseminate and give leadership to Christian Renaissance.

Since it was a spiritual movement it had to be continued. Hence he wanted plenty of labourers for the harvest. He started seminaries to form priests, renewed and co-ordinated liturgical services, codified prayer books for the use of priests, started 40 hours adoration and May devotion, wrote books, and began to found monasteries or ashrams the length and breadth of Kerala that they might be temples of prayer and service. He eradicated schism and promoted vigorous ascetic life. He was the promoter of devotional practices like the rosary and the holy scapular; he was the apostle of the Holy Eucharist, Mary the Mother of God and St. Joseph.<sup>8</sup> This 'bhakti movement' spread like wildfire throughout Kerala. People became enthusiastic and whole-heartedly followed his leadership co-operating with him very generously. Thus he became the undisputed leader and the unconsecrated Bishop of St Thomas Christians of all Kerala. He was regarded as the founder of the Modern Church in Kerala.

Simultaneously Father Chavara took up the role of a great social worker. According to Swami Nikhilananda "three conditions must be fulfilled before a man may aspire to become a social servant. First, he must feel the suffering of others. Second, he must find the right means to alleviate human suffering. Third, he must be totally unselfish. There should not be any motive of personal gain or power behind his social service. A man who sees the Divine Spirit in all can be the true servant of society. To him work is same as worship"<sup>9</sup>. This true picture of a social worker is a hundred per cent verified in Father Chavara.

8. His Holiness Pope John Paul II. Address at Kottayam, 8-2-'86

9. Swami Nikhilananda: *The life sublime*, Ed. by M S Chaubey p. 185



Father Chavara was very fond of outcastes such as Parayas, Pulayas, and Chandalas in and around Kuttanad and near his monasteries like Mannanam, Pulincunnoo, Chethipuzha, Vazhakulam, Elthuruth and Poonjar. He turned his attention to the uplift of the lowest castes and the outcastes. He knew them intimately as the victims of age-old oppression. He felt sympathy for them. All the same was not a politician or an active revolutionist who would incite these people to fight against the brutal injustice and oppression they were labouring under. His state of life as a Priest and sanyasi precluded him from starting a vociferous liberation struggle. So he lit a lamp in the gruesome darkness through his own example.

He permitted Ezhavas Harijans and others to enter his monasteries, work there and earn their livelihood. He kept them well supplied with food, clothing and medicine and opened churches for their worship. All these when blind belief in pollution and untouchability reigned supreme all over Kerala.

He found it was not enough to feed them, clothe them and heal them of their sickness. He had to develop them, bring them slowly into the main stream of society, and to help them equip themselves to be eligible for government services and for state administration. He knew that people were the sovereigns of their own life and that the voice of the people should be heard. He had the vision of a risen people who should take for themselves what the oppressors did not give. In order to prepare the Harijans and Avarnas for this future struggle he wanted to educate them. So he started a primary school at Arpookara (1864). Moreover he built a Sanskrit school (1846) at Mannanam where he wanted the Harijans to learn Sanskrit, the sacred language, sitting together with the children of Savarnas. Here we have to remember that only Savarnas were allowed to learn Sanskrit. Indeed it was a great challenge and a high-handed revolutionary step: Father Chavara could have whole-heartedly said with John Brown: "I pity the poor in bondage that have none to help them; that is why I am here not to gratify any personal animosity, revenge or vindictive spirit. It is my sympathy with the oppressed and the wronged, that are as good as you, and as precious in the sight of God"<sup>10</sup>.

10. John Brown: Quoted by Thoreau in *Slavery in Massachusetts*.



Nowadays we hear a lot about literacy campaign every nook and cranny in Kerala. But in his time Father Chavara wanted to start schools adjacent to every church to make people literate. In these schools, students of all religions and castes including lower castes, and out castes were to be enrolled. Can't we say that this was the first phase of the literary campaign among the people of Kerala? The words of R. Venkataraman, President of India, are worth recalling in this context. "Father Chavara regarded education as a means of uplifting the poor. ... he ensured that all parishes maintained schools as auxiliary to them. Going further, Father Chavara threatened to close down those parishes which failed to comply with his instructions regarding the maintaining of schools. It is remarkable that his schools were open to members of all communities who sought admission including Harijans... Christian missions worked among adivasis, the aboriginals, and among Harijans in a practical implementation of the Christian ethics of service. Few people have exemplified this dimension of Indian Christianity as memorably as Father Chavara."<sup>11</sup>

In 1869 he started a House of charity at Kainakary. This was intended to take care of sick, poor and destitute people. It was the first of its kind in India. This was a symbolic expression of his love for the homeless and the unfed. This became the beacon or torch from which others lighted their candles and so we have at present thousands of poor homes, houses of charity, orphanages, houses for the destitute and dying all through the country.

Decades before the inception of the Depressed Classes Mission Society (1906) and the 'Harijan' movement of Mahatma Gandhi, Father Chavara had launched out into his noble mission of improving 'the social as well as the spiritual conditions of the depressed classes'.

He was also a champion of the printing press in Kerala. He started his press at Mannanam in 1846. He was thus able to quench the intellectual hunger and spiritual thirst of the people.

The condition of the women folk in Kerala during 19th century was far from good. They were easy prey to brutal suppression and oppression. There were so many in human abuses

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11. His Excellency R. Venkataraman - Trivandrum Dec. 20, '87.



perpetuated on them such as infanticide, secret murder of female children, and 'Sati' or self-immolation as it prevailed in China, Babylonia and many other countries. Enlightened Mogul rulers like Akbar not only raised their voice in protest but also took effective steps to prevent such obnoxious practices. But the absence of an organised move and sustained effort led to no permanent effect. (only Lord Bentinck (1829) and Lord Hardinge were instrumental in suppressing Sati and infanticide in the Indian states)<sup>12</sup>. Father Chavara was conscious of their pitiful condition and was sympathetic. Here also he wanted to do something seriously. Radical action or the fighting spirit was not in the blood. 'Light your torch and show the way' was his motto. Whatever be the prize, his intention was to raise women from their despicable and degrading state and thus emancipate them. Here too he found education as a lever to raise them. So he founded another Religious Congregation for women (CMC) in 1866. He had in mind two clear-cut objectives in starting this society: 1) to form a group of women living scrupulously the religious way of life who were dedicated to the love and service of God and 2) to get these women to work among the women-folk as a catalyst and a liberative force. Hence one of the main thrusts in their way of life was to educate women, irrespective of caste and creed, including Harijans, and thus secure for them better and reasonable living conditions and work.

The CMC Congregation, following in the footsteps of its founder and drawing inspiration from their brothers (CMI) started schools in various places in Kerala. These schools absorbed students not only of higher castes but also of lower castes and outcastes. Hundreds of girls from Ezhava, Pulaya, Paraya and Adivasi communities joined these schools. They became conscious of their personal worth and self respect. They began to grow up intellectually rubbing shoulders with Brahmins and Namburies. A new horizon was opening out. From among the outgoing Harijan students these schools slowly recruited workers as well as teachers. The women of all castes who were convent-educated began to scale the ladder of success in every realm of Kerala society. This pioneering effort in the field of cultural renaissance was afterwards taken up by other agencies and was in full swing

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12. R.C. Majumdar: Ibid p. 822-825



during the 1st half of the 20th century. At present women in Kerala are not in any way behind their counterparts in other parts of the world. The coveted position of Kerala women is due to the initiative of Father Chavara and his daughters. According to the President of India, "Father Chavara's vision anticipated modern developments in yet another field: the role of women. As early as 1866 Father Chavara laid the foundation for the Indian Congregation of women, thereby accelerating the great change that has come about in the status of women. Father Chavara thus represented a major manifestation of the Indian Renaissance which has raised our under-privileged, alleviated distress and infused our people with a sense of pride in themselves."<sup>13</sup>

Thus Father Chavara silently lighted the lamp of Kerala Renaissance in the first half of the 19th century itself. He was the glittering, lone 'Morning Star', that appeared on the horizon of Kerala heralding the dawn of a New Kerala. All his contributions became important and significant, against the background of his times and conditions in which he lived. Credit goes to Father Chavara in the main for the pioneering aspects of his work and his achievements without precedent.<sup>14</sup>

Before closing this study we have to answer a puzzling question. In spite of his pioneering work why didn't the historians ever mention his name in their works? The answer seems to be jerky. For many historians history of India means North Indian history; they have nothing much to say about South India, especially the isolated landstrip called Kerala. Hindu historians for whom India is Hindustan, Christianity and its contributions seemed to be threatening. Hindu fanaticism speaks much of the Hinduism and considers Muslims their enemies. However, the Christian presence in North India was very negligible during the 19th century. Hence Hindu historians projected only Hindu revival and its leaders as the cause and effect of Indian Revival. They spoke, here and there, about western missionaries, but according to them they were 'foreign invaders' who were siding with the colonial power.

13. R. Venkataraman: 20-12-'87

14. Chev. K. C. Chacko, *K. E. Chavara* p. 5



It was look into Kerala history, the authors have treated the St. Thomas Christians as indigenous people and the missionaries as foreigners. But we must understand that whether protestant or catholic, missionaries worked for our country, and in the country, for the uplift of Indian citizens. Those who were converted are Indians. So they are the sons of the soil. Here also the historians gave prominence to Hinduism, politics, governmental planning, and revolutionary activities. Our history is a partisan history. Though the pioneer of a renaissance, Father Chavara was a Christian religious priest. Moreover he was a monk and a silent worker. In the words of President R. Venkataraman he did everything 'through the medium of Christianity'.<sup>15</sup> Or in the words of P. Ramachandran, former Governor of Kerala, 'unlike lesser mortals he did not seek pomp and fame or wordly riches or acclaim'.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps this will be the true answer. Perhaps only politicians, revolutionaries and partymen may find room in the pages of our history. He has no place in these categories. However, if at all we go over his life and activities carefully, we cannot exclude him from a true, objective and non-sectarian history of Kerala and India. As the holy Archbishop Mar Mathew Kavukatt observed, "the life of Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara, a monk of extraordinary sanctity, a man of dynamic personality with broad vision and powerful push and unabating pluck ever remains an inexhaustible source of inspiration to all those who care to look at it."<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately there was nobody to take account of this unknown man and his life. We hope future historians may find them a treasure island, in their historical investigations and researches. This pioneering social reformer, long neglected, will be rehabilitated and justly ranked among such luminaries of the Indian Renaissance like Chattampi Swamikal, Rajaram Mohan Roy, and Sree Narayana Guru Swami.

Fr J. Chirayil C.M.I.

15. R. Venkataraman.

16. His Excellency P. Ramachandran: 20-12-'87

17. Rt. Rev. Dr. Mathew Kavukkat quoted by Chev: K.C. Chacko, in *K.E. Chavara* p. 1-2.

## Chavara : A Personality of "Experiential" Entry

"A river flowing like a river,  
A worm moving like a worm,  
I walking around like myself  
Is not this world wonderful?"

These lines from the Kerala Poet Kunjunni can serve as an entry into these reflections on the personality of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara. I am gripped most by the question at the end of the verse: is not this world wonderful?

Chavara had a personality that kept the sense of wonder alive all through. It was Aristotle who said that "philosophy begins with wonder." It would be all the more true if we said that poetry, art, pure devotion—all these fine vibrations of the human spirit—begin, live, grow, flower in this "wonder".

The 'casualty ward' of our sick world is crowded with persons who have, I feel, lost this sense of wonder. The hurly-burly of hectic modern life is rushing us to this casualty ward. "No time" is the very spontaneous response of most of us. In our consumerist world of 'use and reject' of 'throw-away culture', it is almost impossible to stand 'alone and speechless' with Chavara on the hillock of Mannanam or of 'Vazhakulam' to have a view of the 'darsana veedu', ie of the house of vision. It is this vision-darsan that holds the personality together, that makes it one and whole. Tagore has presented this trait of such a personality so beautifully in the Geetanjali: "Day after day, O Lord of my life, shall I stand before Thee face to face. In this laborious world of thine, tumultuous with toil and struggle, among hurrying crowds alone and speechless shall I stand before Thee face to face".



### Alone and Speechless

As I was typing out these random reflections, BBC was narrating the story of a person who is being punished for using drugs to get "more speed and more strength". Among hurrying crowds caught up in the Darwinian game of survival of the fittest, of creatures struggling for survival, it is difficult to be alone in quest of 'darsan'. Here is the entry of Chavara, an experiential entry: "I want to see Your Face". Like Arjuna caught unawares in Kurukshetra, on the battlefield of life, in the existential anguish the cry of Chavara is for the vision of the "whole", of the 'one'. There he stands 'alone and speechless'.

Let us look at the face of that personality keeping the sense of wonder alive in his meditative hymns:

"You are my father - you are my fortune  
There is no other treasure for me, but in you.  
You are my luck, you are my love.  
You are my breath, you are my drink,  
Where can I find solace but in You?"

Here is a personality whole and one standing alone and speechless, 'face to face' in an all-embracing vision, *darsanam*.

### Centred in and centring

The atheist, existentialist philosopher has in the novel 'Nausea' drawn very well the predicament of human beings who have lost the sense of having a centre. Their conquering adventures and advances are shattered with the realization that everything, everyone is outside.

The advances I make to possess the world, and my relentless efforts to capture the attention of the world and to win its applause are thwarted. In the game of musical chairs I cannot find one to sit on for you have forestalled me. Everything everyone is 'far off' in this world vision. But in the world vision, in the darsana vedu of Chavara, the experience is totally different.

His experiential entry and stand before the 'Whole' as a 'whole' brought everyone nearer and nearer. If an experience that everything and everyone is 'outside' makes Sartrean character cry out in despair, 'man is a useless passion!' Chavara is encountering all in the One and sees all in the One.

We can approach Chavara through his achievements, through different facets of the founder of two congregations, with responsibility of being a Vicar General in and through difficult times. His literary creations, the definite step in the communication field through the printing press, his zeal and pastoral care—all these may strike the admirers of Chavara. What was the source of that flow of energy? What was it that gave such a depth and weight to Chavara? What made him forget the offences and flow out in empathy and compassion for others, especially to those who gave him trouble.

The answer is simple: the simplicity of Chavara, the being 'one' and 'centred in' of Chavara. In that centre, in that 'God-with-us' and in the 'all-in-God' experience all are centred in, all, everything is brought in. There is no need to consume drugs to gain 'speed and strength'. The source is different.

The presence of such a person of experiential touch and entry roots and centres all, gives to all the Emmanuel experience. How true and meaningful is the Upanishadic meditation: "Fullness there, fullness here, fullness everywhere..."

There is that story of a man who got the boon of converting everything that he touched into gold. As the story tells us the boon became a curse. Gandhiji has told us of the 'Gospel of the rose'. He was saying this to convey the message that the rose need not go round proclaiming, selling fragrance. Of course, the moral that Gandhiji draws can be questioned. Proclamation and witness are meaningful and necessary. But, in our consumerist set-up there is this inherent risk of running into a predicament of being in a vacuum: this becomes 'identity crisis' frustration, emptiness, of being unable to convince others and oneself of 'achievements'.



**Fr. Kuriakose starts construction of the convent**

In the beginning of the year 1866, a person donated Rs. 10 out of a debt he was paid back through the monastery. With that and Rs. 8 got from some other source, work on the house was begun. It was built of coconut tree and bamboo mats. It was divided into a prayer hall, a dining room and three other rooms. Then the Archbishop ordered that we should start the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament for forty hours. We made preparations for having the Adoration of the three days following Ash-Wednesday and strove to have the convent house ready for residence by that time...

*Complete Works of  
Bl. Chavara Vol. I Page 105  
Published by  
The committee for the cause of  
Bl. Chavara, Mannanam*

Ours is a broken world. To put it back together we need this 'darsan' of the darsan veedu. From Chavara comes the call to withdraw from the musical chair, from the sick hurry and divided aims, to stand again centring in all, to stand 'alone and speechless'. In the Orient the specific note is that of intuition, of 'experiential touch' and experiential entry. You do not go to a Guru with a visiting card. I remember going to a Hindu ashram and telling receptionist that I would like to have an appointment with the Guru. Here comes the reply: "nobody makes an appointment with the Guru. The Guru makes the appointment with you." These words have to be understood against the particular background. I was not surprised by this response. It would be enough if we took home this lesson of 'experiential encounter, and touch' that was the note of Chavara and of the orient.

**Fr Albert Nambiaparambil CMI**



## Blessed Kuriakose Chavara A Man of God with a sense of Humour

The parched earth of the Kerala Church in particular, and the Church in India in general, got a cooling shower, indeed a double shower, in the proclamation on February 8, 1986 by His Holiness Pope John Paul II, raising the two sainted children of the St Thomas Church to the honours of the altar. We propose to examine the distinctive qualities of one of them, Blessed Chavara, that made him not only a saint, but also a leader in every sphere of contemporary society. He has left his footprints in every walk of life, seeing like a visionary, the future of the Church in Kerala in all its varied aspects.

At a time when even Catholic priests looked down upon the low caste people, Blessed Chavara initiated steps for their uplift. His love of the down trodden was born of his love of God. Without distinction of status, priest or layman, caste or creed, he considered all equal. In his writings even the lowliest person is mentioned in grateful terms. He believed that man can see (realise) God only through man: you can serve the weak, the injured members of human society, only when you see them as God's children.

It is because of this clear, perfect vision of Christian charity that Blessed Chavara insisted that among the Carmelites charity must be absolute, perfect. In his eyes the relation of the religious to those around them, was not a cultural or social one. He laid emphasis on the fact that his establishments, the monasteries, must strive for the improvement and edification of all the parishes around them. The carmelites must live the life of an ideal Christian, another Christ. They must be models for all those who approach them, and should give them consolation in an atmosphere of prayer so that they regain spiritual vigour. He believed that more than from natural influences the Carmelite must draw inspiration from the throbbing hearts, the

tear filled eyes, the sighing souls of the labour - laden children of God and lead them, and be himself led into the presence of God.

We might say that Blessed Chavara started a spiritual revolution. He delved deep into the Words of St. Paul in his epistle to the Corinthians (1 Cor 12, 12). "A man's body is all one, though it has a number of different organs: and all this multitude of organs goes to make up one body; so it is with Christ". From Christ his attention turned to the Holy Church, the mystical body of Christ. For him the Church was the realisation of God's Kingdom on earth. Naturally therefore he could not entertain for a moment in his earthly life any thought which would hurt the body of his God. And he never did.

The Kerala people are justly famous for their devotion to Mary, the immaculate Mother of God. His ardent love for the divine mother received an impetus from the earnest efforts of Blessed Chavara to promote the love of Mary among his people. No elaborate account is needed to remind us about his filial attachment to his divine mother, whom he considered the original source of all his blessings.

Blessed Chavara wanted everyone in the Kerala Church to have the benefit of their and their Congregation's services. Urged on by his clear vision of a glorious future for his people he started what is now called the apostolate of the press. Nowadays no one thinks of the intricacies of running a press, or publishing a book or newspaper. But in the days of Blessed Chavara printing was a great adventure.

He himself was a man of letters. His prose writings and his poems are ample proof of his originality and depth of erudition. He composed prayers which even today, though they are not popular among us, are so touching and poetic. It was his ambition to bring his writings, and those of other Christian Writers to his people and in this he succeeded immensely.

In printing religious books and similar publications Blessed Chavara's avowed purpose was the improvement of life in the Catholic families. He wanted to found good Christian families where children would be brought up in the proper atmosphere



of piety. His earnest desire was to give both the children and grown-ups sound training in pious Christian practices.

In all these activities he was driven by his burning love of Our Lord in the Holy Eucharist. As if to perpetuate this great and deep devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, he introduced in Kerala the world-famous Forty-hour Adoration which caught on so up rapidly in our churches. For persons of the older generation, it is sad to think, in the Syrian rite churches the forty-hour is really a thirty-four hour adoration, while in the Latin-rite churches it is still a forty-hour adoration.

The great Prior was held in esteem and awe by all those who knew him and did not know him at close quarters. In fact he was always an austere and serious person not given to any frivolities. I have not seen any mention of the lighter side of his impressive personality. To me it seems that there was quite a distinct sense of humour in him. Even in dealing with such solemn subjects as the sufferings of the blessed souls in purgatory, he found expression for his sense of humour which tickles us. In "A Dirge", a pretty long poem intended to be intoned in a house of mourning, Blessed Chavara includes a small anecdote about the holy souls of purgatory, belabouring the stingy procurator of a monastery.

The miserly procurator withheld money that had to be spent on works of charity to be performed for the souls in purgatory. The beneficiaries, souls of the departed priests of the monastery, gathered in a room in the monastery, caught the procurator and thrashed him:

"Where we in company await to be cleansed  
There you'll be with us to be sure  
Now as a surety for the gift  
You'll come by in the place of fire  
As a sign of the pain you caused us  
Receive this, as your reward."  
So saying upon him they closed,  
Smashed his bones without remorse  
....."

(lines 1011-1018 : "A Dirge")

Whether this is good enough to be accepted as the teaching of the Catholic Church is to be decided by those who are competent to do it. But certainly it reveals the sense of humour of the holy man of God who would introduce such an episode into a solemn poem dealing with a sombre subject.

On the whole Blessed Chavara was a true man of God. He realised God in His creatures, saw Him in the least of His children. In his contemplation of God, he did not ignore or forget man. He understood the problems facing the Kerala Church and strove to solve them. In every sphere of human activity Blessed Chavara took interest and showed that he was a really cultured man, fully developed and able to work in whatever he found useful to his people. Let us thank God for giving us this, His favourite child as a model and leader, and try to emulate him in his love of man.

**Prof. A. P. Mathai**



## **DOCUMENTATION**

### **The Magna Carta of the Spirituality of Poverty and Community in the C. M. I. Congregation**

**Two documents on the first community at Mannanam  
dated 18th June 1840**

**Fr Antony Vallavanthara C.M.I.**

This study brings to light two historical documents so far not known enough, which are of very great value for the study of the history and spirituality of the CMI Congregation. They inform us of the second most important event in the history of the CMI Congregation so far never mentioned by any historian and also reveal to us the names of the first three fathers, equally unknown until today, who started community life in Mannanam. Even more interestingly, these two documents bring to light the original spirit of these founding fathers and their spiritual vision of Community and Poverty in the CMI Congregation. Unfortunately, these documents remained unknown, and so far no investigation into the history and traditions of the CMI Congregation has brought to light their importance in the study of the original spirit of the founding fathers.

The 18th of Midhunam (June), 1840, marks the most important date in the history of the CMI Congregation after the laying of the foundation stone of the mother house on 11th May 1831. Usually the dates 11th May 1831 and 8th December 1855 are considered the twin days of the foundation. The former date marks the laying of the foundation stone of the first house, as mentioned above and the second, the day on which the first eleven fathers of the Congregation made their religious vows for the first time, is considered the day of canonical foundation. But the real beginning of the CMI community and its community

life had taken place some 15 years before its so called canonical foundation. I would say the 18th of Midhunam (June) 1840, which these two documents under consideration bring to light, is more important than the date of the laying of the foundation stone of the mother house and more important in some respects, than the day of canonical foundation. It marks the beginning of the community life of the first community under the leadership of Porukara Thomma Kathanar, Thoppil Geevarghese Kathanar and Chavara Kuriakose Kathanar. They were the first three members of the first community at Mannanam. These three fathers conceived their starting of the life in common as "Akamanathinte Samgrahavum Silavaypum" as the replica or model and the laying of the foundation stone of the religious congregation which they wanted to found. These documents, therefore, reveal the original vision of the community and its life. It reveals the "samgraham" the quintessence of the CMI spirituality. Therefore, these two documents are important not merely because they inform us of a very important event in the history of the congregation, but precisely because they reveal the mind and the aspirations as well as the original vision of the community. Written in the handwriting of Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara, these documents reveal the spirituality and poverty of the community as also the sources of their spiritual vision and the theological interpretation of these.

These two valuable documents have come down to us in a book in manuscript kept in the library of St. Joseph's Monastery, Mannanam, the mother house of the Congregation. This volume is 24×9.5 cm in size and has 94 pages. The Ms has no title. In the official list of the library this volume is entered as "the writings of our father very Reverend Father Porukara" (Na. Pi. Pe. Ba. Porukara Achante Kurippukal). The documents in question appear on pages 2, 48 and 49 of the volume written in the hand of Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara. Of the 94 pages only these three pages are in the hand of Fr. Chavara and the rest of the Ms, except the five blank pages, is written in the hand of Fr. Kuriakose Eliseus Porukara, the successor of Father Chavara and the second Prior General of the Congregation. This justifies the title of the book as recorded in the register of the library. It contains, besides the documents we study, the spiritual exhortations by Fr. Kuriakose Porukara, on different



virtues, the chronicle of the Mannanam Monastery, and some prayers in Syriac, everything written in the hand of Fr. Kuriakose Porukara himself. Pages 3-17 contain his exhortations on humility, patience, etc. Then follows the chronicle. But the chronicle is not written in the proper chronological order. For example on page 22 is noted the death of Father Thoppil who died in Pulincunoo, in the year 1873, entered with the date Thulam (October) 13. Then follow the different events that took place between 1861 and 1874. Against the year 1861 is entered the retirement of Divan Madhava Rao with the description of the achievements during his office, which is entered after the note on the death of Father Thoppil. The prayers in Syriac are contained on pages 75-76, 84-88. Five pages remain blank, namely pages 16, 50, 86, 93, and 94.

The three pages in the handwriting of Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara formed part of some account book containing accounts of the daily expenses of the new community at Mannanam and of the mass intentions of the three fathers, who started to live in Mannanam as a community. Later these two different sheets might have been bound into this volume. The parts of the documents that interest us in this study appear on pages 2 and 48.

These two documents reveal to us the great spiritual insights of the first three fathers, especially that of Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara, who wrote these pages. They make us realise the greatness of their sense of fellowship and love, their sharing of spiritual gifts, and their brother-hood in the things of the spirit and of this world. These documents bring home to us the intimate acquaintance with the Word of God of these founding fathers, especially of the writer. They show us that these first fathers fashioned their community life on the model of the early Christian community described in the Acts of the Apostles. They conceived and understood community as the communion of those who share in the gifts of the Spirit. For them the sharing of material things pooled together after the manner of the early Christians was the external and necessary sign of the sharing of the spiritual gifts and the fellowship in the spirit. This is a new vision of community and poverty. One is astounded by the fact that even at the moment Father Chavara

was writing the daily accounts of the material things, of the daily expenses of the community, he was unconsciously expressing the spiritual vision of the community and the source of their vision and aspirations, namely the Word of God. Hence these two documents exposes well their constant contact with the Word of God and their conviction that the laying of the foundation stone for the community was "sharing" of material and spiritual things in common. The first follows and flows from the sharing of things of the spirit. This twofold sharing and fellowship were the essence of the spirituality of the early community of Mannanam and were founded on the Acts of the Apostles, and on the model of Simon Peter and his friends.

Hereunder we reproduce these two texts, together with the original and the translation and comments.

**Text of the document No. 1 on page 2 of the volume  
in 20th century script.**

(രം). മ. യ. തുണയ്ക്ക

നമ്മുടെ കർത്താവിന്റെ ആണ്ടു 1840-ാം കാലം മിഥുനമാസം 18-ാം ന-  
പഗരെ 3<sup>ാ</sup>മാറു പെരുന്നാൾ ദിവസം മുതൽ ബൈസ റമ്മയിൽ പാർത്തുവരുന്ന  
പൊന്തക്കരെ തോമ്മാകത്തനാരു, പാവറ കുറിയാക്കോസ കത്തനാരു തൊ  
പ്പിൽ ഗീവറുഗീസ കത്തനാരു അത്രപിക്കുത്ത കൂടപ്പിറപ്പുസുഖം യിവരുടെ  
യിടെയിൽ ഉണ്ടായിരിക്കുന്നതിനാൽ ആത്മത്തിനടുത്ത ഈ ചെർമ്മപോൽ  
ശരീരത്തിനടുത്തതുകൂടെയും ആയിരിക്കേണ്ടതിന്നു യിവരുടെ ദൈഹഭരണ്ണ  
ങ്ങളും അവരെചൊല്ലിയുണ്ടാകുന്ന അനുഭവങ്ങളും എല്ലാം തുടക്കത്തിൽ മാർ  
പത്രോസ കാട്ടിത്തന്നതിൽ വണ്ണം ആകമാനത്തിന്റെതന്നെ നിശ്ചയിച്ച  
അന്നമുതൽ യിവരു ചൊല്ലുന്ന കബ്ബാനയുടെ വിവരത്തിന്നു എഴുതിയ കണക്കെ.

മിഥുനമാസം 18-ാം ന-

**Text of the document No. 2 on page 48 of the  
volume in present day script.**

ഇ. മ. യ. തുണയ്ക്ക

നമ്മുടെ കർത്താവിന്റെ ആണ്ടു 1840 മത മിഥുനമാസം 18-ാം ന-  
പഗരെ 3<sup>ാ</sup>മാറു പെരുന്നാൾ ദിവസം മുതൽ ബൈസ റമ്മയിൽ പാർത്തുവരുന്ന  
പൊന്തക്കരെ തോമ്മാകത്തനാരു പാവറ കുറിയാക്കോസകത്തനാരു തൊപ്പിൽ  
ഗീവറുഗീസകത്തനാരു അത്രപിക്കുത്ത കൂടപ്പിറപ്പു സുഖം യിവരുടെയിടുത്തു  
ണ്ടായിരിക്കുന്നതിനാൽ ആത്മത്തിനടുത്ത ചെർമ്മപോൽ ശരീരത്തിനടുത്തു







കൂടായും ആയിരിക്കേണ്ടുന്നതിനിവരുടെ ദൈഹദണ്ഡുകളും അപരം ചൊല്ലി  
യുണ്ടാകുന്ന അനുഭവങ്ങളും എല്ലാം തുടക്കത്തിൽ മാർ പത്രോസ കാട്ടിത്തന്ന  
തിൻ വണ്ണം ആകമാനത്തിന്റെ ഒരു സംഗ്രഹവും ഒരു ശിലവപ്പു, എന്ന  
നിശ്ചയിച്ച ഒന്നിങ്ങുപ്പട്ടനാൾ തുടങ്ങിയുള്ള ചിലവു വിവരത്തിനു ഏഴുതിയ  
കണക്കെ.

യിവരും യിവരോടുകൂടെ കൂടാപ്പട്ടവർക്കു, കൂടിയുള്ള പെരുമാറ്റത്തി  
ന്നായിട്ട ആലപ്പുഴ നന്നു വാങ്ങിച്ച വെള്ളക്കോപ്പു ധനം ക്ഷയില.

കൊടുത്ത.....	ചത്രം ൫൬
പിഡീസ ന്നു ക്ക	ചത്രം ൧൨
വെളുകോപ്പ ക്ക	ചത്രം ൮
വെള്ളവസ്സി ൧൨ ക്ക	ചത്രം ൫൬൭
ല്ലോൻ കൊടുത്ത	ചത്രം ൧
പരലോസിനു ചുകയിലയ്ക്ക	ചത്രം ൧
വള്ളിപെരുപ്പ പാരു ൧൦ ക്ക	ചത്രം ൨൦
പണിയിൽ വച്ച ചിലവിന്ന വാങ്ങിച്ച	
ചുകയില പല. ൧ ക്ക	ചത്രം ൫
കൂട്ടുപാൻ വൃയിചില പ	ചത്രം ൧
കൂടെ ഉള്ളി മുളക	ചത്രം ൩
ഏഴുത്താല ൫൦൦ ക്ക	ചത്രം ൬
കൂടെ ൫൦ ക്ക	ചത്രം ൧

(തുടർച്ച 49-ാം പേജിൽ)

### Translation of the Malayalam text of the two documents.

#### Document 1 (on the page 2 of the volume).

The accounts of the intentions of the Mass celebrated by Porukara Thomma Kathanar<sup>1</sup>, Chavara Kuriakose Kathanar and Thoppil Geevarghese Kathanar, who live in the Bes Rauma<sup>2</sup> from the feast of Blessed Sacrament<sup>3</sup> on the 18th day of the month of Midhunam (June)<sup>4</sup> of the year of the Lord, 1840, kept from the very day they decided to pool all their material

1. a malayalam word signifying priest, Father.

2. a syriac word meaning "house above", which means also the heavens. The fathers called the hill of Mannanam and the house there as "Bes Rauma". house above.

3. Feast of Corpus Christi.

4. In the last century, the months were counted from January, by the Malaya'am names of the months, starting from Makaram as January.



earnings and the fruits there of as belonging to the community following the example shown by St. Peter in the beginning, because there existed deep brotherhood in the spirit among them, and because they wanted to have fellowship in the things of the body similar to the spiritual fellowship.

18th day of the month of Midhunam.

*Document 2 (given on page 48 of the volume).*

The accounts of the expenses, kept by Porukara Thomma Kathanar,<sup>1</sup> Chavara Kuriakose Kathanar and Thoppil Geevarghese Kathanar, who live in the Bes Rauma<sup>2</sup> from the feast of the Blessed Sacrament,<sup>3</sup> on the 18th day of the month of Midhunam (June),<sup>4</sup> from the day they decided and started to live together pooling all their material earnings and the fruits thereof, according to the example shown by St. Peter in the beginning, as the replica (model) and the laying of the foundation stone of the community, because there existed spiritual brotherhood among them and because they wanted this fellowship in the spirit also in respect of the things of the body.

The price paid for 10 white cups bought from Alleppey for their use and that of those who were

added to them.....	Chakram 56
for 6 saucers	Chakram 12
for a big cup	Chakram 8
for 12 white plates	Chakram 56 $\frac{1}{2}$
for the dallal (middle man)	Chakram 1
for Tobacco for Paulose	Chakram 1
for 10 pairs of slippers	Chakram 20
for 1 Palam of Tobacco bought	Chakram 5
for the curry	Chakram 1
for the chilly, onion	Chakram 3
for 500 palmleaves for writing	Chakram 6
for another 50	Chakram 1



## FAVOURS RECEIVED

### The Miraculous Cures Obtained by Rev Sr Alphonsa of the IM. Conception (now Blessed Alphonsa)

*Sr Alphonsa was a novice of the FCC Congregation at Changanacherry in 1935-36. Fr Louis Perumalil cmi., then Defenitor general of the CMI Congregation and Master of the Scholastics at Chethipuzha near Changanacherry, was the spiritual director of the Novices of the FCC Congregation at Changanacherry.*

*Having learnt that Sr. Alphonsa obtained a miraculous cure through the intercession of Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara,<sup>1</sup> he ordered the novice Sr. Alphonsa to give in writing all the facts related to the cure. Thus Sr Alphonsa wrote the following two declarations in her own hand, signed it with date, and gave to Father Louis.*

*Father Louis, well aware of the sanctity of Sr Alphonsa, was keeping with him these autographs of Sr Alphonsa, very sacred, with him. In 1950, he gave these autographs to Fr Probus Perumalil, his nephew, as a souvenir gift of the latter's ordination. These autographs, today, are in the custody of Fr. Probus Perumalil, cmi.*

Hereunder is her first Declaration:

For the last six and a half years, I have not been keeping well. From the time I was sick, I was undergoing all sorts of medical treatment – now ayurvedic, now alopatic – one after the other. Far from being cured, I was getting worse from day to day. Thus, on the advice of the doctors I was taken to the General Hospital, Ernakulam, where I was treated as an in-patient, for

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1. The Canonization process of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara had not commenced at that time.



about a month. The doctors themselves said that the treatment could give me only temporary relief and that complete cure could not be expected. Anyhow, I underwent the allopathic treatment for the whole year. But as the allopathic treatment did not do any good, I turned again to ayurveda. The ayurvedic doctors also said that they had no hope of effecting a complete cure, but that they would do the maximum possible<sup>2</sup>. The prayers and the votive offerings made during the period were innumerable. Meanwhile, however, I was taking the prescribed medicines without interruption.

Anyhow, this year, compared to the previous years, I was found much better, and so the superiors decided to permit me to enter the novitiate. But, on the way itself to the Novitiate house<sup>3</sup> the old disease showed up again. Although with great difficulty I took part in all the community exercises for about a month. But then the disease got worse and I was confined to bed. I could not take any food. If I took one or two spoonfuls of kanjee or coffee, the stomach used to swell up rising upto the chest, so that I was not able to breathe. At the same time, I had severe pain and hunger and felt restless.

I was not able to get up from bed without someone helping me, and I could not sleep. I spent many days like this. I used to vomit eight or ten times a day. On most occasions the vomit was clotted blood. When I got a severe headache blood used to flow out of the nostrils, and on some days, even from the eyes. On days when there was bleeding like this, I used to have severe pain all over the body as well. When they recited the community prayers for me, I would have brief spell of relief from the pain just for two or three days and would again return to the previous stage. Thus, I and others too were in great trouble for almost eight months. I was also afraid to be alone ie without the company of someone.<sup>4</sup>

2. Rev Sr Mary Ursula, FCC., the novice mistress of Sr. Alphonsa, in her declaration given before the tribunal in the canonization process of Blessed Chavara, gives the list of Doctors who treated her in this situation: Dr Olasa Moos (ayurvedic), Dr Pothen Vadakummury (ayurvedic), and Dr Joseph Poovattil MBBS.

3. Sister Alphonsa was staying at Bharananganam as a postulant. Hence she had to come to Changanacherry to begin the Novitiate.

4. Mother Mary Ursula, in her aforesaid declaration gives another detail



When it was like this, one day, Father Louis brought to me a leaflet containing an intercessory prayer to Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara. From the day I started praying that novena I began to feel better. I continued the novena without interruption. Father Louis brought to me also, I think it was by the end of May, a picture of Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara.<sup>5</sup> As soon as I saw that picture I began to feel an extraordinary love for and devotion to him and confidence in him. I placed the picture close to me and used to kiss it before sleeping. When I prayed with the picture before me, my fear would disappear. One day while lying in bed sleepless, with the stomach swollen up, and feeling hungry and thirsty, I felt as if I saw a man in the likeness of the picture close to me. Thinking that it was mother mistress, I immediately spoke to her: "Mother, I think I would die by daybreak, either of the bursting of the stomach or of suffocation". Saying this, I stretched my hand to touch her. But I could not touch anyone. Then I felt like hearing these words: "Your stomach will not swell up again and God will bless you".

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here. She writes: "As Sr. Alphonsa was thus continuously on sickbed, I sincerely thought that she would not be able to complete her novitiate and that the other novices too would be in continuous distraction, I seriously thought of interrupting her novitiate and sending her back to Bharananganam. I exposed the whole matter before Mar James Kalacherry, Bishop of Changanacherry. He said he would visit the patient. The Bishop having seen the patient and spoken to her, was convinced of the good disposition of Sr. Alphonsa and of her spiritual fervour. He told me: "Let her be on that sickbed. Don't send her away. If it happens that she dies in that situation, let her die."

5. Rev. Sr. Mary Ursula, FCC, the Novice Mistress of Sr Alphonsa, in her declaration mentioned above, says: "Father Louis gave Sr Alphonsa also a relic of Father Chavara in order to pray the novena with greater devotion. Here is the story of this relic: Father Varkey Muttathupadath, a diocesan priest of Changanacherry, was a student of Father Chavara at the Mannanam Seminary and had great esteem for the sanctity of Father Chavara. One day, while the barber was cutting Father Chavara's hair, cleric Varky took off a bunch of hair, saying that he would keep it with him as a sacred relic. He later tied together the hairs with a piece of golden thread and kept them in a special silver reliquary. Later, in his old age, he gave this relic to his nephew Father Joseph Muttathupadath, the paternal uncle of Sr Alphonsa. Father Louis was aware of this and he borrowed this relic from Father Joseph Muttathupadath and gave it to Sr Alphonsa on this occasion so that she might pray the novena with greater devotion.



Anyhow by daybreak I was completely cured of the swelling-up of the stomach. From that day till now my stomach has not swollen up. Whereas I was not able to consume even a spoonful of kanjee, I can eat solid rice now. I eat also other food. I have no pain in the stomach and I get good sleep. I am fully confident that this is a special blessing obtained through the intercession of Father Prior<sup>6</sup>. All were surprised at the cure I obtained.

On another occasion, I had a very severe headache, and a lot of blood also flowed out of the nose<sup>7</sup>. When lying tired like this I sought his help again. There was also another sister

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6. "Father Prior is the common name among the people for Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara.

7. Sr. Mary Ursula, in her declaration, gives more details on the condition of her disease, and on the miraculous cure she obtained. She writes: Sr Alphonsa, as also the community of the novices, prayed to Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara that the haemorrhage might be cured. Even after beginning the Novena, there was no sign of healing and it seemed that her condition was worsening. Nevertheless we in the community as also Sr Alphonsa continued the novena with great confidence.

Sr Alphonsa, extremely weak, seemed she would die at any moment. Hence, day and night, several times I used to visit her at her sickbed. On such occasions, only very close and keen observation would reveal that she had life. On the 9th day of the Novena, during the night, about 3 o'clock, sleeping in the room adjacent to hers, I heard as if someone was speaking in the room of Sr Alphonsa. Immediately I rushed to the room thinking that something critical had happened. But, when I entered the room, I found that both Sr. Alphonsa and the infirmarian sister who was keeping vigil in the room were sleeping. However, I woke up Sr. Alphonsa and asked how it was that she spoke during the time of strict silence. As she woke up, she told me: See the great Fr Prior is come. Don't you see him? May I ask for his blessing", so saying she got up and sat on the bed. Sr Alphonsa was acting and speaking as if she saw Fr Prior in person. She continued: Mother, Father Prior came here. I saw him. He blessed me. He touched me and said that I am cured, but that I would get other diseases. Perhaps all this may be my dream or wishful thinking. Anyhow I have no difficulty at present. The blood-flow has stopped. Besides, the inflammation and the wound on the thigh are healed. By this time, Sr Louisa the infirmarian too had woken up, I asked Sr Louisa to look at the wound on the thigh. She looked and said that it was perfectly healed, rather instantaneously. Thus, Sr. Louisa too was convinced that Sr. Alphonsa had got perfect cure through the intercession of Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara.



sitting close to me. By about 3 o' clock in the morning, our old man came close to me. I thought he was standing with great joy and satisfaction and raising his hands and blessing me. At this, I laughed audibly. The sister who sat by my side hearing me laughing, asked me why I laughed. I just replied that I had laughed for no special reason. From that time on, I felt much relieved of my maladies. From then until now there has been no flow of blood from the nose. In the morning I was very much at ease. Besides, there was a wound on the leg which had been well inflamed and had burst out with puz, during these days. In the morning I found that it was completely healed'.<sup>8</sup>

Because I was foolish and as I was praying to him in full confidence that he would be helping me, I think all these might be just my feelings. Anyhow, although the doctors had given up their hope of curing me, God has worked in me this cure. I thank God and glorify Him for this and pray to Him.

Changanacherry  
July 10, 1936

Sr. Alphonsa (sd.)

*Here is another declaration given in writing by Sr. Alphonsa eight months later. This refers to the cure she obtained while she was at Bharananganam, after her profession.*

I have not been well for the last six and a half years. I could not take any food. Occasionally however, I ate a little kunjee. Though many doctors examined me, they were all saying

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8. Mother Mary Ursula says on this point in the declaration mentioned above: "As I waked her up, and after our conversation (See above note 7) Sr Louisa, myself and Sr. Alphonsa right away went to the church and thanked God for the great favour and then we went to bed. Early in the morning, at the bell for rising, Sr. Alphonsa got up herself and went to the common toilet with others. All the sisters were surprised to see Sr Alphonsa, who till the previous evening, had been critically ill and who was feared to die at any moment, Sr. Alphonsa was with the others also for the common liturgy in the chapel. After breakfast, I told the sisters and the novices what had happened during the night and how Sr. Alphonsa was cured by the healing touch of Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara.



that complete cure was impossible. The disease came to a climax fifteen days after I began the novitiate at Changanacherry. It was concerning this that I gave the former note.

After coming to Bharananganam<sup>9</sup>, I got an attack of fever which persisted for about five months and I was very much upset. The doctor who examined me declared that I was suffering from TB and consequently that I should be removed from the community and that nobody should enter my room. There was also some talk about sending me back home. It was said that my parents were themselves preparing to take me back home. Having come to know of this situation, in great grief, I pleaded with the Mother not to send me back home and told her that Father Prior would cure me. I requested her to pray a Novena to Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara in the community. I also asked that I might be sent off after the Novena was completed. Accordingly the Novena was begun in the community. But the temperature due to fever was rising day by day and on the eighth day the temperature stood at 106 degrees in the evening. All were frightened. But the next morning the temperature came down to 95.5. After that I had no fever and I have no difficulty at present. I am fully confident that this is a grace given me through the intercession of Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara.

Bharananganam  
8-3-1937

Sr. Alphonsa (sd.)

The Postulator

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9. Sr. Alphonsa was transferred to Bharananganam after her novitiate and profession. She writes this note from Bharananganam.

**Establishment of a convent again  
under consideration**

For years we have been praying for the establishment of a convent, but so long it has not been possible. Now it seems that God has willed to help us to accomplish our desire. In view of the construction of a convent for nuns, though we had begun constructing a high compound wall, under the circumstances described above, the idea could not be realized. When the turbulent times were over, it was felt that well-trained priests were more important than nuns and so the whole project was diverted to a seminary. After that we could not find means for establishing a convent.

*Complete Works of  
Bl. Chavara Vol. I Page 104  
Published by  
The committee for the cause of  
Bl. Chavara, Mannanam*



### **Fr. Kuriakose starts construction of the convent**

In the beginning of the year 1866, a person donated Rs. 10 out of a debt he was paid back through the monastery. With that and Rs. 8 got from some other source, work on the house was begun. It was built of coconut tree and bamboo mats. It was divided into a prayer hall, a dining room and three other rooms. Then the Archbishop ordered that we should start the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament for forty hours. We made preparations for having the Adoration of the three days following Ash-Wednesday and strove to have the convent house ready for residence by that time...

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