

HERALD OF THE EAST



CHAVARA JAYANTHI SPECIAL II



Fr. Mathew Kaniampampil, CMI Vicar General inaugurating the *CHAVARA JAYANTHI* Mission Seminar organized by the CMIs and the CMCs of North India. It was held in Poornodaya, Bhopal on 4-7, September 2004.



A discussion session of the *Chavara Jayanthi Seminar* held in Bhopal.

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EDITORIAL

A Seminar on the *Vision and Mission of Blessed Chavara* was held at *Poornodaya*, Bhopal, in connection with the *Chavara Jayanthi Year* from 4th to 7th September 2004. It was a joint venture of the CMI's and the CMC's working in North India. 132 persons including CMI Fathers, CMC Sisters and CMI Theology Students from *Samanvaya Mission Theologate*, Bhopal, participated.

The Seminar was inaugurated by Fr. Mathew Kaniampampil, CMI, Vicar General, and he delivered the Key-Note Address. He spoke about Blessed Chavara's comprehensive ecclesial vision, down to earth people orientation and prophetic innovations. The following Fathers and Sisters presented papers on various days of the Seminar: Sr. Jossey, CMC, Ghaziabad: Blessed Chavara and the founding of the CMI & CMC Congregations; Fr. Mathew Thenamkalayil, Bijnor: The 19th century Kerala Church and the leadership of Blessed Chavara; Fr. James Muttickal, Bhopal: Chavara a Man who walked ahead of his times; Fr. Jacob Peenickapampil, Bhopal: The educational vision of Bl. Chavara and our challenges today; Sr. Magi Maria, CMC, Bhopal: Challenges of Social Apostolate and our challenges as followers of Bl. Chavara; Fr. Jacob Marangatt, Bhavanagar: Bl. Chavara, a true Pastor in the footsteps of Jesus; Fr. Thomas Kochumuttom, Jaiharikhal: Bl. Chavara a Man of Prophetic Charism and a Contemplative in Action; and Sr. Ancella, CMC, Bhopal: Blessed Mother in the Spirituality of Bl. Chavara. These papers are published in the current issue of the *Herald of the East*.

Editor

BLESSED CHAVARA AND HIS UNIQUE CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE CHURCH IN INDIA

**Fr. Mathew Kaniamparampil, CMI
Vicar General**

The Church in India is celebrating with great enthusiasm and fervour the bi-centenary of the birth of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara, one of the great stalwarts in its 20 centuries old history. The uniqueness of Blessed Chavara emerges from multifarious angles and perspectives.

The contributions of Blessed Chavara are radically ecclesial, down to earth people-oriented, exceptionally prophetic and integrally and ultimately spiritual. We cannot but marvel at that golden personality which stands out ever luminous and unique in the Indian ecclesial and social arena.

Initiator of Religious Life in India

Blessed Chavara is closely associated with the foundation of the first indigenous Religious Congregation of India in the year 1831. He is the first Indian to make the profession of Religious Vows in this Church. That historic event took place on 8th December 1855. The first Indian religious Congregation he headed is the C.M.I. Congregation. It is to be observed that the Indian Church at that time was 19 centuries old. Almost two centuries later today, India is blessed with 75,000 religious belonging to about 200 Congregations. Therefore, he is the first

and foremost among all the Religious in this land.

As regards the innovation of religious life in the Indian soil, Blessed Chavara is called the St. Benedict of India. From the perspective of the enormity of services he rendered, he is compared to St. Teresa of Avila who imparted vitality to the Church during the middle ages. Like St. Therese of Lisieux who said *I would be love in the heart of the Church*, Blessed Chavara renewed the face of the Church during the 19th century. From the religious point of view, it was Blessed Chavara who initiated the first 7 Indian Monasteries. They are Mannanam(1831), Koonammavu(1857), Elthuruth(1858), Vazhakulam(1859), Pulincunnu(1861), Ampazhakad(1868), and Mutholy(1870). These Monasteries were the spiritual nerve-centres of the Church during those centuries.

Blessed Chavara is also the innovator of the first religious congregation for women in the Syro-Malabar Church. It was in 1866, that, along with Fr. Leopold Beccaro, OCD, he initiated it at Koonammavu. He founded this Congregation for women at a time when education and empowerment of the womenfolk were not even dreamt of. It is to be specially observed that Mother Euphrasia, a member of this CMC Congregation has been declared *Venerable* by the Holy Father in 2002. She is the *spiritual granddaughter* of Blessed Chavara. He personalized the charism of her *Guru*, lived it, and sanctified herself receiving inspiration from his life and teachings.

His ecclesial vision and mission

The basic current of thought running through the entire vision of Blessed Chavara was that he was a person filled with a deep love for the Church. He loved the Church and desired that all the faithful should lead an authentic and vibrant Christian life, centred on the Holy Eucharist and strengthened by the sacraments. His first and foremost concern was the pastoral care of the people. It is with this intention that he, along with his companions, went around the whole State and introduced retreat preaching and

family visits. He also started regular retreats for the clergy who are supposed to be the leaders and animators in the Church.

Blessed Chavara is also the innovator of several devotional practices adopted from the global Church. Some of them are the *Eucharistic devotion*, *Way of the Cross*, and *Rosary*. All these practices fortified the faith of the people. He started the *40-hour Adoration* in the year 1846, first at Koonammavu and then in all the Ashram Churches he founded. People used to flock these centres of prayer from far away places during those years and received great spiritual experiences. There are incidents that the *Way of the Cross* especially during the Lenten season, inspired the people to deep repentance and conversion of heart. Thus with a radical ecclesial vision, it was Blessed Chavara who brought vitality and vibrancy in the Kerala Church almost 200 years ago. What he did in this level of adopting devotional practices from the global Church shows his global and comprehensive vision. We cannot simply brandish them as imitations of the west. In fact, these adaptations exemplify the basic openness and greatness of his heart with the radical Indian vision *Let noble thoughts come from anywhere*. It cannot be forgotten or sidelined the reality of so many souls of the Syro-Malabar Church being elevated to the portals of sanctity during the last one century. There are 3 *Blesseds*, Blessed Chavara ranking the first in that series. There are 2 *Venerables* and 4 *Servants of God* in the waiting list to be raised to the honours of the Altar in accordance with the decision of the Church.

Realizing the importance of imparting systematic seminary training to the Clergy, he started a Major Seminary, and that was in Mannanam in the year 1833. This was also the first Major Seminary in the Syro-Malabar Church. At the instruction of the ecclesiastical authority, this seminary was meant not only for the religious but also for the diocesan clergy at that time. There was a time when upto 150 seminarians were trained at a time in this seminary. It remained there till 1894 when it was amalgamated to the Puthenpally seminary and shifted to Alwaye in 1932.

What prompted him to start a serious and systematic seminary formation was his deep conviction that the growth and well-being of the Church could emerge only through the instrumentality of priests spiritually deep-rooted, morally upright, intellectually erudite, and well-trained in communication skills. The effectiveness of his vision of clerical training was very well manifested during the fight against the Roccas schism in 1861. That schismatic onslaught started shaking the very foundations of the Syro-Malabar Church. It was Blessed Chavara and those priests who were trained in the Mannanam Seminary who were in the forefront in defending and protecting the Church from a very possible disastrous division. Apart from being the Superior General of the Congregation, Blessed Chavara was also the Diocesan Vicar General in those years.

An educationist *par excellence*

Another uniqueness of Blessed Chavara is in the starting of the first school of the Syro-Malabar Church. It was started in Mannanam in 1846 and that was also in the Sanskrit language. The reason why he started it as a Sanskrit school were: first, Sanskrit was considered to be the language *par excellence* since it was the Vedic language; second, English was a newcomer and there was an apathy from the part of the Catholics as it was considered to be the language brought here by the British Protestants.

The starting of the first school at Mannanam and the later order that came from Blessed Chavara in 1864 to start schools adjacent to every Church was prophetic and it triggered a great social change in the society in Kerala. The order that came from him as the Vicar General, had far-reaching consequences. He was convinced that the faith of our people should not remain merely in the emotional level. It should be well founded on deep-rooted convictions. As a result, several schools came up opening their portals to all children irrespective of caste and creed. Traditionally, only the upper castes were permitted to go

to school and acquire knowledge. By the inception of several schools, the situation changed rapidly. The educational revolution initiated by Blessed Chavara, caused rapid socio-cultural changes. Those changes in turn, resulted in a boom in the economic fields too, inspiring well-educated young people to go abroad in search of greater job opportunities, further resulting, as a chain reaction, in greater economic growth of the State.

An innovator of print media

Blessed Chavara is also the innovator of the technology of printing and publishing in the Syro-Malabar Church. The education imparted to our people enabled them to be literate. However, they should be given materials for reading. At that time there was hardly any spiritual book in the language of Malayalam. During those years, there were only two printing presses in Kerala, one in Kottayam owned by protestant missionaries and the other a Government press in Trivandrum. He went to Kottayam in order to have a glimpse of the press, but was flatly denied access to it. However, he did not abandon his endeavour. He went to Trivandrum and received permission to see the press. Keeping its image in his mind, he back to Mannanam and asked a carpenter to make a wooden press according to his direction. That was the beginning of a revolution in the fields of printing and publications. That wooden press is still preserved in the Chavara Museum in Mannanam. It is from this press that later in the year 1887, the *DEEPIKA*, the first Malayalam daily newspaper started publishing.

A man with a deep concern for the poor and the destitutes

It was also Blessed Chavara who started the first *Charitable Institution* in the Syr-Malabar Church. In the year 1869, he started a *Home for the destitutes* at Kainakari. He advised his confreres not to abandon the aged, the sick, the orphans and the poor. The *Chavarul* can be considered the valedictory advise to his confreres and to his people. In that precious little book, he gives clear guidelines about the inevitability of the social concern

we need to make our own lives sublime.

A sublime life embellished by personal holiness

Blessed Chavara's activities were unique and unparalleled in history. His services and achievements were multifaceted and pioneering. However, the sterling quality that shines forth in Fr. Chavara is his personal holiness. That aspect of his life surpasses all the other achievements.

All his activities were natural expressions of his inner divine experience. Wherever he went and in whatever he did, he remained basically a man of God.

Blessed Chavara was radically a *contemplative in action*. His preoccupations and his enthusiasm to render maximum services to the Church and to the society around him did not swindle or block his basic orientations to God. Just opposite was the case in his life. Wherever he went and got involved in the affairs of the people, he was burning with zeal for God and for his Church. There was a divine fire burning deep within him, that prompted and empowered him for any action. In fact, that is the essence of the word *enthusiasm*. The etymological roots of the word 'enthusiasm' are from two Greek words: *en* + *theos*. *En* means to be in. *Theos* means God. Its derivative meaning refers to the 'intense joy, zeal, dynamism and vibrancy resulting from a basic and assiduous awareness of the indwelling presence of the divine deep within oneself. That awareness transforms every action, even unrelated to spirituality outwardly, holy and self-sanctifying. This was the secret of his personal holiness.

Blessed Chavara's confreres certify that they have seen many instances in his life that he was immersed and rapt in contemplative trans many a time. Even in the midst of strenuous activities, Chavara could maintain a *hotline* contact with God. This is *integral* spirituality: a spirituality that emerges from the awareness of the indwelling presence of the divine and a radical openness to the needs of fellowmen. It is not a spirituality away

from the stark realities of everyday life, but a spirituality that is life-touching and life-transforming. Blessed Chavara practiced it in his life, making this the basic vision and mission of his entire life. The Church recognized his personal holiness and officially declared him *BLESSED* in the year 1986.

(From the Key-note address delivered at the inauguration of the *Chavara Jayanthi Seminar* organized in Bhopal.)

BLESSED CHAVARA AND THE FOUNDING OF THE CMC CONGREGATION

Sr. Jossey, CMC, Ghaziabad

Whenever I recall Bd. Kuriakose Chavara, I remember St. Benedict who is described as Father of European monasticism. It was in imitation of the Rule of the Benedictine Monastery, started by St. Benedict in the 5th century that all European religious institutes, whether contemplative or active, of men or of women, had their origin. It was the Monastery at Monte Casino that gave vigour and inspiration to all these institutes. It was the Kerala Carmelite Congregation and its activities, that Bl. Chavara founded in collaboration with Fr. Palackal & Fr. Porukara with the permission of the Latin Bishops of the period, at a time when the Syrian Catholics did not have a bishop or diocese of their own; that became the basis for the foundation of many religious institutes of both men and women in India. Therefore, we may call Father Chavara "Indian Benedict", and Mannanam, 'Indian Monte Casino'.

These are the words of Mar Kuriakose Kunnessery, Bishop of Kottayam at the inauguration of the Bicentenary celebration of the birth of Bl.Chavara at Mannanam on 3rd January 2004.

As the first religious community in the modern times CMI for men and CMC for women have a great responsibility to return to the sources to see its purity and simplicity and to imbibe it totally. The constant call of our communities has always been to carry on creatively and prophetically the CHARISMATIC spiritual movement that our Founding Fathers providentially initiated at Mannanam.

This bicentenary celebration is indeed an invitation to enter into the same movement more authentically to hasten its growth, making it more dynamic and enabling us to renew the humanity and world at large. This coming together or this seminar is a providential opportunity to become once again aware of the demands and dimensions of our religious call in the context of today. It is the sacred duty and a pleasant privilege of the participants of this chavara seminar to seek together prayerfully and prophetically and arrive at creative proposals that would assist the members in our congregations for deeper realization and greater growth on personal and communitarian levels.

THE FOUNDATIONAL CHARISM of the CMCs

It is a historical fact that religious institutes have substantially contributed to the growth of the church. The faithful have been led to holiness of life by the presence, prayers and apostolic activities of the religious. So also in the service of the WORD OF GOD, especially in evangelization, the contribution of the consecrated persons has always been immense.

As against this general picture, the Church in Kerala, of apostolic origin, had to wait until the 19th century to regretfully realize its spiritual bankruptcy resulting from the lack of the leadership of the consecrated presence. So the Founders of CMI, Fr. Thomas Palackal, Fr. Thomas Porukara and Bl. Chavara felt the need for a spiritual transformation to renew the church and society with a collective force of the consecrated persons. This was the vision behind all their projects. The spiritual transformation by the participation in the Divine is possible only with a 'darsan'. So Bl. Chavara when started to write about the beginning of Religious life in Kerala gave the title '*Tapas Bhavan*'. His challenging vision "that a lot of good has not been done in Kerala due to the absence of a "*Tapas Bhavan*" (house of prayer and discipline) even for priests compelled them

to start a "*Darsana veedu*" (house of vision) among the Christian Community. (CWC1,p.1).

To achieve this aim, they found a suitable place on the hillock of Mannanam, and laid the foundation stone on May 11,1831 for the first house calling it 'house above', or 'house in heaven' (CWC1,pp.15,24). In choosing a high place for "darsana veedu" and giving it the name "beth raumma", they symbolically visualized the inner meaning of the CMI charism as God centered and man centered. The top of a hill reminded them of the presence of God and the "house above" stood for a light house, a "darsana veedu" easily visible and approachable to the people.

As they were searching for a suitable place for the monastery they look for " high hill and river closely" (CWC I p.11).The founder fathers were looking for many 'sukham' - Which stand for an involvement in the life of the people, a commitment for their growth and welfare. At the same time a kind of transcendence; a rising above towards the Divine and a leaving behind this worldly affairs. As St. Paul said "set your minds on things that are above, on heavenly things not on this earthly things" (Col.3:1,2)

This idea is seen not only when they searched for the place for the first monastery. Bl. Chavara wrote to Fr.Cherian, Parish priest of Changanacherry in 1868. In response to his letter asking permission from Bl.Chavara to by a land at Changanacherry to start a monastery there. Bl.Chavara puts four conditions for it :

The place should be sufficiently distant from market place so that the noise of the market may not disturb life in the monastery. There Should be good water. There should be river close by so that we can conveniently reach the place by boat. (CWC ,IV, P.90)

St. Paul reminded the first Christian community, "Do not conform to the standards of this world". Bl.Chavara told the members of his community: Even the noise from the market, or the principles of marketing, the business mentality should not

touch the walls of the monastery. The prime motive of starting the religious institute was nothing but the renewal of the Church, He emphatically said it in his Testament written to the members of his congregation : God has willed the foundation of this order for the salvation of our fellow Christians. But our numbers are not sufficient and the desired help is not forthcoming to the necessary extent. (CWC, IV, P.71)

When we analyze the first pages of both the chronicles of Mannanam Monastery and Koonammav Convent which are written by Bl. Chavara himself it bring to our mind few common factors of his prophetic vision:

1. It has reference to the apostolic origin of the Kerala Church
2. The fact that there are no convents or monasteries, which causes great grief or deep sorrow.
3. The writer expresses a kind of helplessness of the people of Kerala. There was nobody to initiate or support for the starting of Religious life.
4. When the fulfillment comes it is said to be a great divine providence that HE sent holy persons to work for it generously.
5. In the case of the description about the beginning of the convent he did not start with Feb. 13, 1866, the exact date of its foundation, instead it starts with AD 52 the beginning of Christianity itself in Kerala. It is presented in continuity of what had happened in 1831 and 1855 at Mannanam, at Puthenpally
7. Due to the absence of established religious life for men & women lot of good has been left undone.
8. The writer is looking for the spiritual growth of the Church, not the personal benefit of the members who join the congregation
9. Above all, the idea that religious life is in the Church, and for the church is made very clear in those lines.. A kind of urgency is seen " The terms like *ambly* express his vision and the inner nature or the purpose of Religious life. The absence of Rel. life,

its beginning, growth, etc. is very much depend upon the kind of leadership the church of Kerala had. The Mannanam Chronicles starts with the events of his seminary days, ie. While he was in his early twenties at Pallipuram seminary, Fr. Thomas Palackal Malpan as his Rector and Guru.

Whereas, at the time of writing the chronicles of Koonammavu convent he had reached the mature state of his saintliness. He was 61 years old, himself a Malpan of all the seminaries, the sole person responsible for the priestly formation of the Kerala Church. He was the Vicar General of the St. Thomas Christians. He was known as BIG PRIOR, has accomplished many great things in his life, pioneered various activities. In 1861 there are 418 native priests in the Vicariate of Varapuzha, and 16 priests in Kollam Vicariate. Mgr. Bernardine Baccinelli OCD as the Bishop of the time, Fr. Leopold Beccaro OCD as the delegate Provincial of the Kerala Carmelite Communities of both men and women. (The report on the vicariate of Varapuzha was prepared on Sep.24, 1861, by Charbonneaux and submitted to propaganda Fide. Quoted in Cherian Varicat P.11)

Two communities with one name and one goal

The growth of the convents and monasteries was a constant concern and a topic of daily prayer of Bl.Chavara. At the end of his book "Dhyanasallapangal" we see a collection of prayers said by Bl.Chavara daily. One among them is 'Prayer for custody of the eyes'. There he prays for the steady growth and safety of the convent and monasteries and of the church, the conversion of the infidels who have not received the true faith, and for all those entrusted to his care, and many other intentions. (CWC III, P.40). In BL.Chavaras' vision both these communities have the same purpose and goal. In his last will, monastery, convent, (boarding house) these three are seen as one unit:

This will help very much to render necessary and useful spiritual ministry to the faithful of the two vicariates of

Varapuzha and Kollam. It is necessary and very useful to have a convent of the sisters one at Mutholy and another at Mannanam with boarding houses attached. A little effort and diligence on your part would suffice to accomplish all the things (Letters VI, 43)

He had properly understood that religious communities help to build the church in pastoral ministries and missionary activities through their collective enterprises. As for the Indian church it was through the leadership of Bl.Chavara that these two religious congregations were formed. And he suggests the same superiors for both the communities.

The Chronicles of the Koonammavu Convent tell about the designation and power of the superior in the following words:

The most reverend Vicar Apostolic of Malayalam Fray Bernerdine of St. Terese who is reigning over us as the Vicar Provincial as per the order of Fray Dominic de San Juse, the Proposit General of the order of Carmelites in Malayalam. And this bishop has appointed a delegate giving him the power to see to the smooth running of the monasteries and also to establish and run convents and to admit sisters to the same order (Ths delegate is the missionary apostolic of Malayam-very Rev.Fray Leopold Maria de San Juse of the order of Carmelite Discalsed) (CKC P.267).

At a time when he thinks of his departure form this world as he was handing over all his wealth and properties to the members of his community Bl.Chavara entrusts the sisters' community to his brothers. To plan out and work for the growth and expansion of the CMC is the responsibility of the CMI's. He visualized clearly the CMI, CMC congrergations that he founded will be great instruments in the growth of the Indian Church. Bl.Chavara, the heroic son of the Syro-Malabaar Church, has cut out for us many avenues to work for the glory of God.

Even the name for the two communities was one and the same; - "Third order Carmelite Discalsed of Mary

Immaculate" (CWC I,P.52) In the Mannanam chronicle we see repeatedly this name for the congregation. This same name is suggested for the women congregation, as well. On Feb. 2nd, 1859 a land was bought at Puthenpally with the purpose of starting a convent for women. At the beginning and end of its deed the name and purpose of the proposed convent is seen: "The purpose of building and conducting a convent in the name of the Immaculate Holy Mother Of Carmel (). In the official documents sent by the Bishop or the OCD superiors the mention of "Immaculate Mother" is found missing. Now let us see in detail the contribution of Bl. Chavara in founding and forming the religious community for women, at Koonammavu.

THE DREAM

The second dearest dream of Bl. Chavara was the foundation of a religious Congregation for women, the first obviously being that of the men's Congregation, (CMI). The former was partially realized when a little house with coconut trees for wood-works and bamboo mats for walls, and thatched with coconut leaves, was built in a small plot of land, then known as kashandian parampu, in Koonammavu in 1866. As it was getting ready, Bl. Chavara wrote:

It appears that God has been pleased to fulfil something which seemed difficult, and for which I have long been praying, namely, a convent for women. (CWC, I, p. 104) This was the house, popularly known as bamboo-mat convent, where the first women candidates for religious life were accommodated. In one year's time, however, a proper house for the convent was constructed, and on the day of its blessing, 27 March 1867, Bl. Chavara again recorded in the form of a prayer: Almighty God! it is to make me more indebted to You that You gave me a longer life so that I can see this event, too; let Your name be glorified forever and ever. Amen. (CWC, I, P. 116).

These two quotations, both from the chronicle of St

Joseph's Monastery, Mannanam, amply testify to the intensity of Bl. Chavara's desire to have a religious Congregation for women, and his joy and sense of fulfilment when it was finally realized. They remind us of the ecstatic outpouring of the holy man named Simeon in Jerusalem as he took baby Jesus into his hands:

Now, Master, You can let Your servant go in peace, just as You promised; because my eyes have seen the salvation which You have prepared for all the nations to see, a light to enlighten the pagans and the glory of Your people Israel(LK 2: 29-32).

To understand and appreciate the full significance of the foundation of the new Congregation for women, we must look at it in the wider perspective of the uplift and education of women, which were in fact aimed at and triggered off. Bl. Chavara clearly stated the purpose of the new Congregation for women as follows:

Besides striving for their own spiritual realization they [the members of the Congregation] have to teach other girls, and train them in some handicrafts.(CKC , P.23)

Thus the purpose was twofold. The spiritual realization of the members was the first among them, referring to which the co-founder Fr Leopold Beccaro OCD writes: It was his [Bl. Chavara's] 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 (Fr. Leopold Beccaro, The servant of God, Fr. Cyriac Elias Chavara, p.10)

The second purpose also is equally important, namely, "to teach other girls how to pray and train them in some handicrafts." We can, therefore, rightly conclude that the new Congregation was meant to be an effective agent of the uplift, reform and well-being of women.

Considering the plight of women in Kerala those days, the humble bamboo-mat convent in Koonammavu was in fact

the inauguration of a movement of far-reaching effects. It was a time when the women were largely deprived of even the basic rights of education, property inheritance, and proper clothing. They were not expected to attend even the retreats and festivals in the parishes, and the family gatherings such as *sradham*, *adiyantiram* and marriages; and they had no role in the process of making policies and decisions in the family, the Church and the society. Thus the women, more especially the Syrian Catholic women, were extremely underprivileged religiously, socially, economically and educationally. The establishment of a religious Congregation for women was certainly an antidote for those socio-cultural evils affecting the women, as its subsequent history has already proved.

THE DREAM COME TRUE

In the first pages of the Koonammavu chronicle, Bl. Chavara presents the initial attempts to start the convent at Puthenpally and how the opportunity lost due to the disturbances caused by the arrival of Mar Thomas Roccas in Kerala on May 9, 1861. Bl. Chavara being appointed as the Vicar general on 8 June 1861, was fully absorbed in the struggle against the schism and the works to restore unity and harmony in the Church. Naturally, therefore, he was unable to pursue the plan for a convent, although it was certainly kept alive in his thought and prayer, as he himself writes in 1865: For years we have been praying for the establishment of a convent, but so long it has not been possible to realize. (CWC 1, P104)

Then the matter was taken up again in 1865 when Fr Leopold during an evening walk with Bl. Chavara brought it up with a concrete suggestion. There are many things that made Fr Leopold different from other missionaries, and dear to the people, especially the Syrian community. His younger age perhaps made it easier for him to adjust to the local culture and conditions of life, and understand the people and their problems. From the day he arrived in Kochi, he stayed in the monastery at Koonammavu, and not ever in Varapuzha with the

missionary community. Thus, on the one hand he was not influenced by the missionaries' prejudices against the Syrian community, and, on the other, he got to know the latter directly and personally and to understand their problems and reasonable demands. Having learnt the local language (Malayalam) he freely communicated with the people sharing in their joys and sorrows, which in turn made him their trusted friend. His pastoral works such as confessions and retreats among them enabled him to sense their spiritual needs as well. In testimony of these details about him we have the appreciative words of Bl. Chavara himself in the chronicle and of Fr. Parappuram in his diary. Among Fr Leopold's spiritual daughters were a widow of Vakayil family called Eliswa, aged 34, and her only daughter Anna, aged 14, both of them living in Koonammavu. As the chronicle continues, they shared with him the desire to lead a life of consecrated chastity till death, and entrusted themselves completely to him. As their confessor and spiritual director he considered the desire sympathetically, thoroughly tested its genuineness, and guided them with instructions and corrections. He also made enquiries about their character, and even consulted the other missionaries. And above all " he prayed to God to show him the way . Eventually God Himself put an idea into his mind:

Finally Fr Leopold confided the matter to Bl. Chavara, as the latter himself has recorded:

One evening in [September] 1865 our Delegate Very Rev. Fr Leopold Maria took me for a walk with him. We went out of the gate of our monastery at Koonammavu and were walking northwards. As we approached the small crumbling mound, he told me: "Here is a widow with a 14 year old daughter whose father has left to her half of his properties. The girl does not want to be married. So why not get these two out of their joint family house, and settle them in the works nuns do, i.e., teaching girls the practice of virtues and training them in some handicrafts?" " I also feel it to be a very good idea," I replied (CWC ,1,P 104)

From now on it is the common project and concern of the two priests, Bl. Chavara and Fr. Leopold. The latter had anticipated objections from those who were to inherit the property under reference. However, sincerely interested in the project of the convent and the spiritual well being of its prospective members, he, with the wholehearted co-operation of Bl. Chavara, went ahead with the plan. As the next step, the plan was communicated to the Archbishop. In proceeding with the plans what encouraged Fr Leopold was the conviction that the two candidates were well intentioned and well disposed .

THE FIRST COMMUNITY

On Tuesday 13 February 1866, early in the morning at 5 O'clock Bl. Chavara along with Fr Leopold carried to the new house all the little things required for a convent community and "arranged them with their own hands". When all was ready by 9 O'clock the three candidates and the helper were sent for, as was already arranged. They were waiting in the church after receiving the Holy Communion. The candidates were wearing the new "extraordinarily modest" dress, women including the helper, who were permitted, went into the prayer room with the candidates. There the latter knelt down before the Lord, and prayed in silence for some time. By then Fr Leopold wearing the surplice and stole came in along with Bl. Chavara.. He proceeded with the prescribed form and prayers, put on them a small scapular each and blessed them sprinkling holy water. Finally the two Fathers sang Te Deum, Fr Leopold in Latin and Bl. Chavara in Syriac. By 11 a.m. having finished everything Fr Leopold and Bl. Chavara returned to the monastery.

There was a Syrian Catholic lady called Eliswa, aged 37, belonging to the parish of Vaikom. On 14 February Fr. Leopold called her to the confessional, heard her confession, conducted her examination and gave her Holy Communion and joined her into the community

PROPHECY FULFILLED

The main concern then was how to find funds to construct a proper building for the convent. To keep the sisters in the bamboo-mat convent was neither safe nor befitting. Soon, therefore, there should be a new building to accommodate not only the present candidates, but also many more who were aspiring for religious life. But where is the money going to come from? To discuss the matter a meeting of the bigwigs from the north and south was summoned. The meeting submitted a written request to the Archbishop to establish the system in the parishes. He was pleased with it, and instructed Fr Leopold to draft a circular explaining the system, which being approved by the former was sent to the parishes.

So, as an immediate means of raising fund Bl. Chavara and Fr Leopold undertook a week long journey to the Syrian parishes of Kuttanad in the beginning of April itself. The next question naturally was to find the land to construct the convent. The Chronicles of Koonammavu Convent, after noting that the two Fathers had gone on a journey for collecting money, says:

When they came back they brought with them some donations to make a new convent building, and started taking steps for buying a plot of land for it.(CKC p.36)

The two plots of land thus acquired along with the said land of the monastery were fixed as the site for the new convent and the foundation stone was laid.

Then onwards it was a clear instance of God directing the events in a surprising manner through people of good will. There was hardly ever any cash in store. Once or twice loans were taken from the monastery and some others, and works were done

INTO THE NEW HOUSE

It took a few more months before the works were all completed, and the community moved into the new house on 27 March 1867. The two Fathers took meticulous care to furnish

it with all the necessary things and arrangements. Finally comes the day, 27 March 1867, when the community moved from the bamboo-mat convent to the new one. It was also the day when the first four members were given the religious habit. Bl. Chavara's entry in the chronicle of St Joseph's Monastery, Mannanam, is shorter, but to the point:

In the year 1867 the Almighty God showered a blessing on us: the nuns who in 1866 April started staying between bamboo-mat walls, were transferred on 27 March 1867 to the newly finished building with all rooms fully furnished. At 6 a.m. on 27 March the four sisters and the new helper Thresia, and an old pious woman from Edakochi, came through the new gate along the new path and entered the new convent. Fr Delegate received them and put on them the cassocks, scapulars, veils etc. with the assistance of the helping woman. They were shown the big bell, the small bell and the rattle. An old man was appointed as procurator. (CWC, I pp. 115-116)

"JUST AN UNWORTHY SERVANT"

To the question, who founded the new Congregation for women, the forthright answer coming from Bl. Chavara and Fr Leopold is that it is God's work.: This convent was not made by me nor by Fr Prior. It was God who made us do it for you. This convent was made not to admit saints because saints will go to heaven. But this convent was made to admit sinners who desire to become saints. (CKC, p73) Proud as I am, I have never had even a passing distraction that this convent was built by me. When we consider how God has been providing and protecting it in every way, I have undaunted hope that God will take care of it in the future also. (CKC p 132)

MUTUAL RECOGNITION

The fact is that Bl. Chavara and Fr Leopold give to one another the credit of founding the convent and emphasize the role of one another. After describing the events that led to the conversion of the convent building to seminary, whereby the

plan for a convent was disrupted, Bl. Chavara continues:

It was when we were pulling on our life, that our missionary, the present Provincial Delegate, Very Rev Fr Leopold Maria of St Joseph, by his powerful assistance and hard work brought this convent into existence. When we look at what happened, we are glad to think that God has sent him here solely for the purpose of establishing these monasteries and convents.(CKC,p.22)

When the new convent building in Koonammavu was completed and inaugurated on 27 March 1867 Bl. Chavara again wrote, "Thus by the simplicity and sagacity of Fr Delegate everything was complete. But in Fr Leopold's description, it was Bl. Chavara who was mainly instrumental for the new congregation for women:

It was his [Bl. Chavara's] great desire to start a convent here as a spiritual resort and to give Christian formation to the girls and teach them catechism. It is impossible to include in this short account, how much hard work he did for it, when God desired it to be started. Every one knows how much care and concern he showed, even after the beginning of the convent, to let it function in order and holiness.

The two priests were also full of appreciation for each other. Bl. Chavara had even a deep sense of indebtedness not only to Fr Leopold, but even to the latter's family. He wants his followers, too, - the CMI and CMC Congregations and, indeed, the entire Church of Malabar - to be grateful to Fr Leopold and his family.

CO-FOUNDERS

Now, returning to the question of the foundation of the convents, in the last analysis it is the joint achievement of Bl. Chavara and Fr Leopold, so that they can be and should be considered the co-founders. The two founders were united not only in thoughts and words but also in deeds. They were almost always together in making journeys and meeting people to

collect money, doing the administrative works related to the convent, furnishing it with all the necessary things, and finally blessing and establishing it. They were also almost invariably together in the frequent visits to the new community, instructing and guiding them, and caring for the sick. They also showed equal interest in teaching them arts and crafts in view of the apostolic works. Above all, they loved and respected one another and as a result co-operated in many good works. The Jubilee Souvenir of the Koonammavu Convent has appropriately observed:

It is difficult to say which is greater - the love Fr Chavara had for Fr Leopold, or the respect Fr Leopold had for Fr Chavara. When the missionary saw in Fr Chavara a holy man and a great administrator, Fr Chavara saw in Fr Leopold a sincere friend who loved the Syrians from the depth of his heart. The unity in mind of such Superiors and mutual love and respect paved the way for the beginning of many good and new enterprises including the establishment of a convent. (Vajrajubilee smarakam: St. Teresas convent, Koonammavu, 1943, p.15)

A BELOVED FATHER AND AN ACCOMPANYING GURU

Bl. Chavara's interest in the new Congregation as well as his love and concern for its members did not end with the establishment of the first convent. Here is the clear testimony of Fr Leopold himself:

Everyone knows how much care and concern he [Bl. Chavara] showed even after the beginning of the convent to let it function in order and holiness. (Fr. Leopold, p.iv)

But going through the pages of the chronicles one may get the impression that in the years following the inauguration of the convent in March 1867 Bl. Chavara did not relate himself to it except as a companion and assistant to Fr Leopold. The chronicle of St. Joseph's

Monastery, Mannanam, is practically silent about Bl. Chavara's involvement in the convent affairs these years. The Chronicles

of Koonammavu Convent, however, continues to mention his frequent visits to the convent, but almost invariably accompanying Fr Leopold. All the same it is noteworthy that in almost all the frequent visits of Fr Leopold - at least once a week on an average! - Bl. Chavara was there with him. In fact neither of them would go to the convent except in the company of the other. Moreover, he personally looked after the sisters and helped them in their needs when Fr Leopold was away in Rome from 11 September 1869 to 08 November 1870. During this period far from being a mere silent observer, he was an active guide and administrator, even in spite of old age and weakness. The chronicler's descriptions of his involvement in the convent matters of the same period clearly betray his continued care and concern, and the more and more self-effacing efforts for the sake of the new community. Apart from such exceptional instances as motioned above, in almost every page of the said Chronicles the two priests appear together, and almost all the entries begin as follows:

Our *Moopachan* [Fr Leopold] and *Priorachan* [Bl. Chavara] came together and he / they said / instructed / did so and so.

In such statements, "he" obviously refers to Fr Leopold. It is very rarely indeed - may be just once or twice - that the Chronicles explicitly state that during their many joint visits Bl. Chavara gave formal instructions. If thus the Chronicles do not assign a more prominent place to him, it may at least partly be in accordance with his own directions to the writer. He certainly preferred to be overshadowed by Fr. Leopold not only as a matter of humility, but also in consideration of propriety and practicalities. Besides being Bl. Chavara's personal confessor and spiritual director, Fr Leopold was also the duly appointed Provincial Delegate and Novice Master, and as such it was only proper on the part of Bl. Chavara to give him a free hand in exercising his rights and duties in relation to the new convent, and indeed he gracefully did so. What else could one expect

from Bl. Chavara who was ever so obedient and respectful towards the Superiors? In his Testament he has advised the confreres that they should take particular care not to interfere in the affairs of the convent or boarding house unless they are officially assigned to the work.

This is certainly a wise advice, which he himself practised before preaching. Still more, as the Prior General of the men's Congregation, and the Vicar General for the Syrian Catholics of Malabar, he, who always got his priorities right, could not possibly afford more time for the sisters' community. Added to all these were his old age and failing health. The sisters were all appreciation and gratitude for all that he did in spite of his old age and ill health, and, in their assessment, during the years following the convent's inauguration, too, he continued to work for them even ignoring his own health and comforts:

These passages are clear evidence of Bl. Chavara's continued commitment to the cause of the new Congregation, although he ever remained admirably subordinate to Fr Leopold, never superseding nor interfering with him.

However, that Bl. Chavara chose to be overshadowed by Fr Leopold is only one side of the story. The other side is that the latter also really valued his support and approval. It was not just anybody's company that Fr Leopold sought, but Bl. Chavara's, which was ever so encouraging and inspiring, confirming and complementing. This should be the explanation why Fr Leopold the young man of merely 25 years or so insisted on being always accompanied by Bl. Chavara the old man in his early sixties. Well, they mutually complemented and supported in all respects, and more clearly in the great mission of establishing and bringing up the new community of sisters, as the latter have unambiguously observed:

He [Bl. Chavara] it was who helped our missionary Fr Leopold, especially to establish the convent for women, and toiled tirelessly for this heroic work. He was the faithful

companion chosen by the missionary Fr Leopold to stand steadfast by him in facing the difficulties and making journeys. He remained a changeless and ever true friend to him. He was a man of untold prudence and great efficiency.(CKC,P .207.)

BLESSED. CHAVARA'S PORTRAIT OF THE CMC

The fact then is that even if we admit that for various reasons Bl. Chavara's direct involvement in the convent affairs during the last years was limited to necessities and unavoidable circumstances, his love and concern for them were on the increase. The biographer and contemporary Fr Kuriakose Elias Porukara, who succeeded Bl. Chavara as the Prior General observes:

Just as Patriarch Jacob had a greater love for his youngest son Benjamin so he [Bl. Chavara] loved them [the sisters] most deeply, and brought them up most carefully, providing them with all the needs even as a hen takes care of the chicks (Kuriakose Porukara short biography of Fr.Chavara . p.35)

This succinct statement cannot be dismissed as a casual remark. Instead it is a carefully thought out statement of Bl. Chavara's love for them, both paternal and maternal, the former symbolised by Patriarch Jacob and the latter by the hen. And this has been amply substantiated by his letters to the sisters.

The letters are very personal, parental, and thoughtful, too. They instruct the sisters in clear details regarding the temporalities such as farming, construction works, bookkeeping and accountancy. A central theme of the letters is the sisters' privileged interior life. He feels a holy envy at their immense good fortune as queens and spouses of the Lord and King Jesus Christ. The state of life they have embraced is indeed great and praiseworthy. The terrestrial empresses will feel jealous of them.

Another great concern expressed in the letters is the sisters' reading habits, which is " the straight way to the summit of perfection and the means not to tumble down from the

heights." Sending them the best available books, some of which he himself translated from Tamil into Malayalam for their sake, he urges them to read them. He wishes he could teach the sisters more Latin. But he cannot. It is not necessary either. Let them learn Tamil well so that they can read the many spiritual books in that language. They must spend the spare time not "in useless conversation," but "in spiritual reading." They must read not merely "for knowledge and enjoyment," but "for knowledge and devotion," which is the sure way to acquire virtues and persevere in the same. Love of reading will lead to love of solitude.

Dwelling further on the same theme he insists that they should resist every temptation to give up the solitude of the convent. Thus in keeping with the Carmelite spirituality, incessant and ever deepening prayerfulness is the trait of the members of the new Congregation as it is depicted in the letters of Bl. Chavara. He irresistibly exhorts that the sisters should above all learn the art of loving Jesus Christ. Let them stay constantly in his presence, walk along with Him and converse with Him continuously (CWC 4 P 82) Let the sisters consider how sweet is the voice of their loving Spouse; He is vigilantly watching them from the inside and the outside of their hearts lest they love anyone else more than Him, and looks into all their needs. Let the sisters keep their hearts locked up in the tabernacle of Jesus, where their treasure is. That is what Bl. Chavara himself had done. Let them be there with Him till the day of resurrection. Again the letters remind the sisters of the care and delight with which the Lord looks after them. As soon as He sees that they have decided in their hearts to love Him, He does everything for them with joy. Take, for example, their convent itself. Just as they begin to think about how to manage certain things, He accomplishes them without the least worry on their part. At one point Bl. Chavara bursts out:

O joy of joys! O Lord, we are mere worms incapable of

understanding anything. Like unto the mother who nourishes her children with milk even while they are asleep, or are unable to express in words their hunger and thirst, You are looking after our needs every day (CWC 4 P86)

In union with the works of their Lord Jesus Christ, which are of infinite merit, let them also offer to God every pulse beat of their veins, every winking of their eyes, every breath of theirs, every little chirping of the birds - indeed everything as their prayer! Whatever they do, should be done in association with an act of mental prayer. Are they not the spontaneous outpourings of the heart's desires and sentiments of a loving father to his beloved little children towards the end of his life? The letters under reference can rightly be considered and respected as Bl. Chavara's testament to the sisters' community. He was also concerned about their future developments, well-being and apostolate, as is clear from his testament addressed to the members of the men's Congregation: (CWC ,4 PP71-72)

IN THE FOND MEMORIES OF HIS CHILDREN

Perhaps it is in the context of Bl. Chavara's final sickness that lasted for about three months and his death that caused his total disappearance from their physical eyes that made the sisters fully aware of his greatness and what he really meant to them. This is what transpires from the few pages of the Chronicles regarding his last sickness and death. It was the period between the beginning of October 1870 and the beginning of January 1871, When Fr Leopold was away in Rome, and Bl. Chavara because of the illness was unable to make the regular visits to the sisters. But he never stopped thinking of them and being concerned about their well being.

But in the beginning of the illness he wrote many letters to us. Even though he did not have the health to write, still he wrote because he was pleased to do so. Till he became unable to write, he sent letters and short notes to inform us of something or another, as and when needed. (CKC , P199) that are frank

sharing of the pains of illness with his dear children

The Chronicles then mention the last three visits of Bl. Chavara to the sisters. The first one was on 15 October 1870, the feast of St Theresa of Avila. That day 'out of his charity he came to the convent twice, and made the sisters very happy. But seeing him so weak, unable to walk by himself, staggering and almost stumbling down, his body emaciated by illness, and the face disfigured, the sisters felt very sorry. As he managed to reach up to the courtyard, they made him sit in a chair there itself. The short walk had made him extremely exhausted and weak, and feel sick and uneasy. However gradually recovering a little he said that he was unable to see their faces except as "stars emitting rays of light." (CKC ,P 202)

At the end, when he was about to go from here, he said the last goodbye. He turned towards us with a smile, full of humility and devotion. He bowed his head unusually in respect towards us as a specialty. He then gave us the blessing and took leave of us ..(CKC ,P 206 -207)

Finally the Chronicles refers to the last three days of his life on earth. On 30 December 1870 all his illnesses aggravated and he lost his senses, too. Next day through Fr Gerard he sent the sisters the New Year message that "they should revitalize all their virtues and make their lives new, and that they had his blessings. On 1 January 1871 at his request he was given the anointing of the sick and other sacraments. Before receiving them he spoke on the passion of Christ and the glories of Mary, astonishing the hearers. After receiving the sacraments, he lost his consciousness, never to regain it fully.

Next day being informed of his critical condition the sisters were overwhelmed with sorrow, about which they state:

But their "prayer was not heard, as it was not the will of

God." On 3 January 1871 at 07.30 a.m. he breathed his last lying in the hands of his spiritual sons in the monastery at Koonammavu, as God willed that he should be called to heaven to receive his eternal reward for all his works and sufferings. It was the time when the sisters were attending the Holy Mass in their chapel. Hearing the bell announcing his death, they were "overcome by uncontrollable grief even while the Holy Mass was going on, and the church was filled with the sound of weeping and sighing.. Today we miss him and all the good he did and all that he was continuing to do for us. Hence it is that our hearts are so sorrow-stricken." But eventually they consoled themselves:

There are a few virtues of Bl. Chavara, such as obedience and the accompanying spirit of resignation to God's will, patience, calm and quiet, and peace and joy, that impressed the sisters more especially during his last illness. During his visit to them on 28 October 1870 when he mentioned that he was going to be taken to Mannanam, the sisters requested him that if he willed, he could continue to stay in Koonammavu without going to Mannanam. His characteristic reply was:

Have I 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 don't wish to do my will. I am ready to do what I am commanded to do (CKC ,P 203)

Nearer the end of his life, saying to Fr Gerard that he then had much peace and joy, a little scrupulously he added, "Father, I did not hear Holy Mass last Sunday." Fr Gerard consoled him saying that it was not by his own will but in obedience to the superior's command that he had not heard the Holy Mass, and that as such it should not worry him. That instantly settled his doubt, and he responded, "Yes, it is true.

It is in obedience that I did not go for Mass. That is enough for me." Ever since, he was calm and quiet. The Chronicler then shares her reflections:

Ah my dear sisters, we have heard just now that since our Father was perfectly obedient during his lifetime, this memory brought him great peace and joy at the time of his death. If we desire to get this favour and this joy at the time of our death, let us now try to be persons of blind obedience. (CKC ,P210)

They do fondly recall and treasure Fr Gerard's testimony regarding his experience while he was administering the last sacraments to Bl. Chavara:

When I was giving him Holy Communion, I felt like looking at his face and I looked intently into his eyes. Then I saw an extraordinary bright glow and a joyous expression on his face, the kind that has never been seen.

Finally the sisters acknowledge with admiration and a sense of legitimate pride the greatness and mission of Bl. Chavara not only in relation with themselves but also in the wider context of the Church and society at large.

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. He was also especially interested in the numerical increase of the members of the convent and in their growth and perfection in virtues. Therefore, he did much to establish the convent of ours and make us grow in the path of virtue. (CKC, P 10-211)

Conclusion

The picture of Bl.Chavara that is imprinted in the minds of the Sisters was that of a pillar that supported the Catholic Church and a guiding light to all the people of his time . The sisters looked upto Bl.Chavara and enjoyed his noble vision about the greatness and nobility of womanhood which he imbibed from his own mother. He has written many lines of

appreciation about him mother's way of moulding the young mind of Kochhu Kuriakose to another Mary-Mary of the Holy family of Nazareth. Bl.Kuriakose entrusted the CMC sisters the responsibility of forming all the housewives and mothers around them instilling into them real faith in God, and giving leadership in their prayers. This they did mainly in and through their apostolate of education, by giving personal guidance and counselling to the staff, Students and the parents in the school. It was effectively carried out in the boarding houses attached to the convents. Slowly it was extended to the parish ministry in the form of pious association / confraternities like Marian sodality, Holy childhood, Mathru Sankham, preparing the children for 1st Holy communion, etc. In the early stages the spiritual dynamism of the sisters was very alive, vibrant and active. They were leading an exemplary life of virtues happiness and unity. The outsiders also were inspired by their holy lives. Today the high female literacy ratio of the state of Kerala, traces its inspiration to the process of women empowerment through girls education started at Koonammavu.

The phenomenon of 'Kerala nurses and nuns everywhere' catches the attention and appreciation of many Gita Aravindan who made a study about it reached the conclusion that it is the personal encouragement and support these girls yet from the sisters who teach them at convent schools that enable them to step out of their home state and settle in important cities and towns of our country or abroad, even in the remotest villages and farther islands. The equal education facilities and job-opportunities that are available for girls in Kerala, keep this state as a place free from the evils of "son- preference" and the subsequent female feticide and female infanticide. According to the censuses 2001 Kerala is the only state in India where in the sex ratio the number of women exceeds the number of men.

This bicentenary celebrations remind us of our great responsibility to take serious steps and projects to empower

the women of North India. Now a word about what we could discuss during the seminar in view of the better ways of collaboration between the CMCs and CMIs to work and grow together in the founding charism of our Bl.Chavara. Both the congregations acknowledge and accept Bl.Chavara as one of their the founders Let admit also out commonness in the Carmelite, oriental and Indian spiritual heritage. In the footsteps of our founding father and in accordance with our original charism, we must recommitment ourselves to the building up of the church with the following questions: How vibrant the founders and founding communities were in the pastoral field and how widely their services were appreciated by the local church. Let these questions stir our minds and conscience these days of celebrations.

BLESSED CHAVARA A MAN OF PROPHETIC CHARISM AND A CONTEMPLATIVE IN ACTION

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Introduction

"His [Blessed Chavara's] success in all his many undertakings was undoubtedly due to the intense charity and prayer, which characterised his daily life, his close communication with Christ, and his love for the Church as the visible body of Christ on earth." These words of Pope John Paul II on the occasion of the beatification of Kuriakose Elias Chavara in 1986, are an accurate description of the latter: a person who succeeded in all his undertakings by virtue of his prayerfulness. He was indeed a prayerful person of many undertakings. The Indian definition of such a person in *karma-yogi*, meaning 'a contemplative in action.' This great ideal of spirituality is the key-concept in *Bhagavad-gita*, a spiritual classic of India. In it Arjuna, who for all practical purposes represents the sincere seekers of God, is persuaded to engage himself in the service of humanity without counting the gains or losses for himself. This was a call for *nishkama-karma*, unselfish service. This is something like what Jesus meant when he said: "When you have done all that is commanded you, say 'we are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty'" (Lk 17:10). Then immediately the question is raised: Can one be so unselfish as to be totally unconcerned about one's own gains and losses in the undertakings? In answer to this question *Bhagavad-gita* says, *yogasthah kuru karmanī* (2:48),

which means: "Do the services while remaining in the state of *yoga*." To be in the state of *yoga* is what the Christian tradition of spirituality basically means by being prayerful or a contemplative. Hence the advice is that one should be engaged in activities while remaining a contemplative: be a contemplative in action, a *karma-yogi*. This is the ideal that Chavara, true to his rootedness in the Indian and Carmelite traditions of spirituality, realised in his own person.

A MAN OF DYNAMISM

That Chavara was a person of action is quite plain, as has been amply testified by many of the other studies about him. Even as a seminarian, if not earlier, his active temperament was obvious. He was active not only in his personal programme of studies, but also in sharing with the *Malpan* (Rector) Fr Thomas Palackal the responsibilities of administration, discipline as well as teaching. His active involvement in the liturgical reform had started already during the seminary life, when he, with the permission of his *Malpan*, collected books of divine office from different places, and wrote them down with great effort.¹ Then his creative and committed participation and leadership in founding the two religious Congregations, fighting against the Rochosian schism, the socio-religious activities for the poor, the re-union movement, the evangelisation efforts, the field of education, the press apostolate, the administration of the CMI Congregation as its first Prior General from 1855 until his death in 1871, founding the seven monasteries, the care and direction of the CMC sisters' community at Koonammavu, the literary works, and the administration of the Malabar Church as the first Vicar General from 1861 to 1871, are well known. But in all these undertakings the underlying force was his prayerfulness, which is the theme of this article.

In fact, however, Chavara's greatness lies neither in the amount of works he did, nor in the contemplation he enjoyed, but in the way he harmonised both of them in himself, a task which *Bhagavad-gita* says is a matter of skill, *kausalam*.²

Therefore, the central concern of this article more precisely is how Chavara developed and maintained the spirit of contemplation throughout his active life, until it culminated in the supreme act of total surrender into the hands of the Father, the act of death in which the dichotomy of action and prayer is creatively resolved once and for all.

Again it is clear to any one having a little familiarity with Chavara's biography that he was a person who spent hours and hours in prayer, personal as well as liturgical. Important as it is, the focus of this study, however, is not on the amount of formal prayer he did, but on the fact of his being a contemplative. Such a person spontaneously perceives, admires and adores the loving hands of the provident God in all that happens to him and around him. This may be described as a life of practical faith. Here one's faith in God instead of remaining just on the theoretical level, is made to bear on every little experience of the person, pleasant as well as unpleasant. Hence it is not a question of the person having so many extraordinary experiences of God, but being able to convert every little experience of life into a God experience. This contemplative character of the person is proved beyond doubt in the face of painful experiences, as it happened in the case of Chavara. For example, during his seminary life, when his parents and the only brother died, instead of giving up the vocation to priesthood, he remained committed in it, leaving the care of the family to the relatives. He gracefully accepted the humiliation when he had to return to Pallipuram from the Roman Rite seminary at Verapoly, where he was sent for further studies of Latin language. His extraordinary spirit of obedience was manifested when he and Fr Thomas Porukara were transferred to distant churches in spite of their request to be allowed to continue the work of their dearest project, the monastery at Mannanam. He bore with equanimity the rejection at the hands of the people in the press at Kottayam where he went twice to see and learn about the setting up of a press. His sense of religious heroism and dedication was simply admirable

in the uncompromising fight against the Rochosian schism. He simply laughed at the enticing offer of episcopate made by the opponents during the struggle against the same schism. He was equally unafraid of their threat to seize the monastery at Mannanam, and their false accusation and propaganda as a result of which the majority of the churches (parishes) opposed and looked down upon him and his co-workers. On the other hand, he was all forgiveness. For example, when Fr Antony Thodanad, who manoeuvring the schismatic movement, showed signs of repentance and conversion, Chavara waited six hours patiently to meet him. "Never did he himself back from any work, nor fight shy of any difficulty as he was always prompted by two motives: obedience to his Bishop and the salvation of souls."³ His deep sense of humility and detachment was unparalleled, as it was clear from the concluding words of the letter of the Vicar Apostolic Baccinelli to the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of *Propaganda Fide* dated 15 June 1861, recommending to consecrate Chavara as auxiliary Bishop: "... but I must warn you that the said person [Chavara] has the simple vow of humility, and even if he had not taken that vow, he would not accept such a character and dignity without an order, as I had to give him to make him accept to be the Vicar General." Again, to comply with the desire of the Vicar Apostolic Baccinelli, in his old age, leaving the monastery at Mannanam, where he had lived since 1831, he moved to Koonammavu in 1864, and lived there till death. In the mean time, when the Vicar Apostolic and Fr Leopold went to Rome, Chavara fell ill. Then the physician and the confreres at Mannanam advised that he should come back to Mannanam for better treatment and rest. But he said: "Since the Vicar Apostolic and Fr Leopold wished that I should stay here, my conscience doesn't allow me to come to Mannanam when they are absent."⁴ He endured the sufferings of the old age, including complete blindness during the last three months of his life, "with the most heroic resignation, even as martyrdom."⁵

A Spirit-filled person

Chavara would not be elated, either, by any amount of praise or recognition. Already while in the seminary he was a favourite of the *Malpan* Fr Thomas Palackal, as he himself testifies: "Fr *Malpan* Palackal adopted me as his protege, looked after both body and soul, and met the expenses of my priestly studies. Until his death he took more interest in me than in any of his relatives or his other spiritual students. He considered me as his heir, and left me in charge of the work that was his heart's love, the further growth and development of the monastery to which he had dedicated life."⁶ As mentioned above, Fr Palackal in recognition of Chavara's ability and character, made him actively involved in the administration of the seminary, and the discipline and teaching of the seminarians. Later in 1844 the Vicar Apostolic Xavier, respecting Chavara's virtues, cleverness, and efficiency⁷ formally appointed him the *Malpan* of Syrian Vicariate. In 1861 the Vicar Apostolic Baccinelli, convinced of Chavara's skill, courage, knowledge and saintliness, appointed him as the Vicar General of the Syrians in Malabar.⁸ Fr Aloysius, who had lived with Chavara for a long time, says that the Syrian Catholic priests showed him towering respect.⁹ Fr Palakunnel, another contemporary, has noted down in his diary: "The people called him an angel."¹⁰ Mr Mani Kurian Madathikunnel, after meeting Chavara and listening to him, said: "How pleasant an experience it was to see him. He was filled with the Holy Spirit. At the same time, all those who assembled in the church could hear his sermon without any difficulty. I still cherish those memories."¹¹ The Vicar Apostolic Baccinelli, in his letter to the Sacred Congregation, recommending Chavara for Episcopal ordination, describes him as follows:

A truly Christian, virtuous, most prudent and well versed in Sacred Scriptures, most learned in Syriac language, and who has shown himself in these circumstances by deed to be most attached to the Catholic religion and to the Holy See, so much

so that the revolutionaries, the intruder and the others on his side, even up to Baghdad have tried very much, used every art and cunning, to the extent of offering to consecrate him Bishop, to get him over to their side. If they had been able to get him, all would have followed him, since he enjoys with all great esteem, reverence, and authority... My thought and request to your Eminence is that if it is judged convenient, and if it is possible, to consecrate him co-adjutor Bishop... he will certainly bring forth fruits much better than those from the Chaldean Patriarch, because he is good, prudent and obedient, and in preaching he enchants.¹²

Thus all along his life Chavara enjoyed the appreciation, praise, and recognition of people of all kinds, and even those of other religions and denominations; and still more the enemies admired him and sought his support. But he ever remained a humble servant of God and people, penitent and ascetic. In his writings, including the letters, whenever a reference is made to himself, he presents himself as a penitent. He may be rightly described a *sthitaprajna*, a steady-minded person, always keeping the mind fixed on the Lord alike in praise and blame, health and illness, success and failure, life and death. He was a *yogi*, a contemplative!

By contemplation or prayerfulness is meant here the ability to live, uninterruptedly in all circumstances, keeping the mind fixed on the Lord. This is, in other words, to live uninterruptedly in the awareness of the presence of God. Here the stress is obviously on the uninterruptedness of the awareness, so that the contemplation is not confined to the formal hours of prayer in the oratory or so. Instead, it becomes a habitual trait of the person, running through all conditions and circumstances of life. According to an Indian definition, "The contemplation [*dhyān*] is in the form of a stream of the thought [of God], uninterrupted like a flow of oil."¹³ The stream of thought or awareness of God should keep always flowing, no matter where one is or what one does. This, indeed, was the great achievement of Chavara, because

of which he can be rightly called a contemplative.

Heir of Prayer Culture

Chavara was the proud heir of a prayer culture, a culture in which prayer was considered a supreme value. In it prayer was an archetype, which he shared from the very birth and even from the conception, so to say. "His parents, who were of excellent virtues,"¹⁴ especially his mother, who sowed in his tender mind the seed of the spirit of prayer, were the primary and the most powerful agents of this culture. Chavara's own testimony is as follows, in the form of a prayer to God:

You gave a mother to bring me up without any mishap in life. As she brought me up suckling me with the love you gave her, she guided me to say my little prayers as well. And as I grew up she taught me more and more assuredly, and made me learn all my prayers. Sitting at her feet I slowly began to know God. Even when she woke up to pray at midnight and prayed on her knees, I, too, was beside her on my knees and learned from her lips the name of Jesus and prayers to the Mother of God.¹⁵

By word and deed his mother initiated him to prayer, introduced him to the mysteries of Christian faith, and to the devotions to the Holy Family, the Holy Eucharist and Blessed Virgin Mary; and she brought him up as a disciplined child. As he himself says, under such a motherly care he grew up as a child pleasing to God.¹⁶ The event of his dedication during the childhood to the Mother of God by his own mother, the latter's practice of daily prayer even at midnight on her knees, her motherly corrections not with stick or hand but by eloquent looks, and the parents' devotion to the Holy Family, left in his mind lasting and deep impressions, which gradually became the unconscious force in his life, inspiring him to a life of incessant prayer. Those impressions, containing all the ingredients of Christian prayer, in fact became the foundation stone of his prayer life, as a look at his later life would substantiate.

The seed of the spirit of prayer that had fallen in the good soul of Chavara's heart, duly sprouted, and was further nurtured first by the priest in the presbytery where he was sent by the parents to stay for some time just before he entered the seminary at the age of thirteen. He recalls that "the priest there brought him up, and taught him to participate in and assist at Mass, and practise virtues and avoid whatever is evil." ¹⁷ Another great and decisive influence on his prayer life was exerted by the ascetic theologian Fr Thomas Palackal, who was his *Malpan* (Rector) in the seminary, the spiritual director, and the main source of inspiration in the task of the founding of the religious Congregation for men. We have already said that Chavara was the *Malpan's* favourite disciple, who had in turn great appreciation for the latter as well. About twelve years of life under the personal guidance of Fr Palackal, a person of strict asceticism and discipline, deep spirituality and learning, gave a solid theological frame and intellectual content to Chavara's prayer life. Even after the ordination he continued to be under the guidance of and in close association with Fr Palackal. About the *Malpan's* austere life, Chavara writes:

The *Malpan*, when we were staying with him and, it seemed even before the time he had said the first Mass, used to eat a full meal only at noon. At night he took a little *kanji*, and in the morning he ate nothing. This had been the practice for long, for how many years we could not ascertain. ¹⁸ It is remarkable that "in those days as a special matter he [Chavara] chose the Rector himself as the confessor." ¹⁹ The biographer Fr Leopold OCD, who, during the last ten or more years of Chavara's life, was his confessor and spiritual director, writes about his seminary life:

As would be endorsed by many of his colleagues still alive, Fr Kuriakose was zealous in the service of God without any consideration for worldly achievements. He zealously attended to his study. He was quite orderly and God fearing. He was pleased with and charitably disposed to fellow students. He depreciated the bad tempers and impatience that often

characterised the youngsters.²⁰

Again, Kuriakose Porukara, who succeeded Chavara as the Prior General of CMI Congregation, writes:

His [Chavara's] life in the seminary is admitted to have been very exemplary by all his colleagues. His devotions, obedience, and charity were outstandingly impressive. The seminary was a new one, and the discipline enforced was particularly strict. Yet throughout the rather long period of training, there was no instance of his having been reprovved for even the slightest offence.²¹

True to the motto, "the Lord is my portion" (Ps 16:5), which he had adopted as he received the tonsure in 1818, "he was decided to follow the Lord's call accepting the sorrows with submission to the will of God as he had learned from his parents," says Joseph Kanjiramattathil,²² referring to Kuriakose Porukara's biography of Chavara.²³

The Monastic Foundation

The close association with the project of the founding of the religious Congregation, starting with the construction works of the monastery at Mannanam, helped Chavara develop further his spirituality, adding to it a new dimension in terms of monastic life. Already from his *Malpan*, Fr Thomas Palackal, he was acquainted with an ascetic way of life, which in no way was less rigorous than that of a monk in a monastery. But it was well complemented by the Dominican spirit of preaching the Word of God. It may be remembered that Fr Palackal had in mind the Dominican ideal for the monastery, which in a spirit of detachment he generously gave up in deference to the sentiments of his companion Fr Thomas Porukara.²⁴ The latter's ideal of *vanavasa* (hermitage), life in the solitude of a forest,²⁵ also must have influenced Chavara's monastic spirit. About Fr Porukara he says that he was "with prayers to our Lord ever in his heart."²⁶ Even from the seminary days Chavara was personally associated with and involved in the project of the new monastery, the *bes-rouma*, house on the hill top, symbolising the heights of spirituality that was aimed at through it.²⁷ He recalls:

"All these had been achieved mainly by the efforts and the interest of the two priests – Fr Porukara and our *Malpan* Fr Thomas Palackal. The writer of this, Fr Kuriakose Elias Chavara, from his youth had been of one mind with the *Malpan*. He had at the time of his ordination... asked God at the first Mass to bless their efforts and the monastery at Manannam, which they were trying to establish." ²⁸

These words amply testify how already from the seminary days Chavara was fascinated by the monastic ideal of spirituality. It was just a month before his ordination that the two priests had obtained the permission of the Vicar Apostolic for starting religious life (monastery). After the ordination, under the continued guidance of Fr Palackal, he more actively collaborated with them in the efforts to find out a suitable site for the monastery, and in overcoming the obstacles. ²⁹ As a new priest, after a short period of pastoral ministry in some parishes, he was sent back to the seminary to assist the *Malpan*, which gave him the opportunity to be still more closely involved in the building up of the monastery. Then eventually, after the severe test of being transferred to distant places, ³⁰ Fr Porukara and he were fully relieved for the construction works of the monastery, and from then onwards the monastic dimension of his spirituality was definitively fixed, as he himself says:

From that day I began to consider myself fully as an ascetic and was determined to keep myself away completely from my blood relations, and give myself up to the monastic pattern of life. ³¹ It also happened that the new monastery from its very beginning combined prayer and scholarship, as a lasting monument to the mutual acceptance of Frs Palackal and Porukara in spite of their divergent temperaments. The latter, an ascetic theologian, felt that if the seminary is attached to the monastery they could get their [the seminarians'] services in reading, praying etc., and thus make the church services attractive. They could also have good vocations from them to the monastery. Fr Porukara differed. He insisted that their main

concern was to have a monastery, which had been furthered so far mainly by their trust in God. Our concern for people and their ways should not be a hindrance to this. The seminaries being teaching places, if attached to monastery, the monastic objectives might not be fully realised... Eventually Fr Porukara out of regard for Fr *Malpan*, submitted to the latter's view.³² Thus the monastery, which according to Fr Porukara is exclusively a house of prayer and penance (*tapasu-bhavavn*), took on also the dimension of a house of insight and learning (*darsana-veedu*).³³ Chavara initially was equally open to both the views, and easily assimilated the great ideal of combining *tapas* and *darsan*, prayer and penance on the one hand, and insight and learning on the other, and this combination remained a permanent trait of his spirituality.

Very soon the life in the monastery-cum-seminary at Mannanam was so organised that it beautifully combined *tapas* (prayer and penance) and *darsan* (insight and learning). Fr Porukara interspersed the day-long studies, three times a day, with pious practices like the long rosary, the seven dolours rosary and prayers to St Joseph, Holy Mass, preaching, scapular devotion, and the way of the cross.³⁵ A little later, at the end of a retreat, at the suggestion of Chavara and two others, a few of them volunteered to live as members of a community observing all the rules followed during the retreat, except that of silence. And rooms upstairs were allotted to them, with Chavara as their director and teacher.³⁶

Thus immediately after the ordination, and much before formally becoming a religious through the profession of the evangelical counsels, Chavara had started the monastic style of life and spirituality. But along with it there was in him also the deep rooted pastoral orientation, which he had inherited from the preachers' (Dominican) ideal of Fr Palackal and the pastoral background of Fr Porukara. The pastoral commitment was in fact the mandate they had received when the Vicar Apostolic Maurilius Stabilini permitted them to start the religious life. He

said to them: "If you the one or two, who know something, go into solitude, who will be here to teach the people? If you wish so, build a monastery which will be useful to all."³⁷ Thus it was very much as part of the original inspiration of the new Congregation, that they integrated pastoral commitment into their vision of monastic spirituality. As a result the pastoral orientation was consciously built into their monastic life, which would otherwise remain a mere hermitage, *vanavasa*. Thus it came about that the new Congregation was the realisation of the Indian ideal of *karma-yoga*, the ideal of engaging oneself in the service of humanity (*karma*) while remaining in the state of contemplation (*yoga*), which entails the skill (*kausala*) of becoming a contemplative in action.

Thus the monastic spirituality of Chavara and his community was a clear blending of the socio-pastoral concern and love for the people (*karma*), learning and insight (*darsan*), and prayer and penance (*tapas*). This may be described as a Christian synthesis of the three traditionally accepted Indian spiritual orientations of *karma*, *jnana*, and *bhakti*: action, knowledge and devotion. Fr Kuriakose Porukara summarises the life style of the first members in the following words:

They were praying continuously and were meditating and keeping vigilance for a long time, and were offering the Holy Mass with such devotion as to cause tears in the participants. Through their sermons on Sundays and feast days, and through their continuous counselling, they stirred this region, and removing the spiritual darkness spread the divine light.³⁸

The Carmelite Factor

The decisive factor that gave the final shape to Chavara's spirituality was the Carmelite tradition. Being providentially introduced to it, he deliberately embraced and wholeheartedly lived it. It was not the initial choice of the founding fathers of the new Congregation to associate it with the Carmelite tradition. As mentioned earlier, at the time of the founding of the first monastery in 1831 at Mannanam, neither Fr Palackal nor Fr

Porukara showed any Carmelite inclination at all, and that too in spite of the personal presence of the Carmelite Vicar Apostolic Stabilini. The latter, too, does not seem to have made any suggestion in favour of affiliating the new religious community to, or even associating it with, the Carmelite tradition. It was indeed a time when the Church of Malabar was ruled and guided by the Carmelites as the Vicar Apostolic and missionaries. If still the founders of the new community did not think of Carmelite affiliation, they must have been purposefully avoiding it!

Chavara's description in the chronicle gives us the impression that before the day of the laying of the foundation they had not ever collectively considered the question of the affiliation of the Congregation to any of the existing religious Orders. Instead, Frs Palackal and Porukara and the Vicar Apostolic Stabilini on the spot made their off-hand personal suggestions:

Then there arose a difference of opinion as to who should be the patron saint of the foundation. The Bishop suggested St John the Baptist, our *Malpan*, who was already a great devotee of St Dominic and had been conducting himself in the manner of a Dominican, wanted the name of St Dominic. Fr Porukara who was a great devotee of St Joseph proposed St Joseph's name. Finally every one agreed upon the last. So the foundation for the monastery church was named after St Joseph.³⁹

Here it may be that for the spirit of the new Congregation the Bishop was thinking of the prophetic mission of St John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus Christ, while Fr Palackal, to whose appreciation for the Dominicans we have already referred above, thought of the preachers' ideal, and Fr Porukara, motivated by his personal devotion to St Joseph, thought more in the line of prayer and penance. It also seems that gradually the two fathers agreed to adopt for the new community the Dominican ideal, including the style of white habit, as Chavara says in his testament.⁴¹ But the striking point here is that at this

stage there is no hint at all in favour of the new community's affiliation to or association with the Carmelite Order or spirituality, and one may reasonably say that it was deliberately kept out of consideration.

However, different from the popular saying, in the present case, what man disposed God proposed! After the death of Frs Palackal and Porukara in 1841 and 1846 respectively, Chavara naturally took on the leadership of the new community, and repeatedly requested the Vicar Apostolic for its canonical approval.⁴² Finally in 1855 in response to a petition signed by all the members⁴³ the Vicar Apostolic Baccinelli canonically approved the community, giving it the *Primitive Rule* of the Carmelite Order, with some changes mainly to suit the pastoral commitments. The community was given the title "Servants of Mary Immaculate of Mount Carmel," and on 8 December 1855 accepting the name Kuriakose Elias of Holy Family, Chavara in a cassock with a leather belt round the waist and a scapular around the neck made the religious profession before the Vicar Apostolic's delegate Fr Marcellini OCD. Then, being made the Prior General of the Congregation, Chavara received the profession of the other members on the same day.⁴⁴

The day of their profession being the first anniversary of the declaration of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady on 8 December 1854, it was quite contextual that they called themselves "Servants of Mary Immaculate," and this must have been also in full agreement with the great Marian devotee, Chavara. But the general feeling is that it was out of circumstantial pressures that he and the others accepted the *Primitive Rule* of the Carmelites, the inclusion of the phrase "of Mount Carmel" in the title of the Congregation, and the Carmelite symbols like the leather belt and the scapular, all indicating a link with the Carmelite tradition. It is quite possible that the acceptance of such allegiance to the Carmelite tradition was necessary, at least as a matter of practical wisdom, for the simple reason that the approving authority, the Vicar Apostolic,

belonged to the Carmelite order! At this stage, however, no legal affiliation to the Carmelite Order was insisted or even explicitly envisaged. But eventually that too took place apparently with little initiative from the new community, and to the great surprise of the later generations, when

On 1 October 1860 the Superior General of the Carmelite community met in Council at his monastery in Rome and resolved to accept and confirm into the Third Order of the Carmelites the monasteries established under the name "Servants of Mary Immaculate" and the members thereof.⁴⁵

Thus suddenly the "Servants of Mary Immaculate" changed to the "Third Order of the Carmelites Discalced" (TOCD)!!

However, for Chavara even such human accidents are within God's bigger plans and providence for man, and accordingly his spontaneous interpretation of the entire course of events, expressed in his testament, is as follows:

Dear children, due to the special grace of God we have been called as Carmelites, the most dear to the Mother of God. But we are most certainly convinced that this has been not according to the counsel of men but according to the counsel of God. The founders of this Congregation, the Rev. Frs Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara, were praying for and organising this community on the model of the Order of St Dominic. So it was that we were wearing the white habit, which was quite uncommon here. But our Blessed Mother viewing our frailty took particular care of us and loved us in this Congregation.⁴⁶

Dawning of the Carmelite Vision

Thus, reading the signs of the times and fully trusting in the providence of God, Chavara promptly responded to the spirit working through the Carmelite tradition. An initial gesture of his openness to the Carmelite world of spirituality seems to be that on the day of profession, 8 December 1855, he changed his name from Kuriakose to Kuriakose Elias, as a fitting homage to the prophet Elias, the Carmelite Patriarch. It is also significant

that a few years later, in early 1860s, he submitted himself to the guidance of Fr Leopold OCD, a much younger but saintly Carmelite missionary monk, who was appointed the Carmelite Provincial Delegate and novice master of the new Congregation. He remained Chavara's confessor and spiritual director till the latter died in 1871.

As his companions and associates like Frs Leopold and Kuriakose Porukara testify, Chavara's life and conduct as a Carmelite was flawless, in full conformity with the Carmelite rules, fully integrated to the community discipline, with childlike obedience to the superiors, full of love for silence, solitude and prayer; poor, simple and austere; perfect in the renunciation of possessions, relations and himself; single-minded in the love of God, and unquenchably thirsty for the salvation of the fellow human beings; with a deep devotion to the Eucharistic Lord, and a filial love for the Blessed Virgin Mary. Archbishop Mathew Kavukat says that Chavara was "a very holy monk... a monk of extraordinary sanctity..."⁴⁷ Fr Aloysius, who was under Chavara's spiritual direction for many years, says:

He [Chavara] was very keen on observing the spirit of obedience, love of God and devotion to the rules of the Congregation. He spent the whole time of meditation in the evenings on his knees, in tears and overpowered by emotions. He had to be reminded by others that the allotted time was over. Other priests held him in high esteem even as superman; "the Prior General appears as an angel," they used to say.⁴⁸

Chavara's views about the Carmelite ideals are clearly expressed in the instructions to the fellow religious. In the circular that he wrote jointly with the Provincial Delegate Fr Leopold, he warns the members of the Congregation against the lowering of spiritual standards, seeking of physical comforts, bodily well-being and vain pleasures, brooding over the slightest sickness, grieving and complaining even about silly matters, carelessness about the spirit of silence and solitude, indiscriminate mingling and interference with the affairs of the

people outside, negligence of self-discipline, meditation and prayer, selfishness and unconcern for the community, and the loss of the spirit of obedience. Some of the powerful statements in this joint circular are:... Persecution by men and discouragements from them cannot destroy it [the Congregation]. But one thing can cause its destruction. If we forget our holy vocation and neglect the sacred duties of our state and fail in humility, charity, religious modesty and genuine devotion, and are satisfied with valuing them only in thoughts, and not in deeds, within a short time all these houses will fall to ruin. ...These monasteries are founded by God and willed by him to be mirrors of virtues and an assembly of holy people, not an association of self-willed stewards and business administrators. ...The strength of a monastery does not consist in the thickness of its walls but in the virtue and the religious zeal of the monks who dwell in them. ...We are the progenitors of the monasteries here. We are the cornerstones ...⁴⁹

Again in his testament he wrote:... The significant mark of a true religious is total negation of his self-will and perfect obedience as though he had neither eyes nor ears of his own. One who possesses such a virtue is a true religious...Let the Vicars of our monasteries foster real charity among themselves and maintain true bond. However numerous the monasteries be, all must be like the members of one family, children born to, nursed and brought up by the same mother. Never let this love weaken, but let it grow stronger day by day. Bear this in mind as an important piece of advice.⁵⁰

In the Line of the Carmelite Mystics

Among the Carmelite mystics perhaps the one with whose ideals and teachings Chavara was most familiar, is St Theresa of Avila. It is rather surprising that nowhere in his writings or instructions is St John of the Cross explicitly mentioned. However, his mystical theology is essentially the same as that of the latter: one's complete detachment from all that is not

God on the one hand, and the consummate union of one's spirit with God, on the other. This understanding of spiritual life is unambiguously described by Chavara, not in the characteristically Johannine language of the *dark night*, *ascent of mount*, *living flame of love* and the *spiritual canticle*, but in his own simple but convincing terms and style. For example, he wrote to the members of the first community of nuns at Koonammavu: Above all, learn the art of loving Jesus Christ... When you feel inclined or attached to any other object, this loving Lord turns his gaze on you: "Look at me! Does this object give you greater enjoyment than what I give? Or does it cause you pain or affliction? If so, why should you be worried? I shall make you happy." Is this not sufficient? He is always with you with the sole desire of pleasing you. He whispers to you: "You must love me. Everything is here. Whatever you desire, I have given you everything I have. There is nothing, which I have not given you." Yes, He has given Himself to you. He is the Creator of the whole universe. He asks you: "Is this little object greater than Myself?" ⁵¹

The spousal mysticism which is the underlying theme of St John's writings is basically accepted by Chavara, too, although he uses this kind of terminology only while speaking to or about the women followers of Christ. For example, in his poem entitled *Anasthasia's Martyrdom*, we read:

Anasthasia longed to live

A life of service filled with love.

There she came to join them,

The brides of Christ, the King of kings ⁵²

Daughter dear, your blessed Groom

Calls you with a longing love;

Go, be quick!
Recall your former days of joy,
Days your King stretched out His arms
To clasp you close to Himself with love.
The Lord who climbed the cliffs and hills,
The Lord who crowned His head with nails,
The Lord who offered life and love,
It is the Lord, your holy Groom.⁵³

Christ the King her lovely Groom
Welcomed her into bliss with Himself.
Jewels of marvel, pearls of price,
All heaped on her by Lord divine.
He held her in His close embrace;
She loved Him deep with warmth sublime.⁵⁴

In the letters to the nuns in the convent at Koonammavu, too, he speaks in terms of spousal mysticism: ...When a soul delights in solitude, Jesus Christ will come to converse with her in solitude, and begin communing with her. At first you will not understand the language. Then it is that the Lord will lead you to the wine cellar and pour out some wine for you, a little at first. In course of time you will begin to understand the language. When He sees that you understand His speech, He will speak more and more distinctly and show you the magnitude of His love. Then on there will be nothing to fear...⁵⁵

May Jesus Christ bless you ! Remain with Him in your cell which is His royal chamber with joy and peace of mind....⁵⁶

Is there any one in the world more fortunate than you?...Consider how sweet is the voice of your loving Spouse. He is vigilantly watching in your hearts jealously, lest you love any one else more than Him, lovingly looking to all your needs.⁵⁷

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 human gaze. If so, how much more demanding would be your divine Spouse?...⁵⁸ I feel a holy envy at your immense good fortune! It is very true. O ! queens and spouses of our Lord and King Jesus Christ, the state of life you have embraced is indeed great and praiseworthy. The terrestrial empresses will feel jealous of you...⁵⁹

St. Teresa of Avila and Bl. Chavara

Chavara, however, was quite familiar not only with the teachings, but also the style and language of St Teresa of Avila. Even his understanding of meditation is identical with hers, and indeed he acknowledges that he has learnt it from her: Meditation is a free and friendly colloquy with God. O ! my mother, St Teresa of Avila, I have read it in your life history that during the tepidity in the beginning of your religious life, while indulging in the way of the world, you found it a foil to make friends with God and that you kept away from meditation. Of this, O! mother, I am convinced. For if meditation is a conversation with God, it presupposes a friendship with God. For when friends sit close to each other, they find enough topics to talk about without cessation. No one needs to teach either of the two friends how to go on talking. For the heart has a language of its own. The very close presence of the friends with no utterance of words is quite gratifying and heart-warming...⁶⁰

Chavara endorses also the Teresian view that the essential mark of the Carmelite charism is incessant prayer. Referring to the *Primitive Rule* of Carmelites St Teresa says, "We must pray

without ceasing... For unceasing prayer is the most important aspect of the *Rule*...." ⁶¹ In a similar manner Chavara advises: "Above all learn the art of loving Jesus Christ. Stay constantly in his presence. Walk along with Him. Converse with Him continuously."⁶² He even recognised the Teresian style of speaking in terms of the grades of prayer experience: "1. Reading, 2. Solitude, 3. Meditative prayer, and 4. Meditation. It is enough for the time being to aspire to this fourth degree of prayer. Our mother Teresa attained to the seventh degree. Some of her sisters reached up to the fifth and sixth. We must reach at least the fourth." ⁶³

Another point on which there is striking similarity between St Teresa and Chavara is the concentration on the fatherhood of God. For the latter "Our Father" was the most effective prayer, handy for the people of all stages of spiritual life: "Therefore, sisters, out of love for the Lord, get used to praying the *Our Father* with this recollection, and you will see the benefit before long. This is a manner of praying that the soul gets so quickly used to, that it does not go astray, nor do the faculties become restless as time will tell." ⁶⁴ St Teresa, however, never lost sight of the difference between God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. But, for Chavara, even God the Son is his Father! Especially in his *Colloquies* he addresses Jesus Christ as "my dear Father," and as the prodigal son did, he places himself at His pierced feet: "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..." ⁶⁵ In *Compunction of the Soul* "he [Chavara] is ever conscious of the ugliness of sin that pains the heart of the heavenly Father: 'Father, my loving Father, I regret my offences,' is the long drawn sigh that sweeps through the whole poem. Hence I am even tempted to suggest for the title [of the book], *My Father, My Loving Father*." ⁶⁶

The reference to Chavara's spirit of repentance reminds us of yet another one of his affinities with St Theresa, namely

an abiding compunction of heart. Neither of them has ever been a great sinner, but both of them were very aware of the imperfections they have had once in the past, and were continuously sorry for them. St Teresa, in the early part of her autobiography, recalls in detail the little distractions and carelessness in her younger life. Regarding Chavara, his *Compunction of the Soul*, especially its earlier part, is comparable to St Augustine's *Confessions*. For the most part *Compunction of the Soul* is a meditation on the life of Jesus and His Blessed Mother. As an integral part of it, Chavara looks into himself with deep sentiments of repentance for the childhood follies on the one hand, and on the other with sincere gratitude for the many blessings of God. And in fact the abiding compunction of heart is characteristic of Chavara's spirituality, which becomes ever deeper and deeper as he advances in age, and is consistently expressed in all his writings, including the letters, of the last years. In a letter, written probably in 1869, to the nuns, he says:

I am afraid my days are coming to an end. So I request you to pray for me to the Father, and especially during these days of 40 hour adoration. Pray for me in a special way that I may be forgiven the scandal which I have caused you by my way of life, my unwholesome manner, disorderly words and carelessness in looking after the innocent little ones entrusted to my care, and you His dear spouses, by my scandalous way of life, and also for the defects in administration I have committed. Pray that I may be forgiven all these short-comings and that I may spend the rest of my life accomplishing always His will in all things, and finally die a happy death.⁶⁷ Again, concluding his testament, written in 1870, to the members of his Congregation, he says: ...to all the members of the monasteries I beg pardon. I beg of them before God to pardon me all my short-comings and lapses in the performance of my duties. Again, I pray my brother religious, pray for me. I took my vows as the first member, and I was made the first Prior. But I have

not fulfilled to satisfaction my obligation in observing the *Constitutions* and enforcing the same. I did not give you good example. You must forgive me the scandal I have given you and pray for me that I may make reparation for them, and that you may become more fervent.⁶⁸ This comparative analysis of the spiritual visions of St Teresa and Chavara could be carried on further with reference to the devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, the meditations on the passion of Christ, the devotion to St Joseph, and the love for the Church. However, for fear of exceeding the space-limit let us now conclude the present study by briefly mentioning the points specific to what we may call Chavara spirituality.

Chavara Spirituality

The end-result of the life experiences of Chavara and the various influences on him, was the development of his personal spirituality with its own characteristics. Let us call it the Chavara spirituality. A comprehensive picture of it we get in his works: *Anasthasia's Martyrdom* (1862), *Colloquies* (1866-1868), *Compunction of the Soul* (1870-71), *Dirge*, and many letters. All of them, with the exception of a few of the letters, were written during the last decade (1861-71) of the author's life. Obviously after the departure of the schismatic Bishop Rochos in March 1862, Chavara was immediately concerned about repairing the harm done by the former to the Church of Malabar at large. Along with that he also turned to matters related to the progress and spiritual well-being of his own religious community. In 1864 he was transferred to Koonammavu where he was also actively involved in the founding and bringing up of the Congregation for women. Along with these activities he also took care to give literary expression to his own spiritual experiences, reflections and insights in the form of the works mentioned above. A careful study of them reveals the nature of what we have called the Chavara spirituality. Even during the final stage of his life our description of him as a contemplative in action (*karma-yogi*) remains valid, and, indeed, it becomes

finally substantiated and definitively established. The point is that on the one hand he never ceased to be an active person, while, on the other, he becomes more and more contemplative even as he becomes more and more active! Here we see his spirituality reaching maturity and finding expression in selfless acts of charity (*nishkama-karma*). On the one hand he becomes more and more aware of the approaching end of life, which made him more and more God oriented, and on the other, as it is clear from the letters, his love for others overflows more and more tenderly and touchingly. Finally, three months before death, he lost his eyesight, as if he closed his bodily eyes in order to see God and the creatures alike through the contemplative eyes! On the last days of his life he would not allow himself to be drawn into conversation on worldly things, and even put up a notice in the room, forbidding the visitors from worldly conversations !!

One of the distinctive marks of Chavara's spirituality is the intense desire to see God, the longing for the *darsan* (vision) of God. Included in *Compunction of the Soul* is a poetry of 168 lines, beautifully describing the incidents of the life of Christ. The beauty of it is that its every other line ends with the words: "I long to see [Jesus]." For example:

The Lord of mercy, the Son of God,

His glorious splendour, I long to see.

How he stayed for nine months

In the womb of His mother I long to see;

Born in her womb, to Bethlehem he came

To obey mighty Caesar, I long to see.

How Jesus, Anna's grand son,
Was hunger-smitten, I long to see;
And with the Pharisees discussed law
In his twelfth year, I long to see.

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.⁶⁹

Another feature of the Chavara spirituality is the familial picture so that in it one feels being in the family of God. Already from the childhood the picture of the Holy Family had impressed on him. And on the day of his religious profession to his new name he added the phrase "of the Holy Family," so that his full name is Kuriakose Elias of the Holy Family. In his advice to the members of the Congregation gathered round his death-bed, he said: My parents always kept me mindful of the Holy Family, which was ever my protection and in imagination. Mercifully it so protected me that I did not ever lose the baptismal grace. I dedicate you all and this humble Congregation to the same Holy Family. Rely on it. Let the Holy Family reign over your hearts.⁷⁰ It is remarkable that Chavara considered the family as the basic and the most decisive factor of the Church and the society. That is why in his letter to his parishioners at Kainakary, which has come to be known as "Testament of a Loving Father," he focuses the attention exclusively on the rules and principles of an ideal Christian family.

For Chavara the supreme rule of the Christian family is, beyond doubt, mutual love, and the consequent unity of mind and heart. In the introduction to the letter "Testament of a Loving

Father" he writes that the family is a *koinonia* formed by blood-relationship and love, where there is love and respect for the parents, and peace between God and man. In this our world, full of sorrows, it is to be an abode of sweet consolation, peace, and order. To live in a family without consideration for God and prayer is miserable. The author refers to the commandment of the Lord "that you love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 15:12), confirming it again with another word of the Lord that a house divided against itself perishes (Mt 12:25). Mutual pardon brings peace on earth and eternal blessing in the world to come. The norm of justice in Christian family has to be greater than that of others. Chavara asks very pertinently whether we should add to the sufferings we have already inherited from our great father Adam. In the same strain he writes: 'Tale-bearing is a dangerous business. Taking family disputes to the law courts has never helped anybody.'⁷¹

The familial picture of the Chavara spirituality has a much wider dimension in which God is understood as the Father of the family of mankind. As we have already mentioned, to call God "my dear Father" was for Chavara the most favourite thing. When he uses the expression 'my Father' to address the Divinity, it does not necessarily mean that he is calling upon God the Father, the first person of the Holy Trinity. Even the second person, Jesus Christ, is addressed as 'my Father' as is abundantly clear from his *Colloquies*. This is a point of which we already made a mention. Let us quote one more passage to illustrate how Chavara addresses Jesus Christ as 'my Father':

Here I come before You, oh my heavenly Father... Seated on His throne of mercy in the chapel... O merciful Father!... looking at Your holy head I feel frightened to think how it came to be pierced with thorns... I am ashamed of myself by reason of the part I played in disfiguring Your face... Alas! I myself disfigured my Father's face, the beauty of which David the prophet sang plentifully... Look at His mangled body and His head crowned with a crown of thorns !...⁷²

The Paternal Figure

Chavara's love for the paternal figure is displayed, when in the context of the Holy Family he addresses its head St Joseph as 'my father.' His devotion to St Joseph, which must have been one of the Theresian influences on him, especially as the patron of the dying, was unusual. He prays: O St Joseph! my dear father, your paternity fostered young Jesus... St Joseph, dear father, you abided by the honour and sanctity of Holy Mother... Oh most kind father, I know the dangers involved in the feeling of self-assurance... O! my gracious father... I am given to shivers to think of judgement...⁷³

In the spiritual family of Chavara, the mother's place was taken first of all by Blessed Virgin Mary, to whom his earthly mother had dedicated him, praying: "I offer this fruit of my impure womb at your feet; accept him and protect him as your servant."⁷⁴ The priest then had said to her: "Bring up this child as a servant of this Mother; in fact he is not your son but hers!"⁷⁵ True to this dedication to the Mother of God, Chavara developed tender devotion to her about which Fr Leopold says: "His devotion to Blessed Virgin Mother was characterised by a genuine filial love. He spoke eloquently of her glories to others and tried to inculcate upon them her devotion. Very often when the thought of death came into his mind, he would recall the kindness and mercy of Blessed Virgin, whom he used to call his "Mother" to overcome the terrible fears and temptations associated with that fateful moment."⁷⁶

As his mother died, Chavara prayed to Blessed Virgin Mary: "Therefore, O ! my Lady, my Mother, now who is there to favour me except you? Certainly I have been your servant... It is my great blessing that you are my Mother and I am your servant."⁷⁷

Among the other mother figures in Chavara's spirituality are St Theresa of Avila, the Holy Catholic Church, and his own religious Congregation. Calling upon St Theresa, who was also his guide for prayer, he says:

O! mother, affectionate and generous, you being a well accomplished mistress in the mysteries of meditation, I again seek your loving intercession in obtaining for me from Jesus the great gift of love... Now that you are in union with Jesus, the Bridegroom in heavenly bed-chamber, your favours with him must be greater now than when you were on earth,... O! mother dear, teach me to pray! ... I must come to my Saviour Jesus Christ, your beloved Bridegroom, to beg pardon for my sins. Mother dear, in your mercy do go before me into the bedchamber of your beloved heavenly Spouse... ⁷⁸

His devotion to the Holy Catholic Church and to her visible head the Holy Father, too, was unparalleled, to which Fr Leopold testifies as follows : Among his virtues the most outstanding was his ardent faith and devotion to the Holy Catholic Church and to the Holy Father. 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 of the trials and persecution of the Church and eagerly longed to see the days of her triumph. Whenever he happened to hear the news of the Pope, he was always moved to tears, either of sorrow or of joy. It was because of this extraordinary faith that he showed great veneration, love and obedience towards the Papal Delegate who was the representative of the Holy Father, and towards the missionaries who were the messengers of the Holy Church. ⁷⁹

His love for the religious Congregation was expressed by his commitment to her ideals and discipline, and to his own duties as a member and Superior of the community : From the very beginning till the very end Fr Chavara subjected himself to the Order with the interest and enthusiasm of a novice. He regarded the Order in such an esteem as though it was his own mother. It was to him the paradise on earth, and he encouraged his disciples to hold it in similar high esteem. He would never willingly absolve any one including himself of the responsibility of conforming to the Order. Travel, old age, weakness and even infirmity hardly succeeded in making him relax much. He would

relax when absolutely necessary, but only after taking permission from the spiritual director. He was ever anxious to have his meals with the community, frugal and austere as they were. Even while sick and laid up, he tried to manage with just the common meals.⁸⁰

Deeprooted Compunction of Heart

In his spiritual family Chavara posed as a prodigal son, come back home, full of repentance and ready to do penance for the mistakes. He prays: Here I come to you, O! my heavenly Father, with a heart full of repentance and firm purpose of amendment to feel your peace in my heart ... O! 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. Now I am a servant to a bad master, feeding his swine. I have grown so famished that I would like to feed on the pods the swine feed on. I have spoilt all the fine clothes my Father gave me to put on , and am now dressed in rags. Still I must be going now in this attire. For further delay is suicidal. So here I am on my feet to make a move to my Father's house with my country cap and walking stick.

O my soul ! see the numerous hired servants in your Father's place, living to their hearts' content. Seeing them why should you be troubled in heart? Your Father is so bounteous as to forgive and forget every ingratitude of yours. You are sure to be reinstated to your former filial status and privileges... O my Father, I have sinned against heaven and before You. I am no longer worthy to be called Your son... Count me as one of Your servants... Therefore, my Father, source of all graces, forgive me all my trespasses due to my selfishness and ingratitude.⁸¹

The rest of the humanity is then viewed as consisting of his own sisters and brothers, which explains his concern for others, especially the weaker and less fortunate members of the human family. At the same time, to some members of this family he feels a deeper intimacy for the simple reason that they, too,

had experiences similar to his. For example, considering himself a repentant prodigal son, he feels a close affinity with the great penitents like Mary Magdalene and Mary Cortona, "who have always been helpful to me in evoking repentance for my sins."

⁸² He also had strong paternal feelings towards those whom he considered and loved as his spiritual children. They include, for instance, the members of his own Congregation, the sisters of the convent he co-founded, and his parishioners. In his letters he addresses all of them as "my dear children!" His testament to the members of the Congregation, written in August 1870, as he was preparing for death, reads:

Dear children, by the special grace of God we are called to be members of the Congregation... My dear children, we, you and I, have not yet become the genuine religious ...⁸³ To the sisters he writes: "Ah! my dear children, these days you must meditate on the love of Jesus Christ..."⁸⁴ Again, "my dear children, is there anyone in the world more fortunate than you?..."⁸⁵ Still again, "my dear little children, see with what care and diligence our Lord looks after you!"⁸⁶ Regarding his love for the sisters of the convent at Konammavu, Fr Kuriakose Porukara writes: Just as Jacob loved his youngest son Benjamin more than others, so he [Chavara] loved them [the sisters] more than others, and looked after them so tenderly as a hen takes care of the chicks.⁸⁷

To his parishioners at Kainakary he wrote a long letter dated February 1868, which was later given the title, "Testament of a Loving Father." In it he wrote: "Accept this as a piece of advice coming from one of your ancestors, keep it sacred, practice it faithfully, and make others, too, practice the same."

⁸⁸ In another letter dated December 1869 he wrote: "Beloved children, in the order of flesh I am the son of Kuriakose Chavara of the parish of Chennamkary... Since I was born in your family, I have a special obligation to do some good to you in justice... So I entrust this [letter] to you, my children of the parish of Kainakary chapel, to be preserved as a treasure."⁸⁹

Concern for his own people

Chavara's family feelings were extended in a very special way to the dying and those in the state of purgatory. A sure proof of this is his famous letter to the parishioners of Kainakary, dated December 1869, in which he advises them to start a confraternity for happy death as a first step for the establishment of a house of charity in which the poor and the destitute could be taken care of in their material and spiritual needs. In this letter he describes in detail his understanding of Christian death, the need to prepare for a happy death, how to help others in their old age, sickness and death-bed, and advises to pray for the departed souls as well as to be devoted to them.⁹⁰ It may be added that prayer for and prayer to those in purgatory was very much part of Chavara's spirituality. Along with that he himself lived continuously keeping in mind his own death, and this was particularly so during the last few years of his life. In *Colloquies* death is a theme to which he makes frequent references. The awareness of approaching death was expressed from time to time in his letters, too. In the joint circular dated July 1869 that he wrote with Father Leopold, he wrote:

Beloved brethren and dear ones, you are aware of the fact that we who write this letter are both advanced in age and are fast failing in health, and are preparing to present ourselves before the just throne of God...if this letter happens to be the last one of the kind from us, we pray, accept it as our paternal death-bed declaration.⁹¹

Among the authors of this letter, Fr Leopold was obviously a young man and healthy, and, therefore, the phrases like "advanced in age," "failing in health," and "death-bed" refer to Chavara's own awareness of death. In another letter to the nuns, written almost the same time, too, he makes a reference to the approaching death: "I am afraid, my days are coming to an end."⁹²

The last, but not the least in anyway, factor of the constituents of the Chavara spirituality is the devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. He is rightly called an apostle of the Holy Eucharist. The liturgical reforms, which he painstakingly effected, included the introduction of the liturgy of the Holy Saturday, the Order of the Holy Mass, the 40 hour adoration, and the renewal of the priests especially through the seminaries attached to the monasteries. Fr Valerian writes:

This invaluable devotion [to the Blessed Sacrament] began to make its appearance from his [Chavara's] childhood itself. He was vigilant to go to communion as much as it was allowed... During the seminary life this devotion grows to such an extent as to cause wonder in his fellow seminarists. There he was an apostle of this devotion.⁹³

Fr Leopold's testimony is unambiguous:

The admirable dignity, devotion and recollection with which he celebrated the Sacred Liturgy, made a great impression upon those who participated in it. Besides the usual visits to the Blessed Sacrament enjoined by the *Rule*, he used to spend long hours on his knees, immersed in prayer before the tabernacle.⁹⁴

In fact the Holy Eucharist was the centre of his spirituality and prayer. To use his own terminology, he preferred to remain locked up in the tabernacle with Jesus. 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."⁹⁵ Let us conclude this study in the words of Fr Marcellin OCD, who received Chavara's religious profession of vows in 1855. In the year after the latter's death in 1871, he published of *A History of the Church in Kerala* in which he writes:

When the religious house at Mannanam was canonically erected it was Fr Kuriakose Elias who was found worthy to be appointed Prior of the monastery. Even if he was the only flower

that blossomed at Mannanam, yet the labours of Fr Thomas Palackal and Fr Thomas Porukara must be considered to have been amply fruitful...⁹⁶

Notes:

1. Kuriakose Porukara, *Short Biography of Our Most Reverend Father Prior of Monasteries...*, Mannanam 1871, p.3.
2. *Karmasu kausalam yogah. (Bhagavat-gita) (2:50).*
3. Leopold B., *A Short Biography of the Venerable Person....*(Malayalam), Koonammavu 1871, p vi.
4. Quoted by Joseph Kanjiramattathil, *The Pastoral Vision of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bangalore 1986, p. 102.
5. Valerian, *Vannya Divya Sree Chavara Kuriakose Elis Achan* (Malayalam) Mannanam, 1939, p. 260.
6. *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara*, Vol. 1, Mannanam 1990, pp. 52 - 53.
7. *Patent letter*, Dated 16 November 1844.
8. See the appointment letter translated and quoted by Joseph Kanjiramattathil, op. cit., pp. 95 - 96.
9. Z.M. Moozhoor, "The Greatness of Chavara's Personality" in *Herald of the East*, Vol. IV nos. 1 - 2, p.12.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*
12. Translated and quoted by Joseph Kanjiramattathil, op. cit., p. 97.
13. *Taila-dharavad-avicchinna-smrti-santana-rupam dhyanam.*
14. Kuriakose Porukara, op.cit., p. 3.
15. *Complete Worker of Blessed Chavara*, Vol. II, Mannanam 1989, pp. 2-3.
16. *Ibid*, p. 3.
17. *Ibid*, p.5.

18. Ibid, p.59.
19. Kuriakose Porukara, op.cit., p. 33.
20. Leopold, op.cit., p. 24.
21. Kuriakose Porukara, op. cit., p. 32.
22. Joseph Kanjiramattathil, op.cit., p. 16.
23. Kuriakose Porukara, op. cit., p.33.
24. *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara*, op.cit., Vol. I, p. 21, and Vol. II, p.70.
25. Br Mathai Kochuparampil, *The Unknown Karma-yogi* (Malayalam).
26. *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara*, Vol. I op.cit., p.15.
27. *Ibid*, p.18.
28. *Ibid* , p.22.
29. *Ibid*, pp. 8 – 32.
30. *Ibid*, pp. 24-27.
31. *Ibid*, p. 27.
32. *Ibid*, p. 28.
33. *Tapasu-bhavan* and *darsana-veedu* are the two terms used by Chavara in his *Chronicles*, referring to the beginning of the Congregation: "Frs Palackal and Porukara, seeing that, in the absence of a *tapasu-bhavan* even for the priests, much good is left undone, yearned to build a *darsana-veedu* at least for the priests. *Ibid*, p.1.
34. "As I [Chavara] was not so shrewd both views seemed to be equally acceptable." *Ibid*, p.28.
35. *Ibid*, p.29
36. *Ibid*.
37. Jacob Kaniyanthara, *History of the Foundation of Mannanam Monastery* (Malayalam), 1846, p.6.
38. Kuriakose Porukara, op.cit., p.35.
39. *Complete Works Blessed Chavara*, Vol. I, op.cit., p.21.

40. A Small statue of Dominic found in Fr Palackal's room indicates his personal devotion to this saint. (See J Kanjiramattam) op.cit., p.36.)
41. See the quotation below, referred to by footnote no. 46.
42. Joseph Kanjiramattathil, op.cit., p. 35.
43. *Ibid*, p. 35.
44. *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara, Vol. I*, op. cit., p. 67-68.
45. *Ibid* pp. 143-144.
46. *Ibid*, Vol. IV, op.cit., p. 70.
47. Chacko K.C., *Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Mannanam 1959, Foreward.
48. Fr Valerian CMI, *The Servant of God*, Mannanam 1953, p.38.
49. *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara, Vol IV*, op.cit., pp. 61-65.
50. *Ibid*, pp. 70-71.
51. *Ibid*, p.82.
52. *Ibid*, Vol. II, op.cit, p.166.
53. *Ibid*, p.167.
54. *Ibid*, p.172.
55. *Ibid*, Vol. IV, op.cit., p.85.
56. *Ibid*, p.78.
57. *Ibid*, p.83.
58. *Ibid*, p.77.
59. *Ibid*.
60. *Ibid*, Vol. III op.cit., p. 2.
61. St. Theresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection*, Chapter 4, no. 2.
62. *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara, Vol. IV*, op.cit., p. 82.
63. *Ibid*, p.85.
64. St. Theresa of Avila, op.cit., Chapter 29, no. 6.



65. *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara*, Vol. II, op.cit., p.5.
66. Sr Mary Leo CMC, *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara*, Vol. II, op.cit., xii.
67. *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara*, Vol. IV, op.cit., p.77.
68. *Ibid*, op.cit., p.74.
69. *Ibid*, Vol. II, op.cit., p.17-19
70. Fr Valerian, op.cit., p.54.
71. Fr George Kaniarakath CMI, "Chavara's Vision of a Christian Family," in *Herald of the East*, Vol. 1 no. 1, Ernakulam 1991, pp. 14-15.
72. *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara*, Vol. III, op.cit., pp. 9 ff.
73. *Ibid*, pp. 13 ff.
74. *Atmanuthapam*, translated and quoted by Joseph Kanjiramattathil op.cit., p.9.
75. *Ibid* p.2.
76. Leopold B., op.cit., p. ix, translated and quoted by Joseph Kanjiramattathil, op.cit., p.15.
77. *Atmanuthapam*, translated and quoted by Joseph Kanjiramattathil op.cit., p.15.
78. *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara*, Vol. IV, op.cit., pp. 2-3.
79. Leopold B., op.cit., p. vii, translated and quoted by Joseph Kanjiramattathil CMI, op.cit., p.103.
80. Fr Valerian, op.cit, p-51.
81. *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara*, Vol. III, op.cit., pp. 3-5.
82. *Ibid*, Vol. II, op.cit., p-3.
83. *Ibid*, Vol. IV, op.cit., p 70.
84. *Ibid*, p. 82.
85. *Ibid*, p. 83.
86. *Ibid*, p.86.

87. Kuriakose Porukara, op.cit., p.35.
88. *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara*, Vol. IV, op.cit., p. 103.
89. *Ibid*, p. 116.
90. The text of this letter is published in *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara* Vol. IV, op.cit., pp. 118-127.
91. *Ibid*, p.61.
92. *Ibid*, p. 77.
93. Translated from Malayalam and quoted by Joseph Kanjiramattathil, op. cit., p.14.
94. *Ibid*.
95. *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara*, Vol. IV, op.cit., p.85.
96. Translated and quoted in *The Apostle of the Eucharist in Kerala*, p.8.

BLESSED CHAVARA A TRUE PASTOR IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF JESUS

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Introduction

Please let me begin with a personal experience. My five-year stay with the Salesians in the Pontifical Salesian University gave me a first hand experience of Salesian life. I could not but wonder at the depth and genuineness of their love and esteem for their founder Don Bosco. I was really moved at the frequency with which the name of Don Bosco came to their lips. Every Salesian would at least once a day mention the name of Don Bosco either in the homily, or in their daily conversations. Practically no homily ended without quoting something from Don Bosco. It is to be noted that the Salesians have made a science of Don Bosco's only charism, ministry to the youth, which of course he practised most excellently, and are teaching it in all their seminaries and higher education centres

I have, again, lived experience with the Jesuits. They mention and quote Ignatius of Loyola left and right and have, again, as in the case of the Salesians, a special Ignatian Method in spirituality.

I really felt ashamed thinking of me and the status in which we have landed our poor but great founder. How often do we mention the name of our founder? How many institutions do we have after his name? How many of us have, in fact, read all his works? Was he less than Don Bosco or Ignatius? I am not here for any comparison. History shows that Chavara was no simple person, though he was born simple and poor. He was a great leader, administrator, pioneer of various institutions,

visionary, polyglot, eloquent speaker, effective retreat preacher, founder of religious congregations, author, poet, chronicler, historian, educationist, social reformer, untiring fighter for church unity, organizer of mass movements, founder of print media and pioneer of works of mercy and social service, and above all, a true man of God, a mystic, and a saint. Which other founder shares all these traits? I really feel we must show a little more respect to this person who was born simple, but rose to national greatness and universal honours of the altar due to the depth of his faith in God and the intensity of his love of the Church and the untiring commitment to the humanization and welfare of people.

This paper is conceived in two parts. Part I deals with how Chavara fulfilled the role of a true pastor in the footsteps of Jesus, and the Part II touches upon the challenges that Chavara poses for us today.

Part I: Chvara: the good shepherd of the 19th century Malabar Church

The concept of Pastor was the most intelligible figure for a caring leadership in the Semitic world given its nomadic, rural and agrarian culture. The Psalmist very often feels confident that Yahweh will lead him to green pastures. Pastor, Pasture and sheep are the three central concepts on which their understanding of a caring God was built up.

Jesus took up this idea from the Old Testament and called himself the true pastor. His mission on earth was to humanize the fallen humanity and restore the estranged divine human relationship. Humanization involves the awareness of man's/ woman's participation in the divinity of God as well liberation from bondages in life. Jesus adopted a three-pronged praxis for this process: teaching, service and sanctification.

His method involved a continuity and discontinuity with the Old Testament tradition. Like a true pastor who lives for the sheep, he moved from place to place, mixing preferentially with poor people, healing and curing the sick, answering to their

questions, entering in intellectual debates with the learned, teaching in Synagogues and fighting the powers that be. But he was also different from his great forerunners of the Old Testament. He spoke of a god of love and mercy and not of justice and punishment. He emphasized worship in truth and spirit more than in rituals and ceremonies. He violated many traditions and customs and even the Law of Sabbath when they went against the process of humanization and divinization of man.

Coming to the life of Blessed Chavara we see that he too was a pastor with a difference. He effected a thorough break with the beaten track in pastoral ministry. His multi-faceted or polyhedral personality with all the different traits mentioned above formed his idea of pastoral work as a holistic work for the total humanization or welfare of the person. His idea of pastoral work was really a breaking away from its traditional narrow understanding of catering only to the soul. In short we can say that he effected a paradigm shift in the understanding of pastoral ministry.

Blessed Chavara perceived that a renewal was necessary in the spiritual, ecclesial, cultural, intellectual and social life of the people of the time, which was a troubled period in the ecclesial history of Kerala, characterized by rivalry between various factions and groups within the church, such as the Padroado, the Propaganda and various other national groupings, offspring of the sad developments after the Coonan Cross Oath of 1653. He began addressing them one by one. Many of his steps were original and innovative as he was a man of method and vision.

1. Spiritual Renewal

The Kerala society of the 19th century, the period of Chavara's life and actions, was a colonial and caste ridden one. The Church life was influenced and confused by the presence of European, Chaldean, Anglican and Antiochean traditions. There was no effective leadership to animate people in spiritual

life, for the missionaries, both European and Persian, were mostly led by financial motivations. Chavara understood that the need of the time was to have leaders who would animate the people, good shepherds who knew and loved their sheep and not hired servants. Therefore Chavara embarked upon a very novel and unique enterprise: to found two religious congregations, one for men and one for women, which would, he thought, eventually take up the duty of providing effective leadership to the people through their examples, preaching and actions. In this way Chavara laid the foundation of a permanent and strong framework within which interested and divinely gifted men and women could offer concerted efforts for the good of the Church and the society. These two congregations, Carmelites of Mary Immaculate and the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel, the first and largest indigenous religious congregations for men and women, respectively, in Asia, were intended as two powerful resources for the spiritual, intellectual, cultural and social progress of the people of India.

He foresaw that the future of the church depended on shepherds who were disciplined and trained adequately at the intellectual, spiritual and cultural levels. He showed courage and innovation to depart from the traditional method of priestly training, which was the malpanate. He instituted two public seminaries at Mannanam and Puthenpally. These were the first public seminaries in the Syro-Malabar Church.

He used another innovative method for a spiritual awakening in the Kerala Christian society. It was in the lines of the missions, which were common in the European Church. Mission in the West meant a short period of time for a spiritual awakening in which a group of priests would preach spiritual retreats for a few consecutive days staying at a particular place. Chavara initiated this kind of public spiritual retreat preaching in the Malabar church. It is said that there was no church in Malabar where Chavara had not preached a retreat. Retreat preaching became such a hallmark of his early followers that

the priests in the congregation that he founded were initially called "*dhyana gurukkal*". The early members of the congregation were practically always on the move giving retreats to people in different churches and schools. Retreats were very fruitful occasions, which provided them time to meet people and families and solve disputes, quarrels and feuds. Today we find that retreat preaching has become a very essential and common practice in the Indian church. It has become the most effective tool in parish and church renewal. If mega spiritual gatherings that assemble thousands of people at a single place and which bring untold benefits to individuals, families, and parishes have become a regular feature in the Kerala church, we must remember that it was due to the futuristic vision of Blessed Chavara who initiated the practice in the Malabar church.

Sunday sermon was another tool that Chavara's versatile brain initiated and popularized in the Kerala Church. The benefit of this practice can never be assessed. In this way we can say that he is the initiator of the pulpit in the Kerala Church. It is a great Christian legacy and heritage. Though the practice of giving sermons on Sundays were made mandatory by the Council of Trent, the missionaries never thought of implementing them in the Indian church.

2. Liturgical Renewal

The liturgy is the source and summit of Christian life and the fountain from which all graces follow, says Second Vatican Ecumenical council. Chavara must be remembered for having applied logic, scientific methodology, and practical wisdom for the modernization of many of the liturgical practices. He applied his mind on methods to make liturgy experiential to people. Besides the Sunday sermons, which he initiated, there were other contributions from him, such as, modernization of canonical offices, introduction of a few devotional practices.

2.1. Modernization of Canonical offices

Chavara's courage and modernist tendency may be measured by the way he updated the practice of canonical office in the Syrian church. In his time, the canonical office was neglected by many priests due to its sheer length. On ferial days, especially in the season of Lent, the night prayer (leliya) contained about 20-25 psalms (3 hulale). On Sundays about 50 psalms (7 hulale) were to be recited. Night prayer on feast days contained about 75 psalms (10 hulale). All the 150 psalms (21 Hulale) were to be recited on the day of Christmas. No wonder if the poor priests neglected the night prayers! The practice of canonical prayer was not at all scientific and standing up to human reason. Here we find the acumen of his intelligence. He did not believe in merely maintaining a tradition that posed many practical difficulties. Every tradition has to be evaluated at the two poles of faith and reason and must be made relevant to the times. With courage and foresight he ventured into a field which today's hierarchy would not have permitted, measuring from its judgments on matters of liturgical renewal.

He made a thorough renewal of the canonical offices, after consulting all the malpans, who too wanted it to be abridged and organized better. He reduced the whole matter to two volumes, one for ferial days and other for Sundays and feast days, without in any way mutilating its structure, but reduced the sheer length and made it handy for a priest of the modern times.

Besides, Chavara composed an office for the dead, a long one and a shorter version. He also composed funeral rites, different for children, adults and priests. It was he who originated the devotion of the way of the cross in the Kerala Church (in 1840).

2.2. Eucharistic devotion

No Christian of the Malabar church can ever forget the ringing of the church bells, the thick clouds of aromatic incense

lurking about inside the church, and the most solemn procession of the Eucharist held under great sense of devotion during the days of the 40 hours adoration, which was a feature in most of our churches till about 40 years ago. No church historian can underestimate the untold benefits people drew from such a practice. During the days of the 40 hours adoration, the ashrams were full with priests who came to pray and hear confessions of the multitudes of people who thronged the churches coming as they were even from far off villages. It was Chavara's great insight to make use of a tradition of the western church for the spiritual benefit of ours. Such a kind of mutual beneficence is found in the western church as well. There are cases in which liturgical feasts originated in the Eastern Church have been incorporated later by the Western Church into its liturgical year.

3. Chavara and Intellectual Renaissance of Kerala

Chavara realized that an intellectually poor community could not grow. Hence he focused his attention on erecting educational institutions attached to all the parishes, which by any calculation was a very revolutionary step. He wanted educational institutions to spring all over the country, for only through education any people can progress. In 1865, while Chavara was the Vicar General, the Vicar Apostolic Baccinelli sent a pastoral letter instructing all parishes to start schools under penalty of interdict. It is widely believed by scholars and historians that this pastoral letter was promulgated at the behest of Chavara. Chavara had a plan to start a college under the management of the Malabar church which did not realize due to unfavourable situations.

Chavara was not only a founder of educational institutions, he was an educationist as well. He had an original idea of Education, one of blending the ancient with the modern. He foresaw that great wisdom was hidden in the ancient Indian religious systems and he wanted to tap it and make it popular. With this motto in mind he established a Sanskrit school at Mannanam in 1846 much before Max Muller began his

monumental work of on Sacred Scriptures of the East (translation of Eastern religious Scriptures) which ushered in the great western interest in the Indian religions. He also asked all the parishes to send a student every year to this school at its own expense. A catholic priest starting a Sanskrit school was really a revolutionary step in those times. It can be pointed out as Chavara's attempts at Dialogue with other religions and inculturation.

Historians are of the opinion that it is due to Chavara's courageous action that the Catholics who were so low in the educational level about a hundred years ago have reached the present envious position. It is doubtful whether there was any other community leader in Kerala who had so deeply understood the fundamental importance of schools

4. Chavara: Man of the Media

Chavara's mind was quick to avail himself of the best methods available for pastoral work. Foreseeing the spiritual, intellectual and cultural advantages and the progress which the press and publication would bring to the community, Chavara established a printing press at Mannanam, the first printing press of the Catholics in Kerala. We can confidently say that blessed Chavara is the man behind the two most effective means of communication in the Indian Church of his times: the pulpit and the press.

The first Malayalam prayer book *Gnana Peeyoosham* was printed from the simple wooden press that Chavara established at Mannanam. The first Malayalam daily *Nazrani Deepika* and the first monthly *Karmela kusumam*, too, were printed from the same press. The numerous books that have been published from this press and the later ones belonging to the congregation have catered to the spiritual, intellectual and cultural needs of the people for two centuries. Some authors say that Chavara's most important contribution to the Kerala church was the establishment of the printing press.

We must note that it is after many decades of his death that the church has begun to assert the usefulness of modern communication media. The present Pope has called the Communication media, the Modern Areopagus.

5. Chavara: the Social Reformer

Blessed Chavara is a great forerunner of social reforms in Kerala. The Kerala society of his time was dominated by intense caste considerations and practice of untouchability. Women of low castes and outcastes were forbidden to cover their breast. People of low caste origin had no access to education. They were not permitted to enter temples or read scriptures. It was such wild and inhuman social practices sanctioned by the popular Hindu religion that compelled Swami Vivekananda to call Kerala a "mad house".

At such a time Chavara began his work on social reform. He received Hindu low caste people into Christian faith where everybody had, at least theoretically, equal social and spiritual rights. He established two schools, at Mannanam and Arpookara, to educate low caste people, especially the Christian converts from such castes. The uplift of the poor, the destitute, and the low castes were his dear causes. With this aim in mind he started an Asylum for the destitute of all castes (upavisala) at Kainakary, at attempt unheard of in Malabar. This upavisala was the forerunner of all Dharmasalas (houses of charity) found throughout the length and breadth of Kerala. He encouraged the parents to send girl children to school at a time when women were not given education.. Chavara initiated in Kerala, for the first time, the practice of supplying midday meal to poor school children so as to sustain them in schools. He appealed to the rich landlords to pay adequate wages to labourers and not to delay it at a time when dalits were forced to work at low or no wages. Chavara preached that the unpaid wages of the poor man would wail before God. The foundation of a religious congregation for women was a wise and prophetic step to raise the status of women in the society. To highlight the role of laity,

he started the first ever association for the laity in the Kerala Church in 1869. Through such activities, Chavara enkindled in all Keralites, especially the Catholics a sense of social justice and equality.

We must remember that it was only in the middle of the 19th century that the Indian church entered the field of social service. Till then the missionaries were engaged in the line of spiritual contemplative stream of evangelization. Only when they came to the conclusion that mere preaching will not effect conversion among Indians they entered the field of social service. But in Chavara we find a man who decades before sensed the need of work for social justice and social reform. Secular historians like A. Shreedhara Menon certify that it was, in fact, from Chavara that people like, Sri Narayana Guru, the acclaimed social reformer of Kerala derived inspiration. Shreedhara Menon, in one of his latest articles, laments that the secular historians of Kerala including himself, who publicized the work of reformers like Sri Narayana Guru and Ayyankali failed in recognizing the original and unparalleled role of Chavara in ushering in social reforms in the Kerala society.

PART II

The Challenges posed by Chavara

It is not exactly what Chavara did that we must pay our attention to, but the principles that animated and guided him in executing his pastoral mission. We have to delineate these principles and apply them to our context. A few principles that stand out from his style are the following:

1. His sensibility to perceive the needs of the time
2. His forward looking mind that even anticipates the needs of the future
3. His courage to adapt church tradition to suit his divine mission, not in any way mutilating the original purpose of the tradition.

4. His deep trust in the Lord as the permanent source of his energy

We find that the needs of the time of Chavara, namely, the spiritual renewal, education, social equality and empowerment of Dalits and women etc, still continue to be the needs of today. But their dimensions have changed due to the progress the church and the society have made in the course of time in some of these sectors. At the same time, we are faced with a set of new problem situations that were not the concern of the 19th century India. Hence we have to redefine the nature of our approach to these situations.

6. Spiritual Renewal

Training in sacramental and other devotional practices were the major spiritual concerns of the 19th century. Chavara addressed these situations effectively through his homilies and retreat preaching. But today it is not enough to form a few more retreat preachers group and multiply the already existing groups of different congregation in the fray.

Today the two dozen dioceses and the hundreds of parishes in the Malabar Church are rendering effective service to people in sacramental and devotional practices as well as in catechesis. There are hundreds of retreat groups who preach the word of God to the people at large. We can say that liturgical services and the bible proclamation are being carried out very effectively by the church.

Today's major concerns, however, are something else. They are the rising religious fundamentalism and the decreasing sense of religious harmony among people including Christians. Some of the Christian retreat preachings, too, seem to be devoid of intellectual contents and cater only to the emotionality of people who desperately want healing in body and mind. Besides, the church teachings on current issues such as, inculturation, dialogue and attitudes to other religions are not taught to the people. It retards the growth of the Christian community as a whole as witnessing community and as leaven of the society.

Our task

We must be very clear about what to preach in today's world. We should be heralds of good news, who would announce universal salvific mind of Jesus and not any exclusive claims. Our houses and churches should be centers of dialogue and mutual interaction from which genuine social actions will generate.

We must not be mere transplanners of church life. Instead we must try to develop original expressions of Christian life, worship, and celebrations in the places where we are. Otherwise we will be destroying the culture of the people and will be entertaining the Malayalee colonialism. And the locals will hate us just as we hate today the European missionaries.

7. The field of Education

Teaching was one of the ministries of Jesus on earth. Education will always remain one of the noblest services for the development of humanity and the world. Here in our case, however, we have to make a distinction between education and school ministry.

Establishing schools were the most essential step in the time of Chavara because there were no other agencies to do that. But in our context we are faced with the following challenges:

- a. There are several other agencies in the field of school ministry competing with one another.
- b. Today's English Medium School ministry in the cities has really become something like an industry with huge investment of money.
- c. Thus they have achieved a very notorious name as a very lucrative business. The guru-shishya relationship is slowly giving way to market-customer relationship. Parents say, "We pay money, and you give us education". Education has become a commodity, which people with high purchasing power alone can afford to buy.

d. In our High Tech and English Medium schools, the children see only our business face. They fail to see our real identity - sannyasis.

Therefore, I think we must reduce (and not fully leave) the present unchecked flow of our man/woman power into the area of school ministry, which produces more negative witness than the amount of money it fetches.

But we must, at the same time, continue to give intellectual leadership to the society through education. We must plan out in which all ways we can do it. Some of the ways that come to my mind are the following:

Schools in rural areas

Adult catechesis/Education

Value education

Informal education

Education through writings

Education through retreats, group media and mass media, etc.

We must also think of new dimensions of education. The concept of holistic education incorporating the eco-economic and socio-spiritual dimensions is gaining ground now. Can we think of establishing centers where we can give holistic education to genuine seekers? I think Ashrams are ideal places where we can organize holistic education combining the secular and sacred wisdom.

8. Social Equality and empowerment of Dalits

The Dalit question

Dalits, Chavara's favourite field of action, constitute in fact 23% of the Indian population. Nearly one fifth of every Indian is a Dalit. 70% of Indian Christians are Dalits. That means Indian Church is largely a Dalit Church. But the concentration of dalits is seen in the Latin Church only. The Syrian Church, it seems, still cherishes and boasts over its Namboothiry or high caste origin.

Dalits are a very potential source. They constitute a large section of the Indian population as we noted above. Strictly speaking they are not Hindus. Only the caste people are Hindus, who constitute only about 50% of the Indian population. Hindus want dalits only as cheap work force and as permanent vote banks. Dalits are victims of a quadruple discrimination: from the upper caste people, from the State, from the church and from the fellow caste people.

Our Task

Dalits are by right ours, because they were close to the heart of our Lord and Master as well as of our founder. It is our right and duty to work for them. I think it is high time that the Syrian Church shed away its pleasure of remaining high caste. It has to enter the Dalit world just as the early Church entered the Gentile world. And that will be a great boosting for the Church and the Indian society.

9. Frontier Ministry

Let us at least partially withdraw from the comfort of our well-protected institutions that mainly cater to the rich who eventually become our own oppressors and enter into what is today called the frontier ministry. Frontier ministry means ministry to those people who are at the periphery of the society, such as orphans, widows, destitute, lonely people, elderly people, migrants, aids patients, addicts etc. The modern globalizing world is throwing out all these unfortunate people as useless discharge of the market engine. It is our duty to look after them.

10. Suggestions

Area of Spiritual renewal

1. Form retreat preachers with the genuine vision of the church in matters of inculturation and dialogue.
2. Include in personal prayer and meditation elements or passages from other religious sources.
3. Try to cultivate courage and zeal for changes in church life

Ministry of Social Justice

1. In our talks emphasize that Dalits are not Hindus. Break the myth that Hindus constitute 80% of the Indian population.
2. Direct our attempts of inculturation to the Dalit world as well. So far it seems that our efforts at inculturation are limited to Brahmin Hinduism.
3. Establish schools in areas of Dalit concentration.
4. Start boarding to give quality education to orphans, dalits, and poor children
5. Encourage Dalit authors to contribute to our publications
6. Popularize Dalit heroes and leaders through our publications
7. Establish departments for Dalit Welfare at the General and Provincial levels and allocate funds for it.
8. Remember that great Indian heroes like, Buddha, Ashoka and Gandhi have fought against caste system in India.
9. Start centers to train workers in frontier ministries.
10. Update seminary curriculum by removing subjects that are not relevant today and adding topics that will equip future priests to address the above-mentioned problems.

Conclusion

Blessed Chavara will always remain an enigma for us. Like his Master whom he love with tears flowing down the cheek, he had a holistic understanding of pastoral work, He has shown to us how to address current issues and be relevant to the times. He teaches us not to be slaves of tradition, but to be its masters by creatively adapting traditions according to the context and genuine needs of the people Renewal consists not only in going to the roots but also in meaningful and relevant adaptations to suit the times.

The task of renewal in any sector, however, is a divinely assisted task. It calls for our deep union with God and austere life-style. Let us be men and women of intense prayer. With the divine power obtained from above let us enter into the task of

renewal of ourselves and the society. The renewal of the present Indian society needs spirit-filled men and women, who, living as leaven of the society, would work for the awakening of the Dalit power and the rehabilitation of the socially neglected people. I think, it is the challenge that Bl. Chavara poses to us today.

Finally, if you ask me, "Which are the two most important contributions of Blessed Chavara for the Church and the society and which is the greatest challenge that he poses for us today?", my humble answer will be the following.

His greatest contributions are not the press or the schools, for they would surely have been established in the near future by the society sensing their urgency and need. His greatest contributions, according to me, are :

1. The two religious congregations that he founded, whose members have now reached all the five continents with their message of love and service. These two congregations steadily provide the church with celibate, dedicated, and detached members in hundreds and will always remain a potential source for ongoing spiritual, liturgical, cultural and social renewal of the Church and society.

2. And, finally, his greatest contribution is his own life spent in deep Abba Experience, which was the real engine, the source of power, for all his actions.

And as a corollary, the greatest challenge that Blessed Chavara poses for us today is not running schools or publishing centers, or preaching retreats, but living as he lived, that is, in deep union with the Transcendent, which alone will enable us to be unselfish in motivations, universal in attitudes and daring and untiring in our commitments to the poor and suffering people.

THE EDUCATIONAL VISION OF BLESSED CHAVARA AND THE CHALLENGES OF TODAY

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Introduction

The famous futuristic writer, Alvin Tofler in his book **Power Shift** speaks about three sources of power: muscle, money and mind and the power shifts that have taken place in the history of the world. The Industrial Revolution resulted in a shift from muscle to money. The second shift from money to mind (knowledge) took place with the invention of information technology and bio-technology. Today knowledge has become the most important source of power. If Mr. Bill Gatez is the richest man in the world the reason is that he fully exploited the possibility and scope of knowledge industry. As we all know, education is the most important means of acquiring and enhancing knowledge. At the same time a large majority of people, especially in developing countries are deprived of quality education and hence remain powerless. Secondly education is not knowledge alone. According to Swami Vivekanda education is the development of head, hand and heart. The objective of education should be character and competence. Competence is the result of knowledge and skills. Both are equally important. Deification of knowledge to the neglect of the other aspects of education has caused many problems that we confront today.

This paper is a humble attempt to portray how the educational vision of Blessed Chavara can inspire us to face the present challenges creatively. The paper has mainly three parts: (1) An

overview of the challenges of today, focusing on the Indian educational scenario. (2) An enquiry into the educational vision of Blessed Chavara and (3) Some suggestions for making our educational interventions more responsive to the challenges.

1. Challenges of Today

- Although India is one of the fast growing economies of the world and has a surplus of 60 million tons of food grains, more than 300 million people live below the poverty line and 50 million on the brink of starvation.
- While India is proud of having the second largest scientific and technological manpower one third of the people remain illiterate and 50 to 60 million children of the age group of 6-14 are out of school.
- Even though India has been the land of diversities and of religious tolerance for centuries, the emergence of religious fundamentalism, terrorism and politicisation of religion during the last two decades have lead to hatred, violence and communal divide in the Indian society.
- In spite if India remaining the largest functioning democracy in the world corruption, large-scale violation of human rights of the dalits and discrimination against women and other weaker sections of the society continues.
- Globalization has opened the floodgates of opportunities for the middle class and the rich. At the same time it has widened the gap between the rich and the poor resulting in large-scale unemployment and further marginalization of the poor.
- Although India is blessed with rich natural resources and bio-diversity, environmental degradation is eating into the very basis of human existence.

- Globalization and market driven capitalism has contributed to the growth of individualism, cut throat competition and unbridled consumerism. The result is the erosion of the values of cooperation, sensitivity to other human beings and nature and reluctance to share with others.
- The cumulative effect of these challenges is the marginalization, disempowerment and exclusion of large number of people whom we call the poorest of the poor- Dalits, tribals, landless labourers, small and marginal farmers and women in particular in the above mentioned categories.

Challenges Specific to Education

1. Existence of Generalized Illiteracy

In spite of the increase in literacy due to the various efforts during the last fifty five years, India has the highest number of illiterates in the world. According to census 2001 the percentage of illiterates is 34.62 and illiteracy among women is 45.16. In 1951 there were 301 million illiterates (83.3 % of 361 million population) in the country. Although the percentage of literates has increased from 16 in 1947 to 65.38 in 2001, the total number of illiterates has not decreased. The total population of the country according to census 2001 is 102.7 crores (16.7 % of the World Population). India has the dubious distinction of housing about 50% of the illiterates of the World. According to Arindam Chauduri functionally literate in India who can read, write and understand does not exceed 37.5 percent. (The Great Indian Dream Page 49)

Many other countries, which were in a situation similar to that of India with regards to literacy 50 years ago, are now close to achieving 100 % literacy. Amartya Sen points out the example of China. When developmental planning began in China after the revolution and India after its independence (1947) the literacy rate was remarkably low in both countries.

In 1998 adult literacy was about 43 % in India and in China it was around 69 %. The sluggish growth rate of literacy in India reflects our failures in the field of both primary and adult education. Near elimination of illiteracy and investment in education is one of the reasons for the economic miracle in East Asian countries.

2. Disaster in Primary / Elementary Education

The Constitution on India first fixed 1960 as the target year for achieving universalization of elementary education. Then it was revised from time to time and even now we are far away from realizing the target. According to National Sample Survey 1987-88, 50% of Children in the age group of 5 to 14 years were not attending schools. The latest statistics show that the gross enrolment in primary schools has reached 93.4 % of the country's children, but the retention rate is very low. Out of every 100 children enrolled in Class-I only 62 reach Class-V the rest 38 % adding up to the vast army of illiterates. The low retention and high dropout rates continue to erode the gains from educational expansion. The poor economic condition is one of the reasons for high dropout rates. Dropout ratio coincides with poverty ratio, according to a number of studies. Some of the other reasons are the following.

(a) Shocking Schooling Conditions

The Public Report on Basic Education (PROBE) 1998 has exploded the myth that the parents of poor children, especially in rural areas are reluctant to send their children to schools. According to the report the shocking condition of the school are the main reasons. They are very poor infrastructure, unattractive teaching process, dismal and collapsing buildings, lack of toilets and drinking water, lack of black boards, textbooks and other equipments, teachers who do not teach, poor

management, indifferent administration and several others.

(b) Wrong Model

According to J.P. Naik the largest part of our failure is however, due to the wrong model of the education system we adopted, namely the traditional formal system of a single point entry, sequential annual promotion from class to class and full time instruction by full time professional teachers. The system first of all excludes all workers whether children, youth or adults from its scope and is therefore, unable to spread education among the poor people.

3. Massive inequalities

Massive inequalities are still prevailing between men and women as well as between the general population and disadvantaged groups such as SCs & STs and the economically poor. There are regional imbalances, urban-rural-tribal disparities and inequalities between various ethnic / linguistic and religious communities. In most of these sectors, substantial progress has been made, but we still have a long way to go.

There is still a big gap between female literacy of 54.16 percent and male literacy of 75.85 percent. The literacy rate in Kerala is 90.92 % whereas the literacy rate in Bihar is 47.53. Above all the inequalities have become institutionalized in a dualistic educational system, which contains two distinct streams: the high quality elite sector and the low quality mass sector. Good education is available only to a minority who can buy it. The majority, especially the poor have to be content with very low quality of education at all levels.

Many students opt for post graduation because the education at the graduation level does not make him/her fit for a job or does not give the confidence and skills for taking up self-employment. India produces 2 million degree holders every year most of whom join the vast army of the educated unemployed.

4. Flight from Government Schools to Private Schools

For example in Kerala less than a third of primary school children are found in the rapidly emptying government schools. The private schools are mushrooming. This trend is found in Tamil Nadu and many other states. Poor people not only want education for their children, but also are willing to pay hefty fees rather than sending them to government run schools.

5. Insufficient and Elitist Budget

India spends much less on education than many countries that spend 6 to 8 % of the GNP. Our average spending on education has been 3.5% of GNP. Fortunately the UPA government has decided to increase the allocation for education up to 6% of GNP.

Sectoral expenditure on education highlights the wrong priorities in our planning. In a country plagued with so much illiteracy and having chosen formal schooling for all 6 to 14 year old children as its main remedy, considerably less than one third of total educational allocation has been spent on this sector. Greater proportion of the educational outlay is spent on higher education, the beneficiaries of which are the middle castes / classes. In fact it is accentuating the existing inequalities between the rich and the poor.

Educational Vision of Blessed Chavara

Blessed Chavara was not an educationist, as we understand today. He was mainly a spiritual leader and reformer who

initiated some educational endeavours in his time. As far as I understand he has not written any book or treatise on education. We have to look into his life and activities in order to find out his vision or views on education. He strongly believed that education is a source of power and means of empowerment of a person. In his last testament he has mentioned about the importance of education as follows. 'When children reach the age of discretion they should be sent to school. Moreover it is to be checked whether they are studying properly. On Sundays what they had studied in the previous week is to be examined.' The following are the actions initiated by Blessed Chavara in the field of education.

1. Education of the common people: While he was the Vicar General of Malankara church he sent a circular in 1865 to all the churches that schools attached to them should be started. He even threatened that the churches that did not implement the order would be penalized. As a result it became a tradition in the Syro-Malabar church to start schools attached to the churches.

One of the reasons for Kerala becoming the most literate state in India is the contribution of private aided schools and Blessed Chavara laid the foundation for the educational endeavours of the Syro-Malabar church.

2. Education of the Dalits: Blessed Chavara took special initiative for the education of the Dalits. He insisted that the schools should admit Dalit children and there should not be any discrimination against the Dalit children. In order to encourage them he gave them special assistance in the form of books, dress etc.

3. Mid-day Meal to promote elementary education: The UPA government at the centre has instructed all the state governments to implement mid-day meal scheme in the primary schools. The late MGR is very often depicted as the one who initiated the mid-day meal scheme in

India. In fact it was Blessed Chavara who introduced it about one and half a century ago. He found that many dalits were not sending their children to school because they took their children along with them when they went for daily wage work. The main reason was that they had no means to feed them at home. In order to encourage the dalits to send their children to school Blessed Chavara introduced mid-day meal (*Uchakanji*) by taking contribution from the general public.

4. At the time of Blessed Chavara learning Sanskrit was the exclusive privilege of Brahmins. By starting a Sanskrit school in 1864 attached to Mannanam Ashram he opened a channel for the Syro-Malabar Christians to learn Sanskrit. This could be the beginning of access to higher education by the members of the church.
5. Printing Press: Printing press need not be within the field of education in the ordinary sense. When reading materials were rarely available in the local language Blessed Chavara started a printing press at Mannanam and contributed to the general education of the people.

Are we faithful to the Vision of Blessed Chavara?

An analysis of the educational initiatives of Blessed Chavara brings to the fore that his focus was on the education of the common people with special attention to the weaker sections of the society. Both the CMIs and the CMCs continued up to the end of 1970's the educational mission of blessed Chavara being faithful to the original vision through the Malayalam Medium aided schools. The common people including the poorest of the poor were the beneficiaries of these schools. Since 1980 there has been a mushrooming of English medium schools in Kerala and the CMCs and CMIs have left no stone unturned in starting as many English Medium schools as possible both in Kerala and the mission areas. I do not want to enter into a debate on the merits and demerits of running English Medium schools.

I just want to point out the end result of this development. We have contributed knowingly or unknowingly to the present scenario of gross inequalities in education: high quality education to the rich and the middle class and poor quality education to the poor. It is a fact that the poor do not have the capacity to pay for the education provided by our English medium schools. We may be giving fee concession to a few students. In the mission areas most of our educational institutions are English medium schools where the poor have no access or very limited access. I do not have the data to show how many percentages of our human and material resources are used for the education of the poor in the mission areas.

Being conscious of the fact that we have deviated from the educational vision of Blessed Chavara, some of our English Medium Schools have started Hindi section also as a second shift. The cost of running these Hindi medium Schools are borne by the English Medium schools. I appreciate this initiative of the CMC sisters. The CMIs are yet to start this kind effort. At the same time I feel that it is a mere tokenism. We, the CMIs and the CMCs, have to think seriously on the occasion of celebrating the bi-centenary of Blessed Chavara how we can provide quality education to the poor.

Bi-centenary celebration of Blessed Chavara is an occasion to recapture the original vision of Blessed Chavara and to translate it into creative initiatives to respond to the needs of today. Grand meetings, Eucharistic celebration with dozens of bishops and hundreds of priests, processions, keeping photos of Chavara on the walls of institutions, installing statues etc. may be important, but not essential. What is essential is recapturing the original vision and translating it into present day situation and I think this seminar is such an attempt. From this perspective I am presenting the following suggestions.

Suggestions:

1. We the CMIs and CMCs shall give top priority among all our apostolates to providing quality education to the poor for the next 10 years.
2. All our English medium schools shall start Hindi Medium also in the second shift. Good quality teachers are to be appointed in these schools and Teaching of English is to be given special emphasis in these Hindi medium schools. As most of the children are from the low income groups their motivation for Educations also may be low. Therefore the teachers of these Hindi Medium schools are to be trained to adopt methods of joyful learning.
3. Some of our schools may replicate the experiment Sr. Cyril of Loretto School Kolkata is doing. Almost 50% of the children are from the well to do sections of the society and the remaining are the poor children from the slums. Sr. Cyril has adopted a methodology that creates high level sensitivity to the poor children from the part of the children from the poor families. The Jesuits in Delhi have done another experiment. Separate divisions are there for the poor children from the slums up to 5th class and these children are given special facilities as well as coaching. From class 6 onwards the poor children are integrated with the other students.
4. All our institutions and organizations particularly those are in the rural area shall take special efforts to improve the functioning of the government schools. Forming and strengthening Community Based Organizations especially Self Help Groups and motivating them to put pressure on the Gram Panchayats and the Government school teachers could be an effective strategy. The Hoy Spirit Sisters working in Gadchoroli district of Maharashtra have done it successfully in many villages. The UPA government has increased the allocation for

education up 6% of the GDP and substantial amount will be spent for elementary education. If the delivery system is not substantially improved much of this money may go waste. We have to help the people to take advantage of this increased allocation for education.

5. Our institutions/organizations/schools shall adopt one or two primary schools in the nearby villages in consultation with the education department and make it a model school by motivating the teachers, parents and students by providing the needed support. I have noticed that in some villages our fathers and sisters have started non-formal schools and the children are the students of the primary school. The reason for starting the non-formal school is that the government school does not function. I do not think that it is a right approach.

6. Millions of students drop out during the high school education. The formal educational system does not take care of them. Helping such students to complete their education through the National Institute Open Schooling is another golden opportunity which we can make use of. Our schools can become Accredited Institutions to help such students.

Dr. Xavier Alphonse, the former principal of Loyola College Chennai has started a movement called Community Colleges to train the school dropouts and the unemployed youth for employment. I find it as an approach very relevant to our situation.

Conclusion

Blessed Chavara was a trendsetter, a man who made a difference in his time by taking bold and creative initiatives. He was not copying what others were doing. If we want to become the true followers of Chavara we too have to become creative and be

CHALLENGES OF THE SOCIAL APOSTOLATE AS FOLLOWERS OF BLESSED CHAVARA

Sr. Magi Maria, CMC, Bhopal

The unique geographical positions, century old foreign trade and contact with Europe and Asia have made Kerala with a distinct unique character, glory and glamour from the ancient times. Kerala enjoyed a separate climate of socio-economic isolation, freedom and different political and cultural liberty with a very few exceptions from the rest of the country. Kerala was able to evolve its own way of life and social institutions. It may seem paradoxical that Kerala is more influenced by the west.

The caste system was foisted on a casteless society by the arrival of the Aryans. The law that prevailed was not equalitarian. The penal code was extremely severe and inhuman as far as the lower castes are concerned. Slavery in the primitive form with all its atrocities prevailed in the land even in the beginning of the 19th century. The land lords killed as well as sold the slaves without being called to account. The women fold had no freedom at all. In such an inhuman situation comes the birth of the social activist as well as a man of God Bl. Chavara, the star of the east in the beginning of the 19th century. He created a social awakening in the southern part of India. He was the pioneering spirit of social reforms in the south. Even before the birth of social reformers Chavara began his work vigorously in the fertile soil of Kerala to eradicate untouchability, casteism and thus enabling Harijans to become part of the main stream of the society. He was ever-alive and active to the new commandments

of Jesus of Nazareth. Ever since his seminary days his chari had enough scope to manifest by itself. Bl.Chavara wanted to raise the status of women in general. He realized that the education is the base of all sorts of development. As a result, for this purpose he founded the CMC Congregation to educate girls irrespective of caste and creed and help them to ascend the social ladder. He visited the houses of the harijans and urged them to go to school for study and to be eligible for government services and thus come to the lime light.

He started another revolution by opening a school at Mannanam, where both upper class and harijans could study in the same class. It was a great challenge of the time. The great champion Iyyankali was not born at that time to witness it. Another school he started at Arpookara Kottayam to teach the Harijans. The former president of India R.Venkataraman, said "Fr.Chavara regarded education as a means of uplifting the poor. He wished all the parishes maintained school as auxiliary to them. He threatened to close down the churches which failed to maintain school with it". The most remarkable things is that his schools catered students of all categories / members of all communities. The Christian mission worked among adivasis aboriginals and harijans. Few people have exemplified these dimensions of Indian Christianity memorably as Fr.Chavara.

In order to improve literacy in Kerala he found that elimination of untouchability was a must at the time. Avarnas and untouchables like pulayas, parayas, chandals and lower caste were not allowed to come near the Brahmins or the upper classes. They were forbidden even to walk in the public street, to enter the place of worship, to go to school or to dress up properly. They were considered as the scum of the society, Charava could not consume it. He made this morally binding on all the members of the Congregation, of feeding, clothing and nursing the sick. This was a practice in the houses he started with, to extent the services and resources for the poor. He raised large amounts of

donations and invariably used them exclusively for the benefit of the poor. He acknowledged all those who contributed to this great / cause. His charity shone out to those, who are hostile towards him too. As a pioneer in many revolutionary & progressive measures, he had many enemies in his lifetime. But he was always kind and considerate to them. As the gospel of St. Mathew speaks he was literally prepared to show his other cheek if he was struck upon one and willing to walk miles with those who asked for one mile. With a magnanimous heart he always sought out those who tried to hinder his work or to humiliate him and promised all sorts of encouragements and co-operation in all their work.

B1. Chavara was ever-alive and active to the new commandments of our Lord Jesus, "Love one another as I have loved you". He spent his days in charity, activities of social welfare, restoration of faith and salvation of Souls.

Ever since his seminary days, his charitable mentality had enough scope to manifest itself. After the day of ordination till his day of glorification his selfless services are many, numerous and uncountable. Following the footsteps of Jesus his divine master he would hasten to the dying even if they were stricken by a deadly or contagious diseases. In spite of the threat and warnings from his opposition he went about doing good to them. He built a house in his own hometown at Kainakary for the destitute and the poor. He also established a confraternity for happy death. Such organizations started by him were the first of it's kind in the country. This reveals his love and concern for the poor, the less fortunate and his deep intimate relationship with God. He taught us his children, that spirituality is not being with God alone in the chapel but reaching out to the needy in their difficult moments. Jesus, as he was one with God His father heaven, he was at the service of the children of God whenever they sought his help.

In his letters to his colleagues, fellow members and to the

sisters of CMC he wrote, "do not let beggars go away from your doors sorrowful and empty handed. Never fail to give them something when you can manage it some how. The laborers must be paid the right wages and they must not be delayed. You should never ridicule, never use harsh words and bring in convenience to the poor". He practiced what ever he preached. In order to propagate Christian faith through selfless service Chavara formed a missionary league to foster evangelization. This is the first indigenous religious institute CMC. Further to promote and perpetuate the spirit of charity he employed every resources possible to carry out the mission.

He was not only worried of the material life of harijans but also of their souls. He saw them as a human phenomenon and wanted to save them. Thus he became the pride not only of Kerala but also of the entire world. He awakened the social consciousness of Kerala. He could touch the Soul of Kerala. No, I should say that he could touch the soul of India like St. Thomas the apostle of India.

In an era where there was no single sign of savings Chavara taught the women, the advantages of it and how it could be utilized. The present system of self-help group is a modified form of the savings, which he started in 1860s. This proves his insight and farsightedness.

Even though his name has not come in the history of India, history will remember him as a man of vision, a companion of the poor, who put into practice what he believed / preached and a great genuine social reformer. Swami Nikhilanandis words are fulfilled in Bl.Chavara. he gives three conditions, which are to be fulfilled before a man may aspire to become a genuine social servant

- he must feel the suffering of others,
- he must find out right means to alleviate suffering
- he must be totally unselfish,

There should not be any motive of personal gain or power

bind his social service. A man who sees ht divine hand in all, can be a true servant of the society. To him work is worship. Now many will be wondering why the historians of Kerala did not enter his name and performance from among the social reformers of Kerala and champions of harijans in their works? May be because;

- he was a religious priest
- silent worker
- not activated to the political parties

Former governor of Kerala have rightly said, "Unlike lesser mortals he did not seek pomp, show, fame or praise from the world or riches of the world or acclaims." Till today the 21st century the world has not seen any other measurers, models or methods in social apostolate, which Bl. Chavara had not initiated in the 19th century. The leaders speak of social action try to persuade people to fight for their right but never stood by them but our founder father always stood beside them and helped the people to come to the front line. He is a man of charity, a reformer, a development worker- social activist above all a man of God because he lived the very life of Jesus our saviour. I wish to quote the words of late Cardinal Lourdasamy "Bl. Chavara's love for the destitute and the deprived must inspire the CMIs and CMCs today. The present staring social reality of India in particular will dictate their life style and fill their prayer sessions.'

Imitating Bl. Chavara we have to be more mystical in mental make up, more prophetic in steps, more open in our outlook, more committed to the church, above all more people centred in our approach. I pray that Bl. Chavara may help us to understand our role rightly today. We should have;

Close intimacy with God

a sense of history and a

Total involvement in the destiny of the people to establish the kingdom of God, avoiding all our selfish motives and vested interests.

The prophets were not only spiritual leaders they were concerned of the life of the people. Prophet Amos taught for social justice Prophet Micha and Isiah pleaded for justice (IS 1:17)

Chavara very well realized that the progress of the community greatly depends on the growth from within and assistance from outside. For the former he launched education at various levels for the rich and poor alike. He was also concerned about the formation of priests and nuns. For the latter he started press apostolate. The religious communities were founded for men and women to take up the prophetic task of building up the kingdom of God. While remaining grateful to him for all that he has done and equated to us, we all should take up the challenge of his Vision and Mission as something very precious, very dear to our heart...Like Mahatma Gandhi he felt;

There go my people,

I must go with them,

Because I am for them.

He believed in reconstructing as James yen said;

Go to the peasant people

Live among them

Learn from them

Plan with them

Work with them

Start with what they know

Build on what they have

Teach by showing

Learn by doing

Not a showcase but a pattern

Not odds and ends but a system

Not piecemeal, but an integrated approach

Not to conform but to transform

Not to relief but to release.

Chavara realized that people cannot be developed. Keeping the writings of Julius Nyerere he worked to help people to develop themselves. He believed that for while it is possible for an outsider to build a man's house, but he cannot give that man pride and self confidence in himself as a human being. Those things a man has to create in himself by his own decisions; by increasing his under standings, knowledge, ability and his own full participation as an equal in the life of the community where he lives.

The need

We need only open our eyes and ears to see many, within the church and outside, who are abused, exploited and hurting or imprisoned by habits and attitudes that are hard to break. We look beneath the veneer and see the many families that are broke, yet stuck together for the sake of appearances.

And what do we do about it? The India I described above with its poverty, religious and caste violence, lack of opportunities and abusive families is no the India we like to familiarize ourselves with. It is so much easier to see it as a vast sea of souls that need harvesting. That way the evangelists can take responsibility and wed don't have to worry about being fair to the maid, or showing kindness to our neighbor, or respecting those with fewer means than us, or those dying in the nearby municipal hospital with no one to speak a kind word to them.

Is your world confined to the church or does it encompass the people and the places that God placed around you for a reason? Does your involvement in the world around you extend beyond handing over a tract and praying for the generic lost? If you do see the needs around you, does it overwhelm you and make you feel like nothing you do can make a difference?

Our intervention as social workers

"The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well being".

There is a burgeoning industry of NGOs and professional social workers with varied motivations pursuing these objectives of social change, building relationships and liberating and empowering people. Some of them are self-seeking and some want to live in a better world.

But consider this – Lasting social change is a function of individual men and women changing from the better touched by Jesus, their Saviour and Creator. Equipped with the Word of God and called to be pacemakers, theories of human behaviour and social systems notwithstanding, those who know Jesus are among the most effective counselors, relationship builders and healers. And imagine the power that can be unleashed when those who know God stand up for those who are weak and exploited that they may be liberated. Or when the body of Christ stands by with jobs, clothes and food for those liberated, rather than the 'Depart in peace, be warmed and filled' approach James warned against. In a world that is as dysfunctional as our, Jesus intended for 'salt' and 'light' to be more than just the words of the Gospel.

When we do this, we will be following the example of our Saviour in deed, by meeting people at their point of need. There is a case for us, as individuals and as a community, to take up on these challenges.

Suggestions

If this challenges you and makes you wonder what you should be doing, following are some suggestions on being a Christian social worker. Pray and ask God to show you the needs around you. I read this prayer once: 'Let my heart be broken with the things that break the heart of God' and prayed it subsequently. Ask God to show you and give you His heart for the world around you.

Don't let the need determine your actions. Let God guide you. Jesus died not heal or feed every soul in Palestine during His ministry. He did what His Father led Him to do. There won't be much left of us if we attempted to do what even Jesus did not attempt. At the same time, **the absence of God's specific intervention should not become an excuse for doing nothing.**

If you do something, do it because you're compelled by Christ's love. Without love, for those whom we are serving and those with whom we serve, all our social work is meaningless, pointless, and worthless. And from experience I can tell you, loving is a hard thing to do. Often we don't have it in us. But the wonderful thing is that when we reach the last leg of love that we're capable of, we can draw from the unquenchable love of the Father. Expect to be inconvenienced. Social work takes time and energy and the need to reach out to someone can occur when you don't feel like it. If God is leading you to do something don't ignore it. What you do (or don't do) could have eternal repercussions, and your inconvenience would sound like a really feeble excuse when God asks you about it. Remember that we don't have all the answers. To the existential questions on poverty, riches and the meaning of life that will dog you, as you get involved in the world around you, don't attempt to propose pat answers to those you serve from the Word of God. God never did answers to those you serve from the Word of God. God never did answer Job's questions, you see. He just silenced Job with a display and retelling of His splendor. There are some things beyond us.

We're not better people than those we serve. But for the grace of God, you'd be the person you serve. Don't look down on those you serve. Try to remember that we are all nobodies. And you just happen to be a nobody who met Somebody sooner than the person you serve. Remember that your only audience is God. Jesus couldn't be clearer than He is Mathew 6:1-4, Be careful not to do your acts of righteousness before men. People will offer opinions, criticism, advice. Take it, consider it

prayerfully and act on it, if God leads you to. But don't pander to every man's whim. Pray for those you serve. Renew yourself with the Scriptures.

Future Perspective and Tasks Ahead

Voluntary agencies were known for their virtues of human touch, dedication, nearness to the community and above all flexibility. These virtues are being eroded, because of professional input in their working which has a set of principles such as avoiding emotional involvement with the clientele on the one hand and on the other bureaucratization in their working due to the need to follow government procedures and rules in the matter of utilization of grant-in-aid. When the voluntary organizations are mainly engaged in the implementation of government schemes, they are unable to make much contribution in promoting community initiative or develop people's organizing capacity.

In context of social work practice, the way ahead for social work points to the following shifts:

- From social welfare to human resource development
- From development to social justice.
- From institutionalizing children of widows, deserted mothers etc. to social security and for enhancing the capacity of mothers.
- From curative problem solving to preventive programmes and services.
- From urban social welfare services to rural and tribal development programmes.
- From social welfare to social activism and social change.

Conclusion

In conclusion, let me just say that the world around us is evil, sad and without hope. But the good news is that we serve and belong to a God who cares. The God of Israel is also our God. He hasn't changed. His ears hear the cry of the homeless,

the helpless, the persecuted, the needy and those in turmoil and pain; and He longs to reach out to them through us who are called by His name. As His children, we can delight His heart by living out His passions.

'He who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin'.

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THE 19TH CENTURY KERALA CHURCH AND THE LEADERSHIP OF BL. CHAVARA

**Fr. Mathew Thenamkalayil CMI
Samanvaya**

Introduction

Let me quote the well-known orator and literary critic Shri Sukumar Azhikode "If a person who lived in the 19th century is remembered with reverence even in the 20th century, then that person had created the 20th and the 21st century while still living in the 19th century. Such great souls are called 'history makers'. A real leader has a vision. Bl. Chavara had a vision of the Kerala Church, Kerala Society and Christian families. With that vision he empowered the Kerala community of the 19th century. This vision of Bl. Chavara is bequeathed to the CMI and CMC communities of the 21st century.

200 years after he was born, Blessed Chavara K. Elias' legacy continues. He was a man of multifaceted talents and a forerunner in most of them especially in Kerala. He was a social reformer, an educationalist, a cultural leader, a friend of the poor and marginalized, a writer and above all a strong pillar in the field of spirituality and religious life, a man who lived what he preached. The extent to which Bl. Chavara has influenced the Kerala society, perhaps, will never be known. Yet we can positively affirm the fact if Kerala has achieved anything in the area of human development from the 19th century, this religious priest has played a very significant role.

A peep into his younger days

Being born in a traditional Syro-Malabar Catholic family and being brought up by devout parents, Kuriakose Elias had a strong ecclesial sense in him. He was dedicated to our Lady, in the church of Vechur. From his very childhood he had great devotions to Jesus, Mary and St. Joseph. From his early life, he was taught prayers and catechism and he attended the parish church with his parents. All these activities instilled in him a strong sense of belonging to the Church and he experienced that he was a child of the Church. He imbibed the spirituality of St. Thomas Christians. He learned from his parents to obey the Church Authorities, respects the priests and to be a faithful catholic. All these helped him to make a choice in his life and join the Pallipuram Seminary.

Another factor that influenced his love for the Church is his life in the presbytery. Malpan Fr. Thomas Palackal was pleased with Kuriakose and invited him to his seminary to study for priesthood. In order to prepare for priesthood and dedicate him to the Church the parents arranged his stay at his parish presbytery for some time where he assisted in the sacred ministry. This stay exerted a great influence on him.

Bl. Chavara's love and commitment to the Church is also an expression of the influence of Malpan Fr. Thomas Palackal. Fr. Thomas Palackal was spiritually solid, intellectually competent and a committed priest. His discipline, prayer life, zeal for the salvation of others etc. influenced the young Chavara much.

"The Lord is my Portion"

Bl. Chavara chose his motto 'the Lord is my portion (Ps. 16: 15) when he received the tonsure in 1818. This motto was the driving force of his life and, therefore is to be seen as a key to his whole life. This is a very deep rooted idea in the Old Testament. "Portion" and "Inheritance" are the two key words

of Ps. 16. "The Lord is my portion of my inheritance" (Ps. 16.5). these words are to be understood in the context of the occupation and distribution of the land promised first to Abraham and his descendents (Gen 12:7). To possess land and other material goods are the sign of Gods blessings. And therefore, they considered it as their sacred duty to safe guard and preserve it for the posterity. When the twelve tribes reached the promised land and Joshua apportioned the land among the tribes (Chs 13-20), the Levites were not given any portion of land. The Lord himself was their portion (Josh 14: 40) "The Levites were given the distinct privilege that the Lord himself became the basis of their life. The Lord is their portion and inheritance, a total abandonment as well as complete trust in the Lord" (v.6).

While he was doing his seminary studies, Bl. Chavara's beloved father, mother and the only brother died. He was forced to go back home and take up the responsibilities. But within a short time he managed to persuade the wife of his diseased bother to occupy the Chavara home taking care of every thing. Chavara gave all his inheritance to her. Thus he showed his firmness and determination to remain in his motto "the Lord is my portion". He decided to follow the lord's call accepting the sorrows with the submission to the will of God dedicating himself to the service of the Church. He decided to follow Jesus radically by denying every thing and any thing that belongs to him on this earth for the sake of the kingdom of God and seek always the will of the father. His conviction and the sense of commitment to the Lord and his Church helped him to withstand all the difficulties of his life.

Social and Religious Situation of Kerala

To understand the real value of his contribution we have to look into the social and religious situation of his period. Socially, it was a period of high caste people. They enjoyed all privileges and a high social status. There were no values such as equality, freedom and brotherhood. Untouchability was in

its peak. Caste system was very powerful. The dignity of low caste people was not considered. They were not permitted to enter the temple for worship. They were not allowed to gather or to come near to caste people. Government jobs were reserved for high caste. The low castes were not given admission to government schools. This, in short, was the social and religious situation of Kerala during the time of Bl.Chavara.

The ecclesial situation of Kerala

St. Thomas Christians of India claim that their Church is an Apostolic Church. Deeply rooted in the memories of St.Thomas and in ties with East Syrian Church and fully integrated into the socio-cultural milieu of Kerala, the St. Thomas Christians had developed an identity of their own. They had a high social status. They were considered equal to the high nobility. They had several privileges, even royal ones which no other community possessed. With the arrival of Portuguese, St.Thomas Christians had a great hope and joy in the beginning that they thought the powerful Christians from the west will help them to strengthen their own privileged existence.

Portuguese with their European Christian background, which they approached on their own way to a community they discovered in India. The claim of the Indian Christians to an apostolic origin was enthusiastically accepted in the beginning by the Portuguese. With regard to socio-cultural life of the Indian Christians, the foreigners, though generally unhelpful, did not completely reject them. What created the greatest difficulty for them was the East Syrian connections of the Indian Christians. The Portuguese were cordially welcomed by Indian Christians. But later the Portuguese posed themselves as a threat to the local Christians. They not only distort the identity but also scattered the unity and destroyed the autonomy of the Indian Church of St.Thomas. There would follow a very hard struggle to restore and rediscover them in a new way. There are traces of the impact of this struggle seen even today.

After many vicissitudes, the contact between these two

communities, culminated in a moment of tension created by the circumstances in which the synod of Diamper was convened at the close of 16th century. With synod, the long standing relationship of Indian Church with Persian Church were terminated. St. Thomas Christians were brought under the Latin jurisdiction of the Portuguese Padroado. Till that time St. Thomas Christians were ruled over by East Syrian Bishops.

The attitude and mentalities of the Portuguese towards the Christians of India was motivated by a sense of superiority about their form of Christianity which according to them is the only true form to which the Indian Christians were to conform in order to be perfect Christians. The local customs and the use of different rites were adulterations and abuses that had to be suppressed. In other words, the Christians had to conform to the Portuguese in every thing. The attitude of the priests and missionaries were not at all different. Their aim was to make Indian Christians conform to the Portuguese ways and usages. And they did it very tactfully.

The St. Thomas Christians never could digest the idea of giving up their social as well as ecclesiastical traditions and customs that they had shaped through many centuries. They wanted the community to remain unimpaired in every respect. At the same time they wanted full co-operation between the both the parties, benefiting each other. But Portuguese wanted to have absorption that too local Christians into Portuguese. They set no limit to it, even going so far as to extent it to food, clothes and also names.

Thus there were conflicts of opinions and methods from the beginning of the missionary work of the Latin missionaries among the St. Thomas Christians. Later events and incidents give ample light to this conflict. This struggle continued through out the centuries. And it came to an end to an extent only at the close of 19th century when the St. Thomas Christians were accorded some kind of autonomy with in Catholic Church.

They looked to Mesopotamia, when ever they had a problem with their latin superiors, to bring their autonomy and identity back by re-establishing their union with Chaldean Catholic Church. This is one of the reasons that some of the groups and leading personalities received Roccas. Also intolerance of foreign missionaries towards Chaldean bishops and the negative attitude they adopted to the attempts of the re-union of the Catholics and Jacobites, created lot of opposition and tension in the community.

The Challenges as a Leader and The Struggle against Schism

Bl. Chavaras' filial attachment to the Church and his zeal for the well being of the Syro-Malabar Community are visible in the struggle against schisms affecting the Church of the 19th century. On the one side he wanted the rightful autonomy of the Syro-Malabarians and on the other hand he was a faithful son of the Church. Chavara's ecclesial sense finds its best expression in this struggle, serving the notice of excommunication to the schismatic even at the cost of his life.

The most important cause was the dislike of St. Thomas Christians for Latin Bishops who suppressed Chaldean connection and imposed Latin rule over the Malabar Church in the synod of Diamper which finally led the Jacobite Schism. The opposition to the Latin rule did not end with this but there were more and more problems. At the same time they had intense desire to have a bishop of their own rite.

Roccas Schism

Roccas arrived in Kochi on 9th May 1861 from Babylon. He was given a grant welcome by Fr. Thondanat and his supporters. He stayed with Jacobite Bishop Curillose. Meanwhile Thondanat wrote a letter to Chavara requesting him to accept Roccas since he is consecrated and sent by the Patriarch with the permission of Pope Pius IX. He also promised Chavara episcopate. By this time Thondanat gained support of many

priests as well as many influential people. In order to strengthen the position and to convince the people, Mar Roccas and his associates produced false letters that Holy Father had called the Patriarch to Rome to confirm Roccas in jurisdiction. The desire of the St. Thomas Christians for a bishop of their own rite and together with false propaganda of Thondanat gave acceleration to people to accept Roccas. By the end of October 1861 the major part of the Syro-Malabar Church submitted themselves to his jurisdiction. Out of 155 Churches, 86 accepted Rokokose fully and 30 partially. From its very beginning, Bl. Chavara began to put up a very strong fight against Roccas schism. To verify and confirm the appointment of Roccas he wrote letters to Delegate Apostolic of Mesopotamia and Sacred Congregation on Propagande Fide and came to know that he came against the will of the Holy See and hence he was an impostor. He believed that the one who entered the fold through back door is a thief.

At the request of Vicar Apostolic, he wrote a pastoral letter to the Syro-Malabar Churches in his own name admonishing them against Roccas, exhorting them to be beware of Roccas who was a wolf intending to enter into the sheepfold of Christ to disperse them. He appealed them to remain under the Vicar Apostolate, the true pastor. Thus he warned the people the great danger that was going to threaten them.

As Roccas was not ready to obey the Pope or the Patriarch, and continued his pastoral activities, the Vicar Apostolic decided to excommunicate him. According to the letter of the Pope, the Vicar Apostolic excommunicated Roccas on 30th November 1861. The reaction of Roccas was cold and continued his activities. But later, realizing the reality on the ground, Roccas decided to go back to Babylon and requested the help of Vicar Apostolic. The Vicar Apostolic entrusted this matter to Bl. Chavara and gave him the faculty to absolve Roccas from excommunication. Bl. Chavara gave him all the help and left Kochi only after the ship left the port with Roccas. Bl. Chavara stood under the legitimate authority and fought against the

Schism. Because of him and his community some Churches remained faithful to the Church. All these things explicitly express his leadership, love and commitment for the Church.

Formation of Future Church Leaders

As a committed priest, Bl.Chavara was called to share the responsibility to form the future leaders of the Church. Seminaries are the important organs of the Church to train priests after the example of our lord Jesus Christ to teach, sanctify and to give leadership to the people of God. During his time priests were trained in the malpanates, domestic seminaries. It has got its own advantages as well as disadvantages. Hence the Malabar Church was in an urgent need of a well-organized seminary. Fr. Thomas Palackal, one of the founders of CMI Congregation, who had very vast experience of conducting malpanates, started a seminary adjoining the monastery at Mannanam. At the same time he was the rector of the domestic seminary at Pallipuram. After the death of Fr.Thomas Palackal in 1841, Bl.Chavara had to shoulder the responsibility of running the seminary at Pallipuram and Mannanam.

Bl.Chavara played an active role in the formation of seminarians. Even as a deacon he had been teaching and managing the seminary. He taught his disciples both by words and deeds. His pastoral zeal and activities influenced the seminarians. Lessons are more effective when words are followed by deeds.

Renewal of The Clergy

Even though Bl.Chavara was fully engaged in the seminary formation, he realized the need for on going formation of the priests who are in the active field. He organized the annual retreats and other renewal programmes for the priests. He made prayer books available to the priests and wanted to see that all priests recite the divine office daily and nourish their spiritual life. When Chavara was appointed as Vicar General of the Syro-Malabar Community, He took the initiative to renew the clergy.

The clerical dress was made compulsory, the canonical prayers of the Syrian Community were revised and he took various steps to improve the seminary formation of the future priests. He paid attention to the discipline and spiritual life of the priests. Bl.Chavara was conscious of the importance of good priests in the life of the Christian community and made all efforts to form good committed priests.

Renewal of Christian life

As a priest dedicated to God and the service of the Church he tried to renew the St.Thomas Christian community through sermons, retreats and other services and also through his writings. Chavara's pastoral zeal for the renovation of Christian families finds best expression in his long letter to the parishioners known as Chavarul. This letter is a code conduct for the Christian families. The main subjects treated are love and forgiveness, charity towards others, love for work, justice to the workers, modesty, surrender to the will of God, contact with good people, fear of God, reading good books, bringing up of children, keeping away from calumnies, etc. A good Christian family is an exemplar of heaven. In his letter he has laid down the basic principles and ideals of Christian family. He realized the importance of a family in the Church as well as in the society.

Social Reforms

The love of God moved Bl.Chavara to love of his brethren. He saw a community of privations and limitations. The social reforms he undertook resulted unimaginable social changes whose effect is very much visible even today. If Kerala is foremost in the human resource development index a part of its credit goes to this visionary.

Just wages

Charity begins at home. Bl.Chavara insisted on giving just wages for the workers. The prevailing practice was to make the Dalit to work for pittance of wage or a little of rice or any other

item. He tried to stop this exploitation of the poor by giving just wage.

Founding of Dharamasalas and Upavisalas

The poor the neglected, the despised and the destitute found solace in these houses that were founded by Bl.Chavara and his followers. It was the beginning of the establishment of such a homes by the catholics as well as other communities.

Religious harmony and Religious Tolerance

Though he worked intensely for the growth of the Catholic community Bl.Chavara never neglected the people of the other creed. Not only that he made a point to live in harmony and friendship with them best never did anything that hampered the communal harmony anywhere he went nor did he allow anyone else from his fraternity to do so. This is evident from the incident that happened when the first fathers wanted to start the first monastery. They wanted to start at Pullarikunnu, but shifted to Mannanam due to some opposition from some Hindus. Bl.Chavara never complained or fought with them. He was a staunch believer in the Indian heritage of religious harmony and tolerance.

The establishment of schools, press and printing religious books, work among down trodden, founding new monasteries, promoting religious harmony etc. are expressions of Bl.Chavara's zeal for the growth of the Church.

His Leadership, Animation and Contribution in the Founding of Religious Congregations

The greatest contribution of Bl.Chavara to the Church were founding of indigenous congregations. As a seminarian when he was praying for his priesthood Chavara observed that his Church, Syro-Malabar Community needed to be renewed. He found that Syro-Malabar Church did not have its own religious communities, which could invigorate that Church. He had discussion with his rector Rev.Fr.Thomas Porukkara and had

this desire in his heart to start a religious community of Syro-Malabar Church for anyone to retire to the seclusion of an ascetical life for the renewal of the Church.

Together with Fr. Thomas Palackal and Fr. Thomas Porukara he worked relentlessly for the establishment of the religious community for men. When they approached the then Vicar Apostolic of Malabar, Msgr. Francis Xavier Pescento, to start a religious house they came under severe test. They were transferred to distant Churches as vicars. They obeyed the Bishop accepting the trial as coming from God and leaving things to the Divine Providence. After some time, they were relieved from the post and allowed to continue the construction of the monastery at Mannanam. The founding fathers started their community life at Mannanam consisting of prayer, meditation and other spiritual exercise and pastoral work for the good of the people. Bl. Chavara's role in the building up of the new religious community became the most prominent after the death of the other two pioneers and the whole responsibility fell on his shoulder.

The life of our founding fathers and the first community points to the objectives of CMI congregation. They led a prayerful and austere life; carried out pastoral activities according to the needs of the Church, preached through out the length and breadth of Malabar; conducted seminary formation; started schools for the social and cultural progress of the people and started press for the propagation of faith and catholic literature.

Bl. Chavara himself in his testament states the pastoral objective of the congregation: "Since God has willed to start this congregation for the salvation of our brother Christians". The intention to start more monasteries and convents were his expression of concern for his pastoral and spiritual needs of the people. So the congregation was started not only for the personal sanctification but also for the spiritual welfare of the people and for the service of the Church. The first members of the

congregation combined in themselves a life of prayer and recollection with a mission to work ceaselessly for the spiritual renewal of the Malabar Church.

He also closely worked with the missionary Fr. Leopold for the founding of the congregation for women. With the permission of the then Vicar Apostolic Baccineli Bl. Chavara and Fr. Leopold started the first congregation CMC for women with three members at Koonammavu on February 13, 1866.

These congregations became model of the founding other congregations in the Syro-Malabar Church and they became the instruments of the renewal of the Church. When we examine the history and the motivation of the founders of these congregations one thing we notice which compelled them was the spiritual and the pastoral needs of the Church.

The Pastoral Zeal of Blessed Chavara

As a young priest, Bl. Chavara was a zealous pastor, pasturing to the spiritual needs of those who were entrusted to him, giving sacraments even to those who were suffering from small pox and at the same time working relentlessly for the establishment of a religious community. His pastoral zeal and concern for the spiritual renewal of the people of God found its best expression when the religious community was established. The members of the community went to every nook and corner where ever the Syro-Malabar Community existed, and preached retreats and sermons and renewed the parishes. A wave of spiritual renewal was vibrated all over the Syro-Malabar Church.

Bl. Chavara and his colleagues were aware of their duty to announce the word of God to faithful. It was a time when the Sunday sermons and homilies were almost uncommon in the Malabar Church. It is said that Fr. Porukara was the first to preach homilies regularly in the Church. Not only they preached on Sundays and feast days but they conducted retreats more effectively for the renewal of the Malabar Church. Another result of the preaching was that more young people came forward to

religious life. They also took more interest in the faith formation of children and new converts.

Liturgical Animation

Another field where Bl. Chavara rendered his great service to the Malabar Church was liturgical renewal of the life of the people. Bl. Chavara led a life centered on liturgy. He desired very much that the priests as well as faithful actively participate with devotion in the divine worship. Hence he worked hard to put liturgical practices of the Syro-Malabar Church in an orderly manner.

Service Oriented Activities of Bl. Chavara

Bl. Chavara realized the truth that Church is not just the body of Christ or people of God but also a servant. Jesus the supreme pastor came to this world not to be served but to serve. He asked his disciples to follow the same path. He taught them with example of washing their feet and asked them to continue. The greatest among you must be a servant, a servant of slaves. The service must be rendered to, not only to the chosen one but also to the gentiles, pagans, foreigners, out castes, suppressed, marginalized, sick and afflicted, widows, old and children, to every one irrespective of caste and creed.

The intellectual enlightenment of priests and laity are necessary for the progress of the Christian community. Chavara wished to remove the intellectual blindness of the Christians of Malabar. He realized the importance of education for the development of the society. The Church has always directed her activities for the integral development of a person and she has given the due importance for education. He also realized that it is one of the best means to give faith formation and true Christian education to the children. In 1846 he started a Sanskrit school at Mannanam. He brought revolution in the educational field. He encouraged the dalit students to study in the school. And they were provided mid-day meals. He admitted children of every caste and creed. The famous declaration he made as

the Vicar General, that every parish must start schools under the penalty of interdict. The name pallikoodam owes its name to this incident.

Another means which Bl.Chavara made use for his pastoral end is press and publication. Among the means of communication press is very powerful force. The influence of press and publication in the life of people, for good or evil, there is no need for explanation. Realizing the importance and influence of press and other means of communications bl. Chavara started the St. Joseph's press, the first catholic press at Mannanam. The ingenuity, with which he started, is indeed a testimony to his vision, determination, amazing grasping power and the unshakable belief in the Divine. Numerous prayer books as well as other catholic literature came out to enrich the spiritual life of the Malabar Church. The first Malayalam daily Deepika was also started from this press.

Bl. Chavara and Mission

The history of the early Church is centered round the person of Jesus and his mission. The persons who accepted the discipleship of Jesus, and confessing him as a universal saviour that Christians derived their identity, and not from their belongingness to any particular institution, culture or any geographical boundary. The master is not the one who is dead and gone but a living and continuing his presence. The Christian discipleship is understood in the early church as a participation in the mission of Jesus, as Jesus himself was sent by the Father. The mission of Jesus became the reason to be of the discipleship and the community of disciples. The existence of Church could not be properly explained in any other way. The Church is identified with mission. Without mission there is no reason for Church to exist. Evangelizing is the grace and vocation proper to the Church. By her call and sending the Church is both sacrament and sign for salvation. This mission is continued by the power of Holy Spirit, the promise of Jesus.

Bl. Chavara realized the missionary dimension of his call and so he never limited himself to the boundaries of his parish activities. A priest should possess the heart of a missionary. With bishop he shares the mission entrusted to the Church and should not restrict himself to the administrative office and the narrow parish boundary (Vat. II AG. 39). All the activities, which he had taken up, express the missionary dimension of his life.

The consecrated life, from being mainly preoccupied with a quest of individual salvation within the traditional set up and apostolate to an understanding and practice of the consecrated life as a special and privileged means of evangelization. The persons consecrated by the practice of evangelical counsels can fully work for the evangelization because of their total availability; those of the active life among the religious should consider going beyond the traditional apostolate to more needed and relevant forms of evangelization.

Unlike the communities outside Kerala, the Christian community of Kerala not only managed to survive but also emerged as a leading community in this region. It is rooted in the native soil. The large majority of Kerala Christians consisted of local people and had not been uprooted from their native culture, they continued the same social cultural life as their neighbours belonging to the other faiths. They remain socially integrated to the social cultural milieu of India. If St. Thomas preached the good news he might have initiated simple form of worship that grew in the natural soil of India absorbing from its nourishing elements, and even assimilating good elements from elsewhere. It is most reasonable to presume that St. Thomas Christians after having accepted the faith continued to live the same social cultural, like other native people, with its various aspects – food and dress, hygiene practices, marriage customs, ceremonies connected with dead. In short they are a more incultured community well rooted in the native soil.

Now the Syro-Malabar Church is extended not only to North

India but also abroad. A great number of her children are working as missionaries all over the world. We, the members of the CMI, CMC congregation have taken up this very seriously even before the establishment of Syro-Malabar dioceses out side Kerala. They are working not only in Kerala and outside but also other countries out side India accepting various forms of evangelization other than the traditional one.

Conclusion

As we are celebrating the 200th birthday of our founder it is high time to evaluate our strengths and weaknesses. I would like to ask certain questions for our introspection and self-examination.

1. We are the first indigenous congregations and we should give a lead in the matters of life of people as did by Bl.Chavara. His pastoral zeal and concern for the spiritual renewal of the people of God found its best expression in founding the religious congregations. What active role are we playing today for the renewal of people of God?
2. What are the contextual challenges we are facing in the work of evangelization in different parts of our country? Are we really equipped to face these challenges? And what methodology do we have for the mission of evangelization?
3. Church is identified with mission. The reason for her existence is the mission itself. Every religious vocation is a call for mission. Are our congregations sufficiently conscious of our missionary vocation?
4. Dialogue is evangelization. Bl.Chavara was a dialogue person. What are the steps we have taken to promote dialogue in a multi-religious and pluri-cultural mission context?
5. Kerala Church is incultured and well rooted in the social and cultural soil of the land. What are the steps we are taking to make our church well rooted in the soil of our mission? Do we bring the Kerala soil to mission area to plant the Church?

6. We the religious are committed to Jesus in the Church for the people. How far are we conscious and committed to the building of the local Church? How far are we available for the same?

Bl. Chavara had a deep ecclesial sense. He loved the Church as a son. All his socio-pastoral and spiritual activities had a clear ecclesial orientation. Bl. Chavara did not invent any new methodology for ecclesial service. He was a willing allowed himself to become a perfect instrument in the hands of God. As history unfolds itself, as demanded, as providence lead, he acted and responded being fully available and fully responsive to the will of God and Divine plans.

Today the heirs of Chavara especially the congregations founded by him have to act after his example. We must be ready to set aside our own plans and programs and discern the plan of God. This is possible only through the refined sense of history, reading the signs of the times, listening to the inner voice and responding to the needs of the masses. Otherwise we have no right to exist. Every activity, apostolate, ministry, structure or institution owned, managed or supported by us shall be subjected to a sincere scrutiny so that we discern ultimately the will of God about us. When we line ourselves fully to the plan of God we could also become ecclesial and meaningful, and then we will also be called as history makers like our founder Bl Chavara.

BLESSED CHAVARA: A GREAT MAN WHO WALKED AHEAD OF HIS TIMES

Fr. James, M.L., Bhopal

Blessed Chavaraji wrote, "The tiny yellow flame of a lamp which lasts longer is far better than the momentary bright light of a burning chaff." These writings are true about him a farsighted visionary. He looked ahead of his times and worked accordingly and he shines like a lighthouse even when we are celebrating his 2nd birth centenary. When we look at the number of programmes initiated by Chavaraji we can see how he has revolutionized many fields of life like, religious life, spiritual and ecclesial life and educational and social fields. T.T.Mundackal in his book "*Kudumbha Preshitan Chavarayachan*" rightly writes about Chavaraji "The horizons can be compared to horizons only, ocean to ocean only, similarly Chavaraji can only be compared to Chavaraji"

The pioneering works of Bl.Chavara

Religious Life

Founding of Religious congregations for Men and Women.

Spiritual Renewal

- Made Sunday Homilies compulsory
- Conducted retreats for Priests and laity
- Started way of the cross for the first time in Kerala
- Started 40 hours adoration
- Renewal of Canonical prayers, Liturgy and spiritual exercise.

- Propagated first Friday devotions
- First faith formation center started in 1853, at Mannanam.

Ecclesiastical

- **First Vicar General – 1861.**
- Fight against the schisms
- First Syro Malabar Major Seminary –1833.

Educational and Media Works

- First Catholic Sanskrit School – 1846
- First Catholic Press – 1846.
- **Publication Centre.**
- Each church- one school – 1864
- Mid-day Meal.



Social

- **First Home for the sick and destitute.**
- First Catholic laymen charitable Association in 1869.
- Education for the Dalits.
- Eradication of caste discrimination
- Women Liberation and Empowerment

As the management gurus of modern times say, Bl.Chavaraji believed, "The Thought coming in the human minds, if worked with intense desire, there forth of it will be fulfilled and God will take care of the fourth part." He had big dreams. The church and people were at the epicenter of his dreams, and he worked with intense passion for the renewal of the church and welfare of the people and most of his dreams were fulfilled.

Religious life

The work of Bl.Chavaraji in the foundation of first indigenous congregations for men and women is are of his most important contribution to Indian Church and people. He shared the vision and desire of his Malpans. He writes about the

foundation of the monastery at Mannanam – "All these have been achieved manly by the efforts and the interest of the two priests- Fr.Parukara and our Malpan, Fr.Thomas Palackal. The writer of this, Fr.Kuriakose Elias Chavara from his youth had been of one mind with the Malpan. He had, at the time of his ordination to which he had been led by these two priests, asked God at the first Mass with the Bishop at Arthunkal to bless their efforts and the monastery at Mannanam, which they were trying to establish. Again when I sang the high mass in my parish Chennankari on first Sunday of this last advent (in the year 1829) I prayed for the same intention." (Chronicle-I) He completed the vision of founding the first religious congregation for men and became its first Prior General and continued in the post till his death.

He knew very well the need of a religious congregation for women. "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." (Chronicle of the convent at Koonammavu) He tried to establish a convent, but he had to leave that attempt because of the other needs of the church. "In 1860 the foundation was laid for the convent, east of the cross at Puthanpalli in Verapoly. A thirteen feet wall was being constructed on the four sides of the compound. Then a Syrian Bishop came from Babel defying the orders of the Holy See. Most of the Syrian churches went over to his side. Because of this disturbance the construction was obstructed. After the cessation, by god's grace, of these conflicts, it was felt that considering the spiritual ruin caused by the dearth of good priests, a seminary was more urgent than a convent. So at the site intended for the convent, a seminary was established." (Chronicles of the convent at Koonammavu) Later, together with Fr.Leapold, he founded the CMC congregation.

These were the two streams that revitalized the church and become model for other religious congregations those came later.

Spiritual Renewal

At a time when Malabar Church had a dearth of spiritual leaders and learned priests, he initiated a good manner of programmer for the spiritual renewal of the faithful, which had lasting efforts in the Malabar church. His programmes were aimed at two levels – the renewal of the priests and spiritual nourishment of the people. He believed that-"the ignorance of the priests not only leads to his own destruction but also the destruction of the souls entrusted to him" Because of the lack of an orderly codified book of cononical prayers, many priests were not saying them. He renewed and codified the book of canonical prayers for the priests and also renewed the liturgy and spiritual exercises. As Vicar General he made Sunday homilies compulsory. For the first time in the Malabar Church he conducted retreats for the priests and laity. The devotions started by him still remains vital in the spiritual life of the Malabar Church, like first Friday devotion, way of the cross, 40 hours adoration etc. In 1853, for the first time in Kerala a faith formation center was started at Mannanam.

ECCLESIAICAL

As the first Vicar General of the Malabar Church, in 1866, he was instrumental in saving the Church from the schisms .He realized that to have learned and holy priests there is the need of systematic seminary training. He played an important role in establishment of the fist Syro Malabar Major Seminary in 1833.

SOCIAL APOSTOLATE

Bl. Chavarji believed and wrote that "consider the day in which you did not do any good for others as not counted in your life." Considering the social situations of his times the steps he took for raising the living standards of dalits, educating them and eradicating the caste system are really bold steps. Even 100 years before Gandhiji embraced the low caste people, calling them "Harijan:", Bl.Chavaraji considered them "God's own children" and sternously worked for their upliftment. For their

education he started school at Mánnanam in 1864 and arranged their midday meal from the monastery.

Another praiseworthy initiative of Chavaraji is giving mid-day meal, clothes and books for the poor students of the schools. Many Indian states boast of their programmes of mid day meal that they started towards the end of 20th century. But Chavaraji successfully put it into practice 150 years ago.

The starting of the first orphanage in India and entrusting its administration to laymen's association, helping the poor through "a handful rice" spared from every day meal of Christian families are the initiatives of a socially committed person.

His farsighted vision in all his charitable works are visible in the way he made them self supporting by either making fixed deposits or purchasing paddy fields for those purposes. He made it sure that the good works should not be stopped due to lack of funds.

Women liberation and women empowerment, although terms of later origin, were also his concerns. By founding convents and teaching women handicrafts, Chavaraji was launching a new trend of solving the problems of women folk by women themselves, through empowering and training a group of women who would be highly enlightened to meet all the challenges of women at that time.

EDUCATIONAL APOSTOLATE

Now all over India Catholics are known and praised for their educational activities. Chavaraji sowed its seeds, when as Vicar General he insisted that every church should have one school. He saw that even low caste people and dalits get proper school education and insisted that in the schools run by the church there should not be any sort of caste dissemination. Starting a Sanskrit school by the Catholics was something people could not even imagine at his time. He not only started one at Mannam in 1944 but also instructed that every church should send two students each for studying there.

APOSTOLATE OF MEDIA

The only mass media available at his time was print medium. For the powerful communication of Christian values he thought it essential that the Catholics should have a press, but he had not even seen a press. He writes in chronicles- "from September '44 onwards we were interested in setting up a press for printing books. I went to Kottayam twice to see and learn about the setting up of a press. But I was denied the opportunity. So I went about asking people who were in this field and with that information started the works of constructing a press". Establishing a press was a difficult task and he did not have sufficient financial resources. Even after making a wooden press with local artisans, many more obstacles were on the way. He continues in the Chronicles- "I went and found 10 bundles of paper and a barrel of ink worth more than Rs.40/-. We had money only for half of a barrel of ink and asked for that. But we were told that it was not possible and we could get from else where". He was not defeated by the set backs on the way, but persistently followed his dream and thus established the printing press and the first Catholic publishing house. Thus St. Joseph's press Mannam became the cradle of the Catholic publications in Kerala. Reflections on his educational and media works.

If Kerala is 100 percent literate, Chavaraji and his followers have played an important role in that. But after making the people literate, after enabling the masses to read and write the follower of chavara did not go much forward. Immediately after Chavara the CMIs took bold steps like starting the Deepika and other publications, and were the leaders in Catholic publications. But this trend did not continue for a longer period when the media took a larger scope in the life of the people. It is said about Kerala that the Catholics educated the people and the communists gave them books to read. Later on "Ma" magazines like Manorama, Mangalam, Mahila etc which are known in Malayalam as pynkili Magazines feed the minds of the people. The same thing is happening in North India we educate the

people through our English medium schools and enable the people to read and write through non-formal schools and adult literacy programs. After that what? Who is giving them the reading materials? -The communal forces! The parents of every child take all means to get their children admitted in our best convent schools. The rush to our schools at the time of admission is a proof for this. If we compare the Hindi medium school students and English medium school students we find that the English medium students' reading habit is very low. Our whole attention is on better results and not the holistic development of the students. Even if they wanted to read where are the good books? How many good books we have produced? If we look at the vast number of students we educate the need of good books are great.

If the literacy rate in the north Indian states has increased, it is mainly due to the hard toil of our priests and sisters, who work in the rural areas. In this the contributions and hard work of our missionaries are great. But have we ever checked that after enabling them to read and write what they are reading? Have we ever cared to see that they should be given materials to read. If we look into this matter we find that we have not produced any materials for the neo-literates to read.

If Chavaraji was living now who learned new languages to translate books into Malayalam would say -" I will spend my whole energy and resources to write good books and publish them for our English medium students and the neo literates in the rural areas."

Now take our Christian population in North India. More than 80% of our Catholics are literate in North India, a great contribution of the missionaries. But how many Christian books are available in our North Indian languages. In Hindi our National language and the language spoken in 7 big states, Christian books are bare minimum. We have good theologians and great writers. But most of them write for the priests and

nuns. They are only very few people who write Christian books for the ordinary people.

After starting the press Chavarji did not stop there. His main intention was publication of good books. His literary works most of them were necessitated by the need of the time. There were only a few Tamil books and a few Malayalam manuscripts available. Therefore he himself thought of writing the books.

Without any doubt we can say that poet in him has excelled in his two beautiful works-*Atmanuthapam* and *The Martyrdom of Anasthasia*.

When we study the Malayalam literature at his time "Atmanuthapam" is equal to any other great poetical works in Malayalam. It is no way lesser in literary qualities than Ezhuthachan's *Kilippattu* and Poonthanam's *Jnanappana*. His narrative poem *The Martyrdom of Anasthasia* is the first khandakavyam in Malayalam when this style of poetry is not yet known in Malayalam. The Malayalam literary scholars have considered A.R Rajavarma's *Malayakavyum* as Malayalam's first Khandakavyum, which was written in 1895. 34 years before that Chavaraji wrote the *Martyrdom of Anasthasia*.

But we failed to understand the poetic greatness of Chavara. So we did not present them Malayalam literary circle. So these great works remained in the shelves of our monasteries and convents. These poetic works went unnoticed in the Malayalam literary circles not because these were of lesser quality, but because we failed to appreciate its quality.

Last month Malayalam storywriter Sakaria made a bold statement. He had written many stories criticizing the church and especially in this short story *Knnadi Kanum Vare*, he has presented Jesus in a very different perspective than what we believe. In the interview he was asked that if anyone had written like this about any other religious leaders there would have been a great opposition as it happened with Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*,

but why there was no opposition from the Church. His answer was very straight, " Its because the leaders of the church, the priests and bishops do not read literature and even if they read they do not understand." To a great extend his answer is true. If we take our own case the followers of Chavaraji, how many of us have taken time to read and appreciate the poetic works of Chavara. Years before Bro.Roger the founder of Taize movement lamented, "The poetry and imagination are lost in the catholic church" It is a responsibility on us to bring back poetry and imagination back to the church.

MOTHER MARY, IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF BLESSED CHAVARA

Sr. Ancella, CMC, Bhopal

Introduction

Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara, the founder Father of the CMI-CMC Congregations was a versatile genius, a holy man of vision and a great devotee of Mother Mary. In a world enslaved by illiteracy, casteism, injustice and corruption, he appeared like a rising sun radiating the light of knowledge, wisdom, goodness and godliness. Drawing deeply from the Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist and inspired constantly by the Divine Mother, he considered the Carmelite way of life based on Scripture, prayer, silence and asceticism ideal for personal commitment to God and for loving service and charity to his fellow beings. The Gospel saying, "Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God" (Mt. 5:8), was absolutely true in his case. From his early childhood, he has learnt to 'sit at the school of Mary' to contemplate the beauty on the face of Christ and to experience the depths of His love. The eminence of this man of God is that he revealed to everyone 'the splendour and exuberance that a soul enjoys in communion with God'. He lived his cherished gift of Christian faith in total dedication and ardent devotion to the Lord and His Blessed Mother on the one hand and in deep communion with a selfless service to his fellow human beings on the other hand. Like 'the mansion built upon the mountain', the religious ideology coupled with profound devotion to Mary that he had lifted up on Mannanam hill, has become the leaven fermenting the entire world with the love of Jesus and His

mission in a new and unique manner. Mary was the guiding light and source of inspiration in accomplishing his vision and mission. As a proud son of India, his name has been immortalized for his plenitude of virtue and his multi-faceted roles in life as an illustrious scholar, prolific writer, genuine poet, multi-linguist, efficient organizer, eloquent orator and eminent educator.

Young Kuriakose, The gem of the family

Blessed Chavara was born of Kuriakose and Mariam of a traditional Christian family Chavara in Kainakary on 10th February 1805. A popular song of Kuttanadu describes his parents as the 'most pious': "Kuriakose is born of the most pious parents of that region". The family was so deep rooted in faith that the young Kuriakose learned the primary lessons of prayer from the parents and grew up as a firm believer. Through her sweet lullaby, pleasant manners and intense spirituality, the mother was inculcating in him a sense of interiority. The family is the cradle of spirituality. Sitting by the side of his mother, he listened to the vibrations of the family prayer so devoutly expressing the love of God that paved the way for him to become a man of all virtues. Even from his childhood he had a great zeal and enthusiasm for spiritual matters. He recited with his family members devoutly the night prayer, 'a string of pious words to the Mother of God and to the Christ, King of Kings' (Canto 2: 59-60), and prayers like "Light Eternal, Jesus Christ, save us all", 'Hail, Earth-born Flower, Lord Immortal' (Canto 1: 62-63). Obviously, even as a child Kuriakose was called, made holy and His own by God.

Like Mother, Like Son

When Kuriakose was a baby, his mother took him to the famous Church at Vechoor and consecrated him to the Mother of Christ. It was her desire to bring her loving son up as the Virgin Mary's own son. In 'Athmanuthapam' Blessed Chavara himself describes about the consecration at the Church at Vechoor:

'The Lord of mercy in His great compassion To His blessed Mother did enslave me And while on nectar mother on earth fed me Mary at her feet, kept me safe. My mother prayed on behalf of me: "Accept him as your humble slave To your maternal love, I entrust him My lowly womb's humble, tender fruit". (Canto 2: 1-8) At the ceremony, the Vicar of the Church sprinkled holy water and gave him a fragrant flower in the name of the Blessed Virgin Mary. He told the God-fearing mother that she should nurture the baby boy with care for the child was, then on, not her son, but the servant of Mary. Later Kuriakose writes, " My mother always remembered these words of the Parish Priest and told me about it when I grew older", 'Then, a servant to you Mother Divine Remember it always in your mind'. His mother took special care in the Christian education of her son. Referring to his mother's dedication as well as to his Christian upbringing he writes, 'My loving mother gave me the primary lessons in prayer while breast-feeding me. I imbibed them earnestly she woke me up at midnight, so I might say little prayers to the 'Mother of God' and to 'Jesus the King of Kings'; when I was able to repeat the prayers of petitions, she helped me to recite the prayers addressing Jesus, Mary and Joseph'. It was the practice of his mother to take him to the Church at Vechoor every year on September 8th, on the feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary, to renew the first dedication. 'On the day of grace, September eighth Holding her hand, to Mary's altar I'd go'.

In the shadow of the heavenly mother

After the initial training under the guidance of the Parish Priest of the Church at Chennamkary for one year, Kuriakose left for the Seminary at Pallipuram at the age of 11. It was a heart-rending scene to part with his parents especially his mother at this tender age. But his mother, an exemplary, devoted and courageous woman embraced him in tears and blessed him saying, " Hereafter your mother is the Blessed Mother and she will take care of you". As she was saying this, she was

entrusting the future life of her son into the divine hands of God and Mother Mary. The mother and the son both remembered the words of the Vicar of the Church at Vechoor as a prophecy. The holy hands of the heavenly Virgin Mary protected the young Kuriakose all through out his life. In the seminary he enjoyed his studies and the spiritual exercises like prayer, meditation, liturgy, spiritual reading and rosary. His ultimate goal was to become a priest and so he was steadily advancing in his studies and practice of virtue. He was always at the service of his friends. Soon he became the beloved disciple of his master Fr. Palackal Thomas Malpan and a trustworthy comrade of his classmates. Unfortunately in his serene life in the seminary, he was confronted with a sudden storm and great tribulations of a fiery test. His dear parents and only brother left the world forever. This was a terrible blow to this very sensitive young man. His feelings were like a volcano, ready to erupt at any time. With a heavy heart and intense sorrow he traveled to Kainakary with his uncles. It was like going through the darkest tunnel never ending. On his way back home, he entered the Church at Chennamkary and knelt down before the altar where he had assisted as an altar boy several times in the daily Mass in the past. He lifted his eyes and looked at the statues of Jesus and His Blessed Mother placed on the steps above the altar. He felt that the Blessed Virgin Mother, his true mother was consoling him. His mother's words flashed back in his mind once again: "Hereafter, the Blessed Virgin Mother will be your mother". About this, Bl. Chavara himself wrote in the Chronicle: "When I had to suffer from this great loss, I said 'yes' to the will of God and became a great devotee of Mary, our Mother, surrendering myself to her". He literally followed the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary who said "Behold! The handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to Thy word". It was particularly significant at this time that he chose his life-principle: "The Lord is my portion".

House Arrest

After the Requiem Mass and prayers on the 30th and the 41st days he got ready to go to Seminary at Pallipuram. But his uncles denied him permission and kept him under house arrest. They admonished him saying: "Consider your Seminary life a closed chapter". Kuriakose did not lose heart. He was determined that he would fulfil the promise that he had once made to God by all means. As usual, he sought the help of his heavenly Mother and prayed to her with a burning heart. Because of his fervent prayer and complete trust in the Blessed Virgin Mary, the problem that appeared like a mighty mountain vanished like a melting snow. His uncle Fr. Geevarghese Thoppil intervened and said that if the seminarian wanted to become a priest, it had to be considered as God's will. So with the blessings of his uncles and aunts, young Kuriakose went back to the Seminary once again.

Model to the Classmates

From his early childhood, he had great devotion to the Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist and to Mother Mary. Through his winsome conversations, pleasing nature and ideal life-style he drew his fellow seminarians to the Eucharistic Lord and to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Describing the demeanor and progress of Blessed Kuriakose as a student for priesthood, Fr. Kuriakose Elisha Porukara, the second Prior General of the CMI congregation writes, "He excelled in virtues and intelligence, and spread his goodness around. His companions were very much taken up by his true devotion, noble character, humility, obedience and charity. He was always cheerful and affectionate. He was their model". Devotion to our Blessed Mother was so overwhelming to his soul like fragrance of a flower. It was because of the zeal of his Rector Fr. Thomas Palackal that they started to celebrate the 'Darsana' (vision) feast. They were then known as the prayer group of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. In the routine duties of the members of the Society of the Servants

of Mary Immaculate founded at Mannanamby Bl.Chavara, he has given great importance to the practice of the devotion to Mary. The central part of their devotion was the Rosary. The seminarians recited the rosary three times a day and said the prayers to the Mother of Sorrow, St. Joseph and the Mother of Carmel. Every Sunday afternoon they had celebrated High Mass followed by the rosary. The pious life and the affectionate dealings of the early fathers enamored the faithful from the neighborhood and they came to Mannanam to participate in their prayers. Mannanam was becoming a paradise of Kerala spreading the aroma of holiness everywhere.

Day of the Mary Immaculate

It was on the feast of the Immaculate Conception, on December 8th, 1855 that the solemn profession of the inmates of Mannanam Monastery was held. This Solemn profession of Blessed Chavara Kuriakose and other ten priests was a red – letter day in the history of the Indian Catholic Church. Thousands of people flocked to Church to witness this first event in the history of the Catholic Church. While the profession was going on, Bl.Chavara was wearing a cassock; he was holding a leather belt, the Carmelite scapular to wear inside the cassock and the paper on which was written the formula of the vows. He took the name ‘Kuriakose Elias of the Holy Family’. Incredible was the joy when the ‘Dogma of the Immaculate Conception’ was declared by Pope Pius IX. As a gesture of his happiness and gratitude, he sang a solemn High Mass. He ordered the public solemn chanting of the ‘Te Deum’. That year, the feast of the Immaculate Conception was celebrated with grandeur. He himself conducted the vespers and preached an eloquent sermon on the significance of the Immaculate Conception. Whenever he had to perform an important task, he chose the ‘day of Mary’ or the ‘feast day of Mary’.

Carmelite Third Order

The monastery life known as ‘the Servants of

Mary Immaculate' became the Carmelite 3rd Order in 1861. It was in the General Assembly of the Discalced Carmelite Order held at Rome in 1860 that the Religious Community at Mannanam known as 'the Servants of Mary Immaculate' was affiliated as the Third Order of Discalced Carmelites. Chavara received this good tidings from Archbishop Bernadine of Verapoly in 1861 and it stated that the Indian members of this Order deserved all the special privileges and spiritual benefits granted to the First Order of Discalced Carmelites. Thus, from 1861 onwards the Congregation became the Third Order of Discalced Carmelites. It was under special circumstances that the society of the Servants of Mary Immaculate became the Third Order of the Discalced Carmelites. Bl. Chavara writes about this: "My beloved children, it is with the special grace of God, we are called the dear and loving Carmelite congregation of Mother of God. This is not because of man's design but because of God's plan. The founders of this congregation Fr. Thomas Palackal and Fr. Thomas Porukara desired that the newly founded congregation should follow the rules of the Dominicans. That is why we used the white cassocks. But, seeing our weakness, Blessed Mother herself took the initiative and embraced us lovingly in her congregation". Later the name was changed into Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI)

The Rosary

For Blessed Chavara, the Rosary was the most powerful weapon in life's struggles and vales of sorrow. Simple yet profound, it remains a prayer of great significance destined to bring forth a harvest of holiness. From the time they began the monastic life in Mannanam, the pioneer fathers gave maximum importance to the devotion to the Blessed Mother in their daily timetable. Everyday they recited one or more full Rosary (153 beads prayer). It was Bl. Chavara who reached the devotion to the Rosary to the families. The prominent prayer in every family was the Rosary. He portrayed the Rosary as 'The Bible hanging on a thread', because all the mysteries are based

on Biblical themes. The prayers 'Our Father' and 'Hail Mary' are also taken from the Bible. The Rosary is a Christocentric prayer and there is no other prayer so inspiring and rekindling the human mind with the Word of God than the Rosary. Through the Rosary the faithful receive abundant grace, as though from the very hands of the Mother of the Redeemer.

Carmel in Kerala

Often a humble beginning leads to a marvelous venture. It was only with Rs.18/- that Blessed Chavara founded the first religious congregation for women. It was from the fountain of his God-experience, vision and mission that CMC has drawn its identity, charisma and life-style. Like the mustard seed sown in the Gospels has grown into a huge tree, the CMC has flourished like a lovely garden with more than six thousand committed flowers blossoming all over the world. CMC, the mother and model for all the indigenous congregations in India, was founded in 1866 under the patronage of Mother Mary.

Marian Devotion in the Kerala Church

Mar Thomas Christians are privileged for the special blessings of the Blessed Mother. Kerala Catholic Church is always on the forefront when compared to other Churches in the world. Pope Pius XI in his apostolic letter 'Romani Pontifices' praises the extra-ordinary devotion of the Kerala Christians to Mary. Blessed Chavara played a vital role in nurturing and promoting this Marian devotion. Blessed Chavara believed that the Holy Virgin Mary, who was leading the early Christian Community headed by Peter and the Apostles in times of trials and persecutions, was also with him and his people. So he prayed always and everywhere. In his biography Fr. Leopold says that Blessed Chavara could address the Holy Mother with no other phrase than "My Mother". He could not conclude his speeches without praising her. Bl. Chavara revitalized the Apostolic Church of Kerala through his vigorous priestly ministry and founding various seminaries. T h e

Society of the Servants of Mary Immaculate became a powerful instrument to spread Marian devotion in Kerala. In order to establish effectively this devotion Blessed Chavara started many movements like 'the Confraternity of the Scapular', 'the Confraternity of the Rosary' and 'the Confraternity of Mary Immaculate', 'the Confraternity of Our Lady of Sorrows' and 'the Confraternity for a Happy Death'. Through retreat, meditations, discourses, poems, speeches and sermons the holy name of Mother Mary was honoured and made vibrant everywhere in Kerala. It was his practice to hold discourses on the 8th of September, the feast of the Nativity of Blessed Virgin Mary in the Church of Vechoor. He insisted that the parents should train their children in the various forms of devotion. Attending mass, especially on Saturdays should be, according to him, made a habit in honour of Our Lady Dolours. It was the earnest initiative of Bl. Chavara that novenas and prayers preceding the important feast of Our Lady and the month of May devotion should be observed in our families.

Favours received through Bl. Virgin Mary

Bl. Chavara has recorded in the Chronicle of Mannanam certain conversions through the help of Blessed Virgin Mary and the stories of people who survived dangerous situations. He composed a particular prayer to be used against the schism of Rochos: "Hail to Thee Mary who was born as a Virgin, free from original sin! O Mother, who removed all the dangers the Church confronted, do not disown this Church; let her not be vexed by the new born schism. Shower graces and blessings so that people all over the world be entirely obedient to the Holy Father who has received this authority from St. Peter, Amen".

Chavara considered sufferings as the blessings of Mary. He adopted a psychological approach to show that one should not be disheartened by the increasing number of ailing persons, when he said that the sick and ailing are the treasures of the Church

and that they are kith and kin.

Mary in his Literary Genre

Bl. Chavara was renowned as a poet and a genius in Malayalam Literature. He wrote three major poems, namely 'The Compunction of the Soul' (Athmanuthapam), 'Dirge' (Maranaveetil Padu vanulla Pana) and 'Anastasia's Martyrdom' (Anastasiayude Rakthasakshitwam). The long poem 'Compunction of the Soul' is cast in epic mould. The theme of the poem is the life of Jesus and His beloved Mother, the Virgin Mary. The poem is renowned for its originality and rich personal experience of Blessed Chavara. It reflects the deep sentiments and expressions of an expert poet who gives vent to the spontaneous feelings of his own soul. While narrating the various events in the life of Jesus and Mary he delves deeper into his own life experiences and sheds tears of repentance pondering over the sins and weaknesses of his childhood. He prays to Mother Mary, "O! Mother of agony, purge me of my sins which caused you incomparable anguish, by your prayer to God". Athmanuthapam unfolds a kaleidoscopic view of a great soul with child-like simplicity and total dependence on our Holy Mother and intense devotion to her. The untainted nature of Mary, her position as the Queen of Heaven, her blessed death, her assumption, her glory and her coronation are all elaborated in this work. He pleads to Mother Mary after confessing that he is a sinner who failed to remember the Incarnation of Jesus, His suffering at Bethlehem, His passion and agony on the cross, not to forsake him. Thankless that I am, quite undeserving of your favour Oh! Beauty! Consider me a servant of yours Untainted Mother, you are my shelter forever Alas! I treated you as a stranger, and it is my sin. Blessed Chavara considered the Holy Family as the image of the Holy Trinity. In the Holy Trinity there is a constant 'turning': Father always 'turning' to the Son and the Son 'turning' to the Father through the Holy Spirit. The place of Mother Mary in the Holy Family is a prominent one. Blessed Chavara sees the model

of 'turning', 'seeing' and 'becoming one' in Mother Mary Blessed Chavara's 'seeing' (*Kanakenam*) also takes place in relation to the life of Mary. Canto 3:1 ff The Lord of mercy, the Son of God His glorious splendour, I long to see....

Blessed Chavara presents in a very simple and lovely style the poor and innocent shepherds who come to see Jesus at his birth. The lines describing the Nativity of Jesus is extra-ordinarily beautiful and meaningful. He says that the new born baby that looks like the beautiful red lotus is on the lap of Mary, the pure and white water lily.

As the lotus bloom or water lily rests The Babe reclined on the 'ocean's star' As the baby swan on a lotus bed Him, the 'star of the sea' in her arms cradled. (Canto 6:33-36) The Holy Family is the sacred abode where heaven and earth met together. The inmates of the Holy abode lived together seeing, loving, sharing and respecting one another. Blessed Chavara is fully immersed in the 'turning' of Jesus, Mary and Joseph to one another. Jesus is the center of the Holy Family. Mary's divine call was to gaze at the Divine Word constantly and to live a life centered on the Word. She followed the Word always fulfilling His gracious will and revealing this luminous Word to the whole world that the world may be transformed and illumined by the Divine Word.

Blessed Chavara considers this as his vocation too. That is why he advocates us, his sons and daughters 'to learn the art of loving Jesus Christ, to stay constantly in His presence, to walk along with Him and to converse with Him continuously' (Letters VII/6). He appeals to Mother Mary, "Beloved Mother, watch over me Show Yourself a mother to me" (Canto 5: 79-80)

Bl. Chavara concludes *Athamanuthapam* dedicating his entire life as an offering to Mary.

Bl. Chavara's Mariology is Biblical, Ecclesial and experiential. It is an overflow of his love of God and Mother Mary from his heart. There is a mystical experience in it. In short, his story becomes the story of Mother Mary; Mary's experience becomes his own. That is why he says, "If I get a share of your

suffering, everything is fine for me" (Canto 7:161-164). This process is accomplished in 'Kanakanam' (I long to see Jesus with my inner eyes). Blessed Chavara's Mariology is flowering through this "*Kanakanam*". An honest compilation of Bl.Chavara's references of Mary in his poems, retreats, sermons, Nalagamam and other writings would be a great treasure for Malayalam Literature on Mariology.

Devoted son of Mary

Bl.Chavara had great trust and confidence in the mediation of the loving Mother, Queen of Heaven. He used to tell the sisters also about it. In his Diary he wrote: "When my spiritual Father Fr.Leopold and I were in great distress, we asked the sisters to pray 3 'Hail Holy Queen' and 3 'Remember...' Mother Mary turned the dreadful problem into a lovely flower". Towards the end of his life, his attachment to Mother Mary was intensified and he surrendered himself totally to the Blessed Virgin Mother. The Slave-Mother relationship was transformed into a Son-Mother relationship. He constantly fixed his gaze on the portrait of the Holy Family by the side of his cot, and contemplated on the mysteries of God. Here-dedicated the Congregation and its members to the Holy Family and besought the inmates to let the Holy Family reign over their hearts. He prayed to Mary for a happy death: "Redeem me Mother, with a peaceful death". He pleaded with Mary to conceal him under the mantle of Her Maternal protection to resist the cursed judgment and bitter punishment that awaited the sinners. Moments before his death, he humbly professed in profound gratitude to God that he could keep his Baptismal innocence intact.

Conclusion

Blessed Chavara was a man of amazing grace, a man filled with the Holy Spirit. He lives in the minds and hearts of people like a luminous star emanating the splendid love of the Divine Mother for her children. His very life was a testimony to the Christian motto: 'To Jesus through Mary'. His words were so winning and captivating that no one left him without being

inflamed with a deep devotion to Mary. As we read in the Gospel of Mt 5/15-16, he was like 'lighted lamp' raised on a lamp-stand that the gooddeeds accomplished by him are shining before people that every one gives praise to our Father in heaven. Blessed Chavara's Marian devotion is like a brilliant guiding light in the path of progress and perfection in spirituality not only for the Kerala Catholic Church but also for the entire humanity today, tomorrow and till the end of times.

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HISTORY OF ROCCOS SCHISM (contd)

Fr. Lucas Vithuvattical CMI

Bishop Roccas refuses to see Fr. Kuriakose Avira Tharakan, agreeing to my proposal, went to consult Bishop Mar Thoma, Fr. Antony Thondanatt and others. He came out and reported to me what they said, namely that we need not wait to see Mar Thoma, as we had come only to insult him, that the letters he had, were already known to us as exactly as if we had seen them, that there was nothing else to be shown to us, and that there was no need of writing to Rome.

Attempt to arrest the Prior and his group

So we left and while getting into the country boat a police corporal and a few constables approached those on the bank, and enquired why they had come there. They prudently replied that they had come to see Bishop Mar Thoma and then got into the boat.

Fr. Chavara writes to the Pope

As soon as Fr. Chavara with the group returned home, Chavara decided to write to the Pope directly to know the details regarding bishop Roccas who was exercising ecclesiastical jurisdiction in Malabar. He wrote the letter in Syriac¹.

To the Eminent and exalted Throne of His Holiness Pope Pius IX, who holds the key of St. Peter, who was assured that the gates of hell shall not prevail over and wields the supreme authority over the entire Church of Christ.

A few humble priests, members of the Discalced Carmelite Congregation of the Immaculate conception, weaklings in their faith and charity, along with their Prior, Kuriakose Elias, now

under the jurisdiction of the Most Rev. Archbishop Bernardine, Vicar Apostolic of Malabar, kneeling in spirit before your august presence and kissing the sacred feet, submit the following matter for your consideration:

On May 9, 1861, a Bishop, Thomas Roccas by name, came to us under the orders of Joseph Audo, the Patriarch of Babylon. He was accompanied by a priest, named Anthony, who had gone to Mossul from here (Malabar).

The bishop preaches to the entire community of the faithful, claiming that he was sent by the Patriarch with the instruction to govern the Chaldean Christians of Malabar with the permission and orders of the Pope's wish. But Archbishop Bernardine our Vicar Apostolic, has clearly stated in his pastoral letter as follows: "The Patriarch has sent the above mentioned bishop on his own wish, contrary to your wish and order. So anyone who receives holy Orders, or authority at his hands, and one who confers such authority will automatically stand expelled from the Church".

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

Lastly, kneeling before your august throne and kissing your

sacred feet, we pray, bestow on us your paternal blessing in abundance, so that we can obey you and conduct ourselves as your faithful sons.

Grant us your blessing in plenty, on all our parishes, our mother-land and on all those who live here. We are living here subject to authorities who hold other faiths.

Mannanam Monastery

June 19, 1861

(sd.)

Kuriakose Elias, Prior

*(Twelve other priests of the Carmelite
Congregation have put their signatures
to the letter)*

**Holy Father, please send us a reply as early as possible in our Chaldean tongue².*

Chavara writes also to the Prefect of the Propaganda Congregation

On the same Chavara with his confreres wrote also to the Prefect of Congregation of the Propoganda. The contents being the same, we don't quote the letter here. A month later, on July 22, he wrote again to the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation explaining the critical situation brought about by the intrusion of Bishop Thomas Roccas and also referring to certain problems in the Vicariate Apostolic.. The letter written in Syriac is preserved in the archiuves of the sacred Congregation for the Oriental Churches³. We quote the letter here below:

To His Eminence Alexander Cardinal Barnabo, Prefect pf the Congregation for the propagation of faith.

Your humble son, Kuriakose Elias, Prior of the Third Order of Carmelites of the Immaculate Conception with a few of his confreres under the jurisdiction of Archbishop Bernardine, the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly, kissing your revered hands and begging your Apostolic blessings, we beg leave to inform you

sacred feet, we pray, bestow on us your paternal blessing in abundance, so that we can obey you and conduct ourselves as your faithful sons.

Grant us your blessing in plenty, on all our parishes, our mother-land and on all those who live here. We are living here subject to authorities who hold other faiths.

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with sad and heavy hearts some of the things that are happening in our midst in recent times.

Joseph Audo, the Patriarch of Babylon, has sent to us a Bishop, by name Thomas Roccas. He is preaching to the Christians here that he was sent by the above mentioned Patriarch, as directed by His Holiness Pope Pius IX, to shepherd this Church. The faithful and even the priests fully believe what he says. They have already been complaining that the commands of the Archbishop Bernardine were very heavy and hard to bear.

Your Eminence, we feel that within a couple of months all will follow his footsteps, if yourself or His Holiness the Pope does not did not pronounce interdict on him forthwith. Even those whom we had considered to be very staunch in their faith have gradually slipped away from the truth. Therefore, with lamentations, sighs and tears, we beseech you to inform us without delay the real truth of these matters and that too in our Caldean Syriac language, so that our priests could read and understand for themselves in their own tongue.

Lastly we inform you of one more fact. For quite for some time now, our laity and priests have been alienating themselves from the Archbishop. The reason for this alienation, according to them, is that his orders were harsh to accept and his directives were excessive. But, in truth, he is carrying out his duties here with genuine zeal and a great sense of justice. But because of the weakness of their faith and lack of charity our faithful and our priests fail to understand this. Hence, in all sincerity we tell you that unless another Bishop, say Bishop Carlos, the Vicar Apostolic of Quilon, or someone else whom you consider worthy comes here at this juncture, those who have followed the footsteps of the above-mentioned Caldean Bishop will not be converted. They will not come back to the bosom of the Church. Even if this Bishop is put under interdict, we feel it won't make any difference.

Your Eminence should not misunderstand us that this

request comes from our prejudice against the Caldeans. For, we were aware from the very beginning that the administration by the Caldeans would not benefit us. True, they will be glad to rule us always. But their association with the schismatic Jacobites who live in our midst, causes scandal to our faith. We are opening our hearts and informing you of the situation to invite your careful attention on our souls, on our churches and our monasteries, for we are weak in faith and imperfect in charity.

We beseech you to shower your paternal blessing on our land and to pray to God that he may not forsake us. We are sure that God will not forsake those who pray to Him sincerely and with a pure conscience.

Mannanam Monastery

22nd July 1861

Fr. Kuriakose Elias, Prior.

Roccas visits the churches and ordains priests

Mar Thoma proceeded to gain the support of more churches, to exonerate those who had been punished reasonably, and to cancel the suspensions imposed on priests, to grant faculty to hear confessions to those from whom it had been withheld, to permit some priests to say Mass in their parish churches which they had been prohibited to do, and to ordain deacons including those who had been denied ordination and were about to be expelled from the seminary. To make sure of all these he convened a meeting of all those gathered there at Thaikattussery on 28th August and made the official visitation of that churches. The churches were asked to remit to Parayil the income of the churches deducing the expenses, in four instalments. It was decided and recorded that the documents of the properties of the southern and northern monasteries⁴ were to be kept in the respective monasteries, and that Archbishop Mar Thoma should reside in the two monasteries for six months each. On Saturday 5th October he set out from Thaikattussery on a visit to Vadayar and stayed there for four days.

The manner of ordination in the Chaldaean Rite

Bishop Mar Thoma reached Kaduthuruthy and stayed there for the purpose of ordination. He gave the minor orders on Thursday 10th October; subdiaconate and diaconate on Friday 20th and Saturday 21st, respectively and the priestly ordination on Sunday 22nd. These were given according to the manner of the Caldeans and not according to that of the Latins. One important difference is noted here. Those who were to be ordained did not kneel, but stood with lighted candles in the hands on either side of the bishop and said Mass. The bishop wore an outer vestment over the chasuble and the archdeacon wore the latter only. The bishop anointed the hands and the forehead with the holy oil and then covered them up. Those ordained stood on both sides of the Bishop and the four together said Mass. The Bishop, after receiving one of the consecrated wafers, and took the other four, divided them, turned to the right and gave to those on the right, and then turned to the left and gave to those on the left. Then he drank the sacred wine, and those ordained drank from the same chalice. After the Mass, taking up the cross and the flag, they went round the church and then took off the covering on the hands and the forehead and washed them in the sacred font.

Roccas' letter to the Prior, and Notice against the monasteries

As we, the monasteries did not acknowledge the Bishop Mar Thoma Roccas, he wrote a letter full of abuses to the Prior of the monasteries.

Here below is a free English translation of the letter in Syriac: "*Thoma, by the grace of God Metropolitan and Visitor of the Caldeans in Malabar, to Fr. Kuriakose, Prior of the Monastery, Mannanam:*

Let it be known that we have come to know of your ingenious letter which you wrote to the churches⁵. For you have depicted us in that letter as wolf which disperses the sheep and destroys the sheepfold. Besides, you have made yourself Simon the

magician. For, you have gone to bishop Bernardine and obtained for you the title of 'cor-episcopus'⁶. He gave you a false promise to consecrate you bishop of Malabar. You are going round the churches and towns preaching lies. For, you say "I have gone to bishop Thoma; he has no patent letters, neither from the Pope, nor from anyone else". Oh, you liar, you deceiver! When did you speak with me in order to know that I have no credential letters. Oh! You Idiot, who lacks proper intelligence. Oh you useless man! Why do you preach lies? Not being content with these, you also preach in the churches that you know Bishop Thoma is a schismatic, excommunicated and suspended. Oh! You fool and a miserable man, and hard of heart, ambitious to be bishop. How did you know that I am a schismatic? that I am excommunicated? Have you received any letter either from the Pope, or from the sacred Congregation, or from our Patriarch in which it is announced that I am a schismatic or that I am excommunicated? Perhaps you may say that Bishop Bernardine told you so. Will you believe if Bishop Bernardine told you that there are five Gods? Bernardine is not God, nor is he our Pope. Oh, you fool, cut off part your tongue. Then this confusion will be over. You go back to your monastery and there you preach your doctrine.

If you disobey me I will inflict on you punishments both spiritual and bodily, in proportion to your audacity. Perhaps I may even dismiss you from the monastery. Stop your malicious activity, by which you impede the people from coming to me, threatening them of excommunication. May you know that you are acting against the orders of the king and of the civil authority. Know at least now of this.

Enough for the time being. Mar Thoma Roccas (sd.)

Written on 24th of June, 1861

Later on, a notice too was published in the churches: "As the Prior and the inmates of the monastery have insulted us and our Father the Patriarch, who has sent us, they are now in spiritual danger. As it is our duty to inform you of this so that

you may not fall into eternal perdition by lending your ears to their evil counsel". Because of this notice, and because some churches have given their submission to him, many turned against us. Among them were two priests and some deacons who had grown up drinking the spiritual milk of the word of God from our Monastery and Seminary. From them, as well as from the Jacobites and the Protestants, we had to suffer much humiliation and oppression. They threatened to force us out of our Monastery and install Mar Thoma there. Therefore, from July onwards we had sent four letters, one after the other to the Pope and to Propaganda. But, we have not received any reply.

The Prior receives a letter from Propaganda

Then on 7th November a letter reached the archbishop of Verapoly, in the 4th paragraph of which the following was said about our letter. *"Received the letter sent by the Syro-Malabar priests, like Kuriakose Elia, Alexander, John, Jacob etc. to the Pope. In that, they submit that a bishop has come from Baghdad. They requested to be informed whether he has been sent by His Holiness and if they should submit to him. The said letter has been sent to us for translation, which will be handed over to the Pope by tomorrow evening".* What we, in the meantime inform all concerned, is that His Holiness the Pope has not approved the sending of the aforesaid bishop to Malabar. In fact His Holiness has specifically prohibited the Patriarch of Babel from sending that bishop or anyone else to Malabar. Besides, he had been told several times not to consecrate this, or any other bishop without the knowledge of the Delegate Apostolic. The Delegate Apostolic has not permitted, but, on the contrary, had prohibited this consecration and interference in any form, in the affairs of the Syro-Malabar Church. The Patriarch has been summoned to Rome to know how this happened and he is now here. But, what that bishop is, in spite of the prohibition, doing there without authority will hinder us from reaching any conclusion here. Therefore you are requested to inform these priests of the truth, to assure them that they would get a separate

reply and to use this letter to induce and strengthen them and others who are worthy to stand fast. (From Propaganda, on 21st September 1861, Cardinal Alexander Barnabo)

The letter from the Propaganda fails to convince the rebels

When Mar Thoma, in his abusive letter to the Prior had asked whether they had received any letter from the Pope or Propaganda saying that he had been indicted, we sent copy of this letter to him and to Avira Parayil. But they did not admit the truth. On the other hand they claimed that the Patriarch, now in Rome, would get the consecration approved. They also produced copies of several letters from Bishop Thariosa and the Patriarch himself- none original or bearing signature. These said that the Patriarch was received on arrival by all the Cardinals, conveyed him in the Pope's own chariot and settled him very close to the Pope's palace; the letters from Mar Thoma's adversaries here had reached Rome, but would get no reply, and the Patriarch himself was about to be sent by the Pope to Malabar to settle the controversy here etc.

On 22nd November, on receiving a letter from the Pope, the archbishop summoned the Prior to Verapoly. There were: 1) a sealed letter in Latin to the Archbishop, 2) a sealed letter to me, replying to my letter, and 3) between the two, a letter bearing the papal seal, addressed to Mar Thoma written by the Patriarch on the order of the Pope. The Archbishop, after taking a copy of the third letter, sent it to Mar Thoma by post with a covering letter in Syriac.

Peshkar's prohibition against Roccas

After giving all these letters and sending them to him, we succeeded in getting an order from the Peshkar prohibiting Mar Thoma from visiting the churches where the people were of rival groups⁷. Mar Thoma continued his visits. But he did not go farther than Punnathura.

Roccas' reaction to the Patriarch's letter

While returning from Punnathura he received the letters,

and on reaching Thaikattussery, he read them. After reading the Patriarch's letter, it is heard that he said: "I must now go, as the Patriarch has written". However he proceeded to Cochin and there, it was reported to us that he was persuaded to remain by Kurillos Bava⁸ whom Avira Ayyanattu and Ittira Nidhirikal had brought in there. After sending letters to the churches, summoning the representatives to assemble at Gnarakal he went on to visit Ollur.

The meeting at Gnarakal

We thought that these reported rumours were true, but God did not let this visit to happen. The Catholics in the Northern churches presented a petition to the Dewan mentioning the Peshkar's order and the Dewan gave a similar order. So he did not go to Ollur as there, Kallukaran and others were still Catholics, nor to Aranattukara as Tharakan etc remained Catholics. He went to Trichur and returned to the assembly at Gnarakal. Mar Thoma declared that as the seal and the paper looked different he did not think that the letter was truly that of the Patriarch and so he would not leave. The people from the churches who were assembled inside the Gnarakal church resolved that they would not let the Bishop leave. An agreement to this effect was signed and letters were written to Rome and to the Patriarch. A committee of 12 members including priests and laymen was formed to function as consultants and advocates in furtherance of this purpose. In the committee were Nidhiri, Kirankari, Thevaraparamban, Fr. Nidhirikal and Fr. Stephen Tharayil from the Southern region and from the Northern region Kunjupaily, Palackal of Kanjoor, Chakoru Kalliyath of Ollur and Avira Tharakan Parayil of Ayyanattu were selected to collect money and canvass support. All these were recorded.

Mar Thoma Roccas excommunicated

As Mar Thoma Roccas continued even after receiving the Archbishop's letter to visit churches and to give confirmation etc. in defiance of the orders of the Pope, the Archbishop

excommunicated him absolutely during a prescribed ceremony. Twelve priests wearing sleeveless surplices and stolls and holding twelve big candles with the Archbishop wearing cope, mitre and holding the crozier and a lighted candle at the centre, entered the church. As the bell was being tolled, the Archbishop blew out the candle and laid it down after readings and prayers. The priests too blew out their candles and laid them down and treading on them went out of the church in the order in which they had come in.

The sentence of excommunication: *"By the mandate of the Omnipotent Father, Son and the Holy Spirit and of the first of the Apostles, St. Peter and all the Saints, and in the name of the now-reigning Pope Pius IX, who has been granted the power to bind and loose in heaven and on earth and on the authority vested in us, we cut him off from the community of the recipients of the precious Body and Blood of Jesus Christ and from the union of all the Christians, declare him excommunicated and accursed and expel him from the bounds of the Church in heaven and on earth"*.

As we have surrendered him to the devil for the destruction of the flesh until he repents, turns to the right path recognizing the devils' traps, and repairs the harm he has done in God's Church, so that his soul be saved on the day of judgement, we sentence him to eternal fire with the devil and his cohorts and all the inmates of hell".

This, on the 28th of December, 1861, Fr. Bernardine of St. Theresa, Archbishop, Vicar Apostolic.

The Order of Excommunication sent to Roccas

It was so published and the Order was sent to Gnarackal through Rev. Fr. Mathai Mariam Kapil, Vicar of the monastery of Koonammavu. He was met there by Fr. Antony and some people from a few churches. Fr. Antony said that Mar Thoma had no time to see him and received the letter himself. On reading the letter and finding it to be the Order of excommunication, he tried to hand it back

Reaction to the Order of Excommunication

But Fr. Kapil refused to take it back, saying that it was for the Archbishop Thoma, and came back. They sent after him some ruffians to insult him. As he fled through the town to escape from them, one man like Loth⁹ drew him inside his house and closed the door. He was a Catholic and refused to send him out in spite of the pressure from the rebels. He kept the priest in his house until it was safe and then sent him back to Koonammavu, escorted by a few men from the nearby Latin filial church at Vattayil. Then Parayil and a few others from the churches got together and wrote a letter to the Archbishop(Thoma), saying that they were writing to Rome and to the Patriarch and never again approach Verapoly. Mar Thoma himself wrote that he very much doubted whether the letter said to have been written by the Patriarch, had been really written by him and that the people from the churches were not letting him leave. He requested that the excommunication be withdrawn and warned that if the excommunication was caused out of jealousy, they would themselves have to regret it.

Bishop Roccas goes on visiting the churches

After sending that letter he continued his visits again. He ordained all the youngsters who had accompanied Fr. Antony earlier to Baghdad, except one from Vaikom. Thus he went about without accepting the excommunication declared by this great Church. For two months he showed no sign of repentance and reached Malayattoor. There he got a letter from Baghdad. We do not know what that letter contained, as it was kept secret. But it was heard that it was from the Patriarch calling him back to Baghdad. According to reports, he got ill, tried to bleed himself. But as the bleeding did not stop, he was rushed to a European doctor at Cochin, where he stayed for some time. However he sent a letter from there to Verapoly.

Roccas sends a letter to Verapoly

This letter was sent through the missionary Apostolic Fr.

Cherubin of Kottayil church to Verapoly. At the request of Avira Aranattukara, our Archbishop sent Fr. Mathew Naganooly to call back the Prior who had gone to meet Tharakan Aranattukara and others. Fr Mathew caught up with him at Pallipuram and came together to Verapoly where he was shown the letter. The letter translated by Fr. Marceline was read by our Archbishop. Here below is a free translation of the Syriac letter:

"To our dear Brother Bernardine, Vicar Apostolic of Malabar: May Your Fraternity know, that already from Gnarackal I had written a letter. I regret that until now I have not received any reply to that. In that letter I had informed you in writing, that I am obedient to the Pope and to my Patriarch all through my life, as I am even today. Because of this I would have already gone back. But I had not the opportunity. On the other hand, the people were not permitting me to go back. However, now I have managed to come secretly to Cochin, and I declare to you publicly that I will go back. But I am sure that they will plot by all means to impede my going back; they may also use the influence of others to achieve their goal; they may also influence the Government to impede my going away. I also fear that they may not meet the expense of the voyage. I also heard that I am excommunicated and put under censure. Alas! May this not have happened! lest my journey become more difficult. If all that I have said are fulfilled, surely I will go. The Rev. Father who brings this letter to you will explain to you the rest. May this letter be considered confidential, so that no one else may know of this. Otherwise they may impede my journey. All what I have narrated are from my heart to Your Fraternity.

With my greetings, February 20, 1862.

Mar Thoma, Metropolita, Visitor of the Caldean Church in Malabar.(sd.)

Reply to Roccas from Verapoly

His Grace expressed the fear that if this request is not considered, His Holiness being informed may be displeased with

us. So His Grace wanted to give all reasonable and possible help. Though the excommunication pronounced formally and solemnly can be removed only in a similar way, it can be revoked privately and conditionally if circumstances needed it, on the basis of a solemn assurance. His Grace promised to revoke the excommunication immediately on request, taking into consideration the bishop's illness and the long journey he would have to undertake. The request should be accompanied by an admission that he had done all these without sanction or authorization from the Pope, his expression of regret, and his assurance that he would submit all this to the Pope as soon as he reaches his native place. He will have to accept and perform the penance which His Holiness would impose on him. This promise was to be conveyed by me and by Fr. Geevarghese John¹⁰ together with the assurance that the expenses up to Bombay would be paid in advance to the captain of the steamship, and that Fr. Philip would be sent to the Vicar Apostolic of Bombay with a request by the Archbishop to make arrangements for his journey from Bombay to Baghdad. I was granted the faculty to hear his confession and to withdraw the excommunication if he accepted this offer.

The Prior contacts Mar Roccas

We reached Cochin, went to the Fort and conveyed all these to the Bishop. He said that immediately, on being intimated of the Pope's order that he would be excommunicated if he did not go back, he answered that he had decided to go in obedience to it. But as the people would not part with him, he was forced to remain. So he did not deserve excommunication. He would not sign the undertaking and the requirements demanded of him, and they need not revoke the excommunication. He had come not on the order of the Pope, but of the Patriarch, not to stay and administer, but only to enquire and leave. And this he would solemnly declare in writing and he would leave, if the Archbishop of Verapoly would be kind enough to provide money for the journey.

As he requested the Prior to use his good offices to get his petition accepted by the Archbishop, the Prior at once went to Verapoly. The Archbishop generously conceded the request. The Prior again returned to Cochin and the Bishop Roccas was glad to hear that his request was granted.

Suit filed against Roccas to prevent him from leaving

In the meantime he met the Jacobite Bishop Kurillos. The latter arranged with him to come and stay at Chavakad. He sent for his boxes and other things to be brought there from Thaikattussery. So the plan for the journey cooled off. This was intimated to the Archbishop. On hearing that the steam-ship had come, the Archbishop asked me to tell the Bishop that if the latter leaves by this ship, he would give the promised help, but if otherwise, he would not. The Prior was asked to remain at the Fort till the steam-ship left. I did so. The next day the box was brought from Thaikattusery. With it came four lawyers: Nidhiri, Kirangari, Parayka and Ammeel and representatives of a few churches and the two Parayils. To them the bishop declared that he would come out from the residence only to go into the steam-ship. Thus he did, because he had the box now with him and also because he knew that he would get no help from Verapoly unless he went by this ship. They now consulted together and got the lawyers to prepare a petition against the Bishop. In it they claimed that as the Bishop had promised that he would stay here and perform religious services for them and had persuaded them to spend on his behalf Rs. 5,000/ he should either stay here and perform religious services for them, or return the money. They wrote this petition as was the practice in the court, on stamp paper, worth Rs. 150. and filed it before the Judge. The Bishop sent Mar Kurillos to the Judge, who said that he could, on the assurance of Mar Kurillos, go. He made also the arrangements for the journey in secret. At the same time, through Kurillos he gave a promise to Parayil and others that he would remain till October unless another order came from the Patriarch.

Roccas' supporters turn away from him

Feeling that the Bishop was departing from them in October, they accepted the offer of Fr. Antony to go to Babel and fetch Michael¹¹ before October. Parayil and others gave Fr. Antony Rs. 1000, and he accompanied by deacon Poondikulath and another deacon from Pulincunnu who had earlier travelled to and back from Babel, boarded the ship at 10 am., on Tuesday.

The Prior sends back Mar Roccas

In the afternoon Bishop Roccas was conversing with priests like Pallissery, vicar of Ollur, Fr. Mani vicar of Trichur, Fr. Kudilunkal etc. When the clock struck four, he stood up and stepped out of the room. Some Latin Catholics present there entered his room, picked up his boxes etc. and accompanied him to the ship, which soon after he boarded set sail. This voyage was to bring another misery¹²

Though Bishop Mar Roccas was repatriated, of the 155 parish churches of the Syro-Malabar Church, then existing, 86 churches had fully accepted the jurisdiction of bishop Roccas separating themselves from the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly and other 30 churches had partially accepted Roccas. All these parishes had to be brought back to catholic communion. This was really a herculian task. One by one Bl.Chavara brought back all the separated churches to full catholic communion within two years. But each church has a story of its own. Bl. Chavara describes just one of them in the chronicles, the case of the parish church of Muttuchira.

Bl. Chavara continues in the chronicle:

After this, the churches, one by one, turned away from the schismatic group and submitted to Archbishop. The first of these were Kaduthuruthy and Muttuchira. At Muttuchira Fr. Thomas Murickan and Fr. Mathew Kuzhiveli were with the Roccas group from the beginning. Fr. Mannamcherry kept moving from one side to the other. Fr. Parambil was on our side. On the very day of the publication of the Edict in October, Chacko Murickan

had got his son ordained by bishop Roccas. Later, but before the Bishop's departure, on knowing that they all had turned back from the schism, the Prior went to Muttuchira on the persistent request of the confraternity there, for the feast of Epiphany they were celebrating. Koki, the Ayurvedic doctor's son had married from the schismatic group and so his relations the Kaithalayakaran and the powerful Thevaruparambans were in the schismatic group. These assembled in the old church on the pretext of celebrating the feast. These stood bent on confrontation. Conveniently for them, a dead body was brought to the church for burial. Some policemen under a corporal arrived. The prior observing that the affair was taking a violent turn, fled to Kaduthuruthy in the hot sun. Thus a scuffle and police interference were averted.

Those who were in the Roccas group come back

From Kaduthuruthy the Prior sent a letter to the schismatic vicar of Muttuchira. Two days after the Prior had reached Mannanam monastery, the former came there and reconciled himself with the Church. From that time one after the other, they all came back. The people of the new church of Lalam remained obstinate to the last. But they also came back before their feast of St. Xavier, on the 3rd of December. However, the people of Athirampuzha who were our neighbours and disciples still stood steadfast in this evil, like a rock in the middle of the sea. Their stony hearts were unmoved even though they had seen and heard of these conversions and retractions. May God give them the grace to return. All the men of Thaikkattuseril, except Avira Ayyanatt (senior) who often waver and look across to us and then mindful of his displeasure, turn their eyes away.

(Footnotes)

¹ However, the original Syriac letter is not found in the Vatican archives. Only an Italian translation is found there. The name of the translator too is recorded the translation: Fr. Joseph Gurriel

² Cf. Gen. 19,1-11

¹⁰ Geevarghese John (name in Religion) is Vakey Parapuram cmi

¹¹ Another bishop consecrated in Babel

¹² Here the author refers to Fr. Antony Thondanatt who travelled in the same ship with Mar Roccas, later returned to Malabar being consecrated by the Nestorian Patriarch under the name Antony Mar Abediso and tried to continue the faction formed by Mar Roccas.

THE MORTAL REMAINS OF BL. KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA

Fr. Lucas Vithuvattical CMI

Kuriakose Elias Chavara died at the St.Philomena's monastery, Koonammavu on 3rd January 1871, in the morning at 7.15, and on the next day he was buried in St.Philomena's church, in front of the sanctuary.

In 1889, consequent to the separation of the Syro-Malabarians from the Latin community of the Vicariate apostolic of Verapoly, and in accordance with the decision of the Delegate apostolic of India Mons. Andraea Aiuti, the St. Philomena's monastery and the annexed church had to be vacated in favour of the Vicariate apostolic of Verapoly. Thus, the CMI community bade farewell to the St.Philommena's monastery in February 1889. This monastery was unconditionally donated by Mons.Bernardine, the Vicar apostolic of Verapoly to Fr.Kuriakose Elias Chavara for the CMI congregation in August 1857, and was in the possession of the CMI congregation for 32 years. During the period, the CMI members had developed the institute with an annexed printing press etc. As they vacated the monastery, they moved to a temporary shed built in the compound of St.Theresa's convent, called Thondiparampu.

In this situation an extraordinary general chapter of the congregation was held at the St.Joseph Monastery, Mannanam in February 1889. The general chapter took the decision to have the mortal remains of Kuriakose Elias Chavara transferred from St.Philomena's church to the St.Joseph monastery chapel Mannanam. The chapter constituted also a commission consisting of Fr.Geevarghese Yohannann¹ (Fr.Varkey

Parapuram), prior of the S.H.Monastrery Chethipuzha, Fr.Joseph Augustine Thopil (Fr.Chandapilla²), and Fr.Ouseph Yohannan, the former prior of St.Philomena's monastery Koonammavu.

Accordingly, these fathers met the Archbishop Leonard Melano, Vicar apostolic of Verapoly and informed him of the decision. With his permission the Rev.fathers went to the St. Philomena's church, Koonammavu, and having closed the doors of the church began to open the tomb. By this time false rumours spread among the local people, who within a short time flocked in the compound of the church and created much disturbance outside the church saying that the Syrian fathers are demolishing the church as they are taking leave of the monastery, so much so that the fathers had to stop their attempts for the time being to open the tomb. Regarding this Fr.Varkey Parapuram records in the chronicle:

"As the Mortal remains of our father Prior were in St.Philomena's church Koonammavu, there was a common desire expressed by all even before taking leave of the institute at Koonammavu, that the mortal remains of our beloved prior should be carried with us to Mannanam. The Archbishop too had agreed to this. Fr.Hilarion Tharavattath, the vicar of the church of North Paravoor too came to our help. Along with him we consulted also the fathers who were there in the monastery. All said that there won't be any difficulty to open the tomb and to take out the mortal remains, and so we closed the doors of the church and tried to open the tomb. Hearing the noise of opening the tomb using the spade etc., within a short time a large crowd filled the compound of the church, and without understanding the truth of the matter began making disturbances outside the church and spreading a false news that in the coffin of the Fr.Prior there is a zink plate, on which are inscribed the details regarding the Prior. Fathers are opening the tomb in order to take out this zink plate in order to give new arguments that the church and the monastery belong to the Syrians. There were others who guessed differently. The tumult

outside grew to such an extent that we feared that the people would break open the doors and windows of the church and of the monastery. Consequently we stopped for the time being our efforts to open the tomb. Fr. Hilarion mentioned above immediately went outside the church and informed the people of the real facts and thus peace was restored and the people became quiet"³.

Subsequently the CMI fathers appealed to the Delegate apostolic Archbishop Andaea Aiuti, who during this period, was also the Superior General of the CMI congregation. Immediately he gave orders to the Vicar apostolic of Verapoly and to Fr.Philip OCD, the Vicar General, who was in charge of the church and the monastery, to help the fathers taking leave of the monastery and the church, to exhume the tomb of Fr.Kuriakose Elias Chavara and to take with them the mortal remains.

But the regretful fact is that Fr.Philip did not take any interest to carry out the orders of the Delegate apostolic. It won't be an exaggeration even if we say that he was purposefully delaying the matter giving false excuses.

In accordance with the decree of the Delegate apostolic the inmates of the St.Philomena's monastery vacated the monastery on the fixed date and settled in the temporary shed in the compound of St.Theresa's convent Koonammavu, called Thondiparampu. Fr.Varkey Parapuram and others staying in the above shed were continuously insisting the missionary father Philip to accelerate the matter. There were also some correspondence between them. On some days, Fr. Varkey Parapuram had to write to him morning and evening, as the missionary seemed to delay the matter on suspicious motives. In the letters the fathers were insisting that the tomb should be opened during day time, and that while opening the tomb some of the CMI fathers should be personally present at the site and that this is very important in order to guarantee regarding the tomb and the contents in the tomb. As demanded by the

missionary father, Fr. Varkey had also given assurance in the letter that he would meet all the expenses incurred in opening the tomb. We quote below the correspondence, as recorded in the chronicles⁴

Here below we quote the letter of the missionary in this regard: *"As requested I shall make arrangements to open the tomb of the late Fr. Prior and to take out the mortal remains and entrust them to you. However, you will have to meet the expenses in the work of opening the tomb"*.

To this Fr. Varkey replied on May 1, in the morning: *"Very Rev. and dear Father, You had promised that you would make arrangements to open the tomb today and entrust to us the mortal remains. As you have told that you have done some works in this connection, the day before yesterday, I had entrusted to you the money needed for the wages of the workers. But the sacristian told us that you had not paid the full wages to the workers and that on this account the workers had not come today. We don't understand why you paid the workers below their normal wage."*

It is evident that the Vicar Apostolic has the exclusive authority over the church at Koonammavu and not the people. It is on this account that the Delegate apostolic and the Vicar apostolic entrusted the matter to you for execution. Hence, we wish to know whether you, as we have requested and as you had already promised, would open the tomb and hand over to us the mortal remains.

Besides, it is essential, as we have already informed you, that some of us should be present at the site when you are opening the tomb.

Fr. Yohannan Geevarghese (sd.)

Vicar, SH monastery, Chethipuzha.

Camp: Koonammavu

No reply was given to this letter. Hence the same day evening at 4.30 pm. Fr. Varkey was forced to send another letter. Here below is the copy of the letter:

Very Rev. and Dear father,

Some time before, you told me that it is not possible to get workmen to open the tomb. But, now some persons have come here asking for spades, baskets etc. I don't know who they are.

As I have already informed through my previous letters, we wish to inform you once again that some of us should be present at the site while you open the tomb. You shall not open the tomb and take out anything from the tomb unless in our presence. Besides, we cannot be present there unless during the daytime.

Fr. Geevarghese Yohannan(sd.)

I was compelled to write the above letter because at about 4 p.m. somebody came to call me. Accordingly I went and met him. Then he asked me to bring the workmen to open the tomb immediately and that he would be ready.

But I felt it is not easy to get workmen at that late hour. Even if we get some men, by the time the tomb would be opened it may be already dark and so I thought it would not be fair to open the tomb at that time. Hence, returning to the Bungalow I wrote the following letter:

May 2, 1889

Thondiparampu Bungalow, Koonammavu

Dear Rev, Father,

With regard to the opening of the tomb of the late Fr. prior, and take his mortal remains, we have written several times and have personally pleaded before you. In spite of all these the work is not yet executed. Besides, we have become an object of ridicule to others.

Hence we request you not to try our patience any further. If you have decided upon some practical means to execute it,

please, we request you to inform us of it in writing. I do not wish to come there and return without having the thing executed and thus once again to be ridiculed by the people. Besides, may you understand that we are trying for this in accordance with the order of the highest authority in the Church, and not on our private initiative. The matter is officially entrusted to you for execution. Please give me a reply to this in writing.

Fr. Geevarghese Yohannanan (sd.)

Vicar, S.H Monastery, Chethipuzha

Camp: Koonammavu

On May 3 in the morning, as soon as the missionary Fr. Philip received the above letter, he sent for me. But, I did not go. Fr. Chandapilla went instead. He met the missionary father and told him that Fr. Geevarghese Yohannanan won't come unless he receives a personal letter from you. Thus, immediately he sent me the following letter:

To Fr. Geevarghese Yohannanan TOCD

Dear Rev. Father,

Please come immediately to open the tomb of the late Fr. Prior and to take his mortal remains. Nobody will make any obstacle. I assure you.

Fr. Philip Missionary (sd.)

Vicar General of the Vicariate Apostolic of Verapoly

He wrote the above letter and made the things easy fearing the Delegate Apostolic. Besides, it seems he received also an order from Ootty, the office of the Delegate Apostolic.

As soon as I received the above letter, I went, and he received me politely, and led me to the church. He did not discuss anything, either regarding the workmen, nor on their wages. Immediately they began to open the tomb. There were present Fr. Philip the missionary the vicar general, myself and Fr. Chandapilla, the assistant vicar of the church and a few lay people. After some time there came also Fr. Candid the missionary.

When the tomb was opened, we got only a few bones. We collected the bones in a special copper box⁵ and carried to the Bungalow at the Thondiparampu. Subsequently we carried them to Mannanam and re-interred them solemnly in front of the rails of the high altar, on the southern side"⁶.

The chronicles of the St. Joseph monastery, Mannanam record the events regarding the re-interring of the mortal remains.

"As recorded already in these historical chronicles, the mortal remains of the late Fr. Prior, buried at Koonammavu, were exhumed and re-interred in the St. Joseph church, Mannanam.

The St. Philomena's monastery Koonammavu was donated by Archbishop Mar Bernardine to our religious community. This monastery had been our novitiate house for the last 30 years and many members of our religious community were staying there. Consequent to the separation of the Syro-Malabarians from the jurisdiction of the vicariate apostolic of Verapoly governed by the Carmelite missionaries, the Vicariate apostolic of Verapoly wanted to evacuate the St. Philomena's monastery of the members of our religious community. Thus in February 1889, at the order of the Delegate Apostolic for India, our fathers vacated the monastery. In this situation a general chapter of the congregation was convened at Mannanam and the decision was taken to exhume the mortal remains of the aforesaid, the late Venerable father Prior and to re-inter them at Mannanam. Accordingly, on Friday, May 24, after a solemn Mass and office for the dead and the funeral oration⁷, the mortal remains were enclosed in a copper box and re-interred here. The superiors of all our monasteries, many diocesan priests and a multitude of people participated in this ceremony"⁸.

At this time Archbishop Andraea Aiuti was the Delegate Apostolic for India and the superior General of our congregation; Monsignor Charles Lavigne, a French Jesuit was the Vicar apostolic of the vicariate Apostolic of Kottayam; Monsignor Adolfus Medlycott was the vicar Apostolic of the vicariate

apostolic of Trissur; Monsignor Leonard Mellano was the vicar Apostolic of the vicariate Apostolic of Verapoly. His Holiness Pope Leo XIII was the supreme Pontiff. At this time we had seven monasteries: Mannanam, Elthuruth, Vazhakulam, Ambazhakad, Pulincunnu, Mutholy and Chethipuzha.

Nazrani Deepika, a weekly at the time, has given the following in the 'news column' of the journal, on the 15th of May, 1889: "*It is known to all that the Very Rev. Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara of happy memory, Prior of all the Monasteries of Malabar, died at the Monastery in Koonammavu and was buried in the church attached to the Monastery. Now, his mortal remains are brought here (Mannanam?). These Mortal remains will be re-interred on Friday, the 24th of this month with solemn ceremonies in this church*".

Again on June 1st the same journal has published the following news, on page 3 of the journal: "*We have already published in these journals that the Mortal Remains of Fr. Kuriakose Elias, who died in Koonammavu in 1871, and who was buried there, were brought to Mannanam, and that they will be solemnly re-interred here on Friday the 24 of May. Accordingly at 8^o clock in the morning, after solemn Raza, office of the dead, and a most appropriate sermon, they were re-interred in the church attached to the Monastery, in front of the sanctuary.*

"Many faithful from different parts of the country participated in these ceremonies. There were 20 priests, vicars of different churches, many other priests and religious..."

Conclusion

As we have seen above, transference of the mortal remains of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara was not a private act of certain individuals. The process began with the decision of the General Chapter of the CMI Congregation held at Mannanam in February 1889, which appointed a commission of three fathers of the Congregation in the persons of Fr. Geevarghese Yohannan (Fr. Varkey Parapuram), Prior of the SH

Monastery Chethipuzha, Fr. Joseph Auustine Thopil, a former member of the St. Philomena's monastery Koonammavu, and Ouseph Yohannan, the former prior of St. Philomena's monastgery. Who all were eyewitnesses of the death and burial of Chavara, who knew exactly where and which was the tomb of Chavara.

Their first attempt of the fathers to exhume the tomb and take out the mortal remains failed because of the uncontrollable crowd making disturbances outside the church. Hence they appealed to the Delegate Apostolic, Andraea Aiuti, at Ootty, who at the time was also the Superior General of the CMI Congregation. He immediately wrote to the Archbishop Leonard Mellano, the Vicar Apostolic and to Fr. Philip OCD, the Vicar General, who at the time was in charge of the Philomena's church, to help the fathers take out the mortal remains of Kuriakose Elias Chavara.

The three CMI fathers of the commission were camping in the meantime in the temporary shed close to St. Theresa's convent Koonammavu. Fr. Varkey parapuram had written several letters to Fr. Philip to speed up the matter. In one of the letters to Fr. Philip OCD, Fr. Varkey had insisted that the tomb should opened only during day time and in the presence of some of the members of the CMI commission.

Actually, when the tomb was opened there were present on the spot Fr. Philip OCD, the Vicar General, Fr. Varkey Parapuram CMI, Fr. Chandapilla CMI, the assistant vicar of the church and also Fr. Candid OCD, the missionary, who all were very familiar with the tomb of Kuriakose Elias Chavara.

The Mortal remains of Chavara were collected in a copper box. It is worthy of note that when tomb was exhumed in 1970, in connection with the process of canonization, amidst the mortal remains collected in the copper box we have found also the zinc figure of the crucifix, which the CMI fathers used to carry on the breast attached to the habit. This crucifix is kept today in a special reliquary in the Chavara shrine at Kainakary.

Deepika (at the time, called Nazrani Deepika), then a weekly had given the news on 15th May 1889, that the mortal remains of the late Fr. Kuriakose Elia Chavara exhumed from Koonammavu, are brought to Mannanam, and that they would be re-interred in the tomb on Friday, May 24th.

The same journal on 1st June 1889 gives the news regarding the solemn ceremonies of re-interring the mortal remains in the tomb in front of the Monastery chapel conducted on Friday, May 24th.

Chronicles of the St. Joseph Monastery Mannanam and of the Carmel Monastery Vazhakulam record the whole event of the mortal remains in detail. Other monasteries of the time too have recorded the event in their chronicles, which we have not quoted above.

(Footnotes)

¹ Fr. Geevarghese Yohannan, commonly known as Fr. Varkey Parapuram was a student of Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara and was a cleric in the congregation when the first members made their religious profession at Mannanam on Dec. 8, 1855

² Fr. Chandappilla was a member of the St. St. Philomena's monastery, and had lived there many years. He was also the procurator of the monastery.

³ Bernard of St. Thomas, Brief History of the TOCD Congregation, Palai 1908, pp. 339-342.

⁴ Chronicles of Carmel Monastery, Vazhakulam, pp. 197-201

⁵ When the copper box was opened in 1970, in connection with the cause of canonisation process, among the mortal remains there was found also the zinc figure of the crucifix, the kind of which the CMI members used to wear till recently on their cassock.

⁶ Chronicle of the St. Joseph Monastery, Mannanam, Vol. IV, (1872-1905), p. 378

⁷ The funeral oration was delivered by Fr. Leopold cmi, (Puthenpurackal of Pulincunnu parish), who was a novice and infirmarian at Koonammavu when Fr. Chavara died and to whom Chavara had entrusted his testament, which he wrote in August 1870, to be handed over to Fr. Leopold Beccaro OCD after the death and funeral of the former.

⁸ Chronicles of the St. Joseph Monastery, Mannanam (ms.) vol. III, (1872-1905) pp. 377-379.

⁹ At the time, Nazrani Deepika was being published from Mannanam.



Celebration of the Divine Divine Liturgy during the Seminar days at Bhopal.



During the Offertory Procession, the Emblems of the CMIs & the CMCs are presented to the Main Celebrant His Grace Dr. Paschal Topno, S.J., Archbishop of Bhopal.

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His Grace Most Rev. Dr. Paschal Topno, S.J., Archbishop of Bhopal, celebrates the concluding Mass at the end of the Chavara Jayanthi Seminar in Bhopal. Fr. Mathew Kaniamparampil, CMI Vicar General and Fr. Anto Karokaran, CMI, Director, Poornodaya, Bhopal are on both sides.