

BOOK REVIEWS

Navya Maria CMC, *Empowered Womanhood: Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara's Socio-Pastoral Vision for Woman and the Legacy of the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2014. Pages 473; Rs. 390; ISBN: 81-89958-98-5.

This book is the published version of the doctoral dissertation of the author, defended on 9 October 2013 at Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore. It has the messages of George Cardinal Alencherry, Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church and Sr. Sancta CMC, Superior General of the Congregation of Mother of Carmel. Dr. K. S. Radhakrishnan has offered an Appreciation of the work as well. The foreword is by Dr. George Edayadiyil. The work has five pages of abbreviation. Navya Maria (henceforth NM) begins with a General Introduction (35-46), which serves as a *compendium* of the study. The work is divided into five chapters with a General Conclusion. A long Bibliography (417-453), Glossary (455-459), and Index (461-473) are also given. These make the work easy for consultation for the future researchers.

Dr. K. S. Radhakrishnan, in his Appreciation, introduces Kuriakose Elias Chavara (henceforth KEC). According to him, the saintly person is "one of the towering personalities who led the Renaissance Movement in Kerala ... who started his mission as a social reformer by establishing a Sanskrit school at Mannanam in 1846 to provide Sanskrit education to all the needy ... irrespective of caste, creed and community" (19). In the General Introduction, NM calls KEC "a multifaceted ecclesial personality chosen by God to shed the light of love and wisdom of God in the dark recesses of the nineteenth century Kerala society." With his holistic vision regarding creation in the Bible, Father Chavara, the pioneer, executed God's plan and purpose of women. He was blessed by a broad vision for the empowerment of women and the integrity of the family. The author points out the relevance of her research, since no serious study focusing on KEC's understanding of the role of the women in social change has been made yet. Hence, one of the major objectives of her studies is "to highlight Chavara's

programmes for the empowerment of woman in the nineteenth century especially in second half of it." The author finds out that these programmes were meant to help women realize that they can be agents of major changes in the Church and the society. NM tries also to present an ecclesial vision for the empowerment of the members of the CMC and their concrete response to the social issues of the time.

Chapter I deals with "Women in Biblical Traditions" (47-88). NM begins with the creation stories of Genesis which are followed by presenting the self-empowered women in the Old Testament, such as Miriam, Deborah, Ruth, Judith and Esther, who had played unique roles in the salvation history. Then, the author studies the women in the New Testament times. "Jesus' relationship with the many women He met during his ministry was marked by a unique inner freedom, openness and serenity" (65). "Paul and the Dignity of Women" is the next issue analyzed. According to NM, Paul considered women as his partners in the evangelization work. She considers 1 Cor 11:3-16 and 1 Cor 14:33b-36) as misunderstood and misinterpreted texts.

Chapter II deals with "Women in the Kerala Society: Socio-Religious and Educational Scenario during the 18th and 19th Centuries" (89-157). First, the author gives a brief survey of the Kerala society during 18th and 19th centuries. Then, she focuses her attention on socio-religious and educational status of women. The caste system, untouchability, social discrimination and *janmi* system as well as other traditions had marginalized the women in the Hindu society. The condition of the women in the Christian communities which were patriarchal was a little better, although they did not enjoy participation in the Church activities, and were mostly confined to their home. Then, there came forward Christian, Hindu and Muslim reformers, who brought revolutionary changes in Kerala. In the words of NM, "Chavara represents the first glimmer of the rise of a social consciousness even before the advent of Chattambi Swamikal, Sri Narayana Guru and Ayyankali."

"Chavara: A Man with a Vision and Mission for a Renewed Church" is the title of Chapter III (159-264). First, the author invites our attention to the important traits of KEC's personality, which was moulded by earthly persons such as his family, especially mother, Malpan Thomas Palackal and Malpan Thomas Porukkara, Leopold Beccaro, as well as heavenly patrons such as Blessed Virgin Mary, Teresa of Avila, Mary Magdalene, Mary of Egypt and Mary

of Cortona. The author, then, presents KEC as a man of God: His Abba consciousness, longing for the divine vision, commitment to God's will, contemplative character, compunction and contrition, reconciling attitude and suffering life. In the subtitle of "A Man of Holistic Vision," NM portrays KEC as a spiritual visionary, a pastoral visionary and a socio-cultural visionary. Under the designation "Chavara's Ecclesial Vision in Action," NM looks at his love for the Church, seminary formation, formation of religious life, formation of the ideal domestic Church, Church at the service of the society (which deals with the topic such as Church mission through media, education for the transformation of the society, home for the homeless, Christian dignity of the sick and dying, Church mission for the creation of a just society), Chavara and women empowerment (which tackles Chavara's deep desire to establish a convent for women - the unfulfilled dream at Alangadu, the convent building at Puthenpally - the foundation of the women TOCD, testimony of contemporaries regarding Chavara as founder such as Leopold Beccaro, Sr. Anna, Fr. Kuriakose Eliseus Porukkara, Varkey Parappuram - testimony of Chavara regarding the role of Leopold, the construction of the Bamboo Mat Convent, the beginning of the small community and Chavara's further relationship with the community).

NM's presentation of KEC as a man with a vision and a mission is comprehensive. This epitome is very useful for the future students who are interested in the subject. The author's attempt to prove that the construction at Puthenpally was meant for a convent for the local women under the name "the Immaculate Holy Mother of Carmel" (242-245) is very interesting, as she brings out seven arguments in favour of her position.

Chapter IV (265-321) focuses on "Realization of the Socio-Pastoral Vision of Chavara in the Mission of CMC." KEC envisaged the convents as abodes of virtue and *Veda*, as well as a centre to train young girls in the practice of virtue and *Veda*. Then, the author makes an analysis of how KEC's vision brought out a tremendous growth in the community for women. Different communities of the CMC Congregation evolved as abodes of virtues and of *Veda*, and continue to serve as a pillar of the Church. The sisters put into practice the vision of the founder and imparted the virtues and *Veda* to the families through education, serving the sick and the downtrodden, transmission of the charism through media beyond

the boundaries, in the field of social welfare services and vocational training for the empowerment of women.

NM's use of *Veda* (KEC used the word *vedakaryangal*) is indeed commendable. She applies it to the poem of the *Martyrdom of Anasthasia*, who was a *vedasakshi*. If she would have drawn in detail the implications of the term in the Indian context, it could have been a great contribution in the field of Indian Christian theology.

Chapter V is entitled "The Response of CMC for the Empowerment of Women in the Contemporary Indian Society" (323-401). The author discusses once more the status of women in social, economic, political, educational and religious fields in order to understand the role, scope and relevance of the vision of the CMC in the society and in the Church. According to NM, CMC is now engaged in Christian formation through education, and make new attempts in faith formation to save and serve the mission of the Church. The sisters help the women to empower themselves through social welfare services. The author makes an honest review of the vision of the CMC, and calls for their renewed response in order to bring in dynamic changes in the outlook of the members and to avail themselves for the society. She, thus, concludes: "The relevance of the existence of CMC in the Church and in the world depends upon her faithfulness in the mission of empowering women" (401).

In "General Conclusion" (403-416), NM once more summarizes the themes of each chapter. At the end she invites the members of CMC "to open their eyes and take the responsibility of finding out new ways and means of empowering women... The dreams of Chavara will come true only when each member of the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel is transformed into a motivated, committed and dynamic religious who in turn can witness and serve as an instrument of encouragement and empowerment for every woman she meets in creating a better world also for the less privileged" (416).

NM deserves our wholehearted appreciation for undertaking such a laborious work. She has made a thorough study of the existing literature. The front cover page is indeed symbolic and inspiring. It would have been more enriching if NM had presented KEC as a prophet, one who could dream the divine dreams concerning His living images on earth and put his heart and soul to realize God's vision. This prophetic focus would have enabled the researcher to look at all that he was and all that he had done for the

women empowerment, especially the foundation of the Congregation of Mother of Carmel, in a totally new light with a thrust on contemporary application.

Once more I would like to express my deep appreciation of this study *Empowered Womanhood* by Navya Maria. It is my earnest hope that she will continue her research and publish more studies by exposing novel dimensions of this Herald of the East.

Paul Kalluveetil CMI

M. K. Sanoo, *Jivitham Thanne Sandesham: Vishudha Chavarayude Jivitham* (Malayalam), Kottayam: Manorama Books, 2014. Pages: 156; Rs. 150; ISBN: 978-93-83197-50-7.

The name 'Kuriakose' means 'someone belonging to God'. St. Chavara belonged exclusively to God. *Jivithan Thanne Sandesham: Vishudha Chavarayude Jivitham* by Prof. M. K. Sanoo takes the reader to the new realms of the personality of Kuriakose Elias Chavara. M. K. Sanoo, a versatile writer in Malayalam, known for his poetic expressions and originality in his thinking, has portrayed with excellence this saintly figure displaying his social as well spiritual capabilities. This book, therefore, cannot be limited to a biography alone, but rather a reminiscence of a great religious leader and visionary. The author has written it from the perspective of a personal encounter. In this book, a deep search has been undertaken to find the soul of St. Chavara. M. K. Sanoo, in his preface, begins with deep respect for the person of Chavara. The author portrays the making of a saint with artistic perfection. Behind a script there is always a story, and this story leads the script in all directions. The reader will be impressed by the authenticity of the author in touching the social scenario in which St. Chavara was brought up. Picking up the essentials, and pinpointing the social realities, M. K. Sanoo blends stupendously and remarkably the social surrounding in which this saint grew up.

This book takes the reader to a marvellous journey, into the inner recesses of Chavara's morality. The spiritual nourishments poured into his conscience from his parents, especially through his mother offered a moral impetus in the making of St. Chavara. The parental guidance which he received went beyond religious realm, extending even to the social aspect as well. This expansion of horizon through parental guidance imprinted within his conscience

the love for humanity. Over and above piety and religious observance little Kuriakose developed a sense of charity and humanness. The society of his times ridiculed the downtrodden and the marginalized whereas his family loved them with cordiality. This aroma of fraternal kindness, devoid of caste and religious distinction, reflected in his family paved way for the formation of Kuriakose Elias Chavara. The author has elucidated with accuracy the cultural milieu in which little Kuriakose lived, offering a window to understand the life of St. Thomas Christians.

St. Chavara lived what he preached and he lived with utmost dedication to his vocation. The vocation to priestly life comes through Rev. Fr. Thomas Palackal and little Kuriakose is moved with spiritual fervour to serve God. This Divine experience shrouds Bro. Kuriakose which compels him to serve Jesus Christ even when his parents and his beloved ones die due to an epidemic. He had to undergo sufferings with deprivation, abandonment, rejection. When the ecclesiastical circle of his times was reigned by superiority and inferiority complexes the exemplary lives of Fathers Palackal and Porukara became the guiding light of Fr Chavara. Later, their spiritual partnership brought a paradigm shift in the pastoral dimension of the Kerala Church, which, in the Providence of God, was eventually led into the establishment of the CMI Congregation in 1831. M. K. Sanoo masterfully describes the canonical establishment of the Congregation on 8 December 1855 and the humiliation in the process that Fr Chavara and others bore with grace and generosity. Narrating the moves that Fr Chavara and others made during the days of Bishop Roccas, the author describes him as the faithful son of the Church who would not tolerate any disturbance in the unity of the faithful. The author also describes how Fr Chavara respected the legitimately constituted authorities; he would not tolerate any revolt against them.

This book gives the picture of the Herculean task that Chavara had to undertake in maintaining the unity Malabar Church. Along with the religious community which he established he worked hard for the spiritual uplift of the Syrian Christians and established seven monasteries in Kerala with the support of the natives; these monasteries were turned into spiritual powerhouses for the faithful. In order that priests may celebrate the Divine Liturgy with devotion and in a uniform manner, he compiled the rubrics in detail and made following them obligatory. He prepared the liturgical

calendar for the Syro-Malabar Church, systematized introducing nine liturgical seasons.

M. K. Sanoo presents with creative beauty the spiritual bonding Chavara shared with Fr Leopold Beccaro OCD and the ways they worked with cordiality in starting the religious congregation for women which is presently known as CMC and CTC congregations. Fr Chavara initiated transformation of the society through the education of women, a truly revolutionary thinking of the time, taking into account the social situation of the nineteenth century.

Even when he displayed obedience to the authorities St. Chavara worked tirelessly for the uplift of the community. The author never forgets to portray Chavara as a social figure due to the contributions he rendered to the society by establishing schools besides every Parish Church and even founded a Sanskrit school which admitted also students from among the dalits. The image of St Chavara, who was not only a social reformer but also an Indian who gave an Indian image to Christian spirituality fills the mind of the reader; thus, the reader is offered an encounter with a personality truly Indian and the author presents the saintly charisma of this person who loved God so much that he does not stop dialoguing with God. His great works such as *Atmanuthapam* and *The Martyrdom of Anastasia* are considered to be landmarks in Malayalam literature; the author describes them as the gems poured out from the intense spiritual experience of St Chavara.

The life and spiritual legacy of Kuriakose Elias Chavara will be remembered, as he could live what he preached, i.e., his life itself was his message. As one reaches the climax of the life of St Chavara one finds that he never stopped loving God even in his illness. The author describes with extreme perfection, the dramatic scenes surrounding the last moments in the life of St Chavara. He stated with child-like innocence: "The grace I received during my Baptism has never been spoiled in my life and this I can say with conviction." St Chavara died on 3 January 1871 at the age of 65.

In this excellent book, although M. K. Sanoo has wonderfully fulfilled the task of describing his charisma, the prominent place of St Chavara in the Indian history is very rarely mentioned. Though the depiction is certainly done with historical precision, St Chavara is presented merely as a historical person. From the articulation of a historian the St Chavara of yesterday and today is rarely considered. Chavara's contribution to Malayalam literature is scantily mentioned, thereby limiting him as a mere social reformer.

Despite all these the author's portrayal of St Chavara has been stupendous. No doubt the reader will love St Chavara immensely as the pages of *Jivithan Thanne Sandesham* unfold.

Blessen Jose CMI