

## **KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA**

### **A Saint for Our Times**

**Thomas Mampra CMI**

*Abstract:* This article offers an exquisite narrative picture on the life of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara. In the chronological order, the author sketches the eventful life of Chavara from his birth to the last days. Thomas Mampra deviates from this narrative style only when he purposefully wanders into the spirituality and the literary works of the saint. The tumultuous as well as the mystical life of the saint receives a happy blend in the study.

*Keywords:* Holy Spirit, beth-rauma, sonship, literature, fatherhood, *karmayogi*, Roccas, Beccaro, indigenous, Euphrasia, Carmelites, monastery, community, publications, printing, seminary

#### **1. Introduction**

India is known the world over as an ancient land of saints and sages, hermits and holy men belonging to a variety of religious traditions such as Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Islamic, etc. Though many holy men and women are remembered and venerated, seldom do we come across saints formally declared and accepted by the Church from among the ranks of Christians who are a tiny minority in the country, mostly living in some pockets like Kerala, Karnataka, Goa, Bihar, Orissa and other places. The one and only saint of India, declared by the Church so far is St Alphonsa of Bharananganam, Pala, Kerala, otherwise known as the Passion Flower of India. Now there is reason for the whole country and the Church in particular to rejoice as we approach the canonisation of two more of her children, namely, Fr Kuriakose Elias Chavara, the founder of the Congregation of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI) and Sr Euphrasia Elavathunkal of the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel (CMC) on 23 November 2014. The canonization, indeed, is an occasion for celebration, no doubt, but more importantly an opportunity for inspiration by and

assimilation of the ideals and ideas which were the driving forces behind the saintly lives and activities of these two saints.

This article proposes to present an overview of the saintly life and activities of Kuriakose Elias Chavara. On the occasion of his beatification on 8 February 1986 at Kottayam, Kerala, the saintly Pope John Paul II said:

The Church throughout the world rejoices with the Church in India as Fr Kuriakose Elias Chavara is raised to the rank of the Blessed in the great Communion of Saints. This man advanced to great heights of holiness through his wholehearted cooperation with the grace of God. All of his 65 years long earthly life, Blessed Chavara laboured generously for the renewal and enrichment of Christian life. His deep love of Christ filled him with apostolic zeal and made him especially careful to promote the unity of the Church. With great generosity he collaborated with others, especially his brother priests and religious in the work of salvation.

## **2. Early Years**

Kuriakose was born on 10 February 1805 as the sixth and youngest child of Kuriakose Chavara and Mariam at Kainakary, then a part of the parish of Chennankary in Kuttanad, about six kilometres east of Alappuzha. The Chavara family is a branch of the ancient Mukkatt family which is traditionally believed to have migrated from Kuravilangad, an offshoot of the famous Pakalomattam, which in its turn was one of the four Christian families that migrated from Palayur via Angamaly to Kuravilangad. Those four families are traditionally believed to have been baptized by St Thomas the Apostle of India. The child's mother Mariam belonged to the ancient Christian family called Chothirakkunnel of Thottackad, not very far from Changanacherry and Kottayam. Chothirakkunnel is said to be the present name of Chowarakkunnel, a settlement of families migrated from Chowara, not far from Angamaly, an important ancient Christian settlement. Some of Mariam's brothers later migrated to Pulinkunnu and neighbouring locations in Kuttanad taking family names like Thoppil, Illippampil, etc. The child was baptized on 18 February 1805 at the parish church of St Joseph, at Chennankary. Kuriakose had an elder brother named Joseph and four sisters. Joseph got married and had a daughter while his sisters were married to families at Edathua, Champakulam, Muhamma, and Alappuzha.

The little boy grew up with special care and concern of his beloved mother. As mentioned in the early two autobiographical chapters of

Chavara's work *Atmanutapam*, the child was taken to the shrine of Our Lady at Vechoor on 8 September, the feast of her Nativity and was placed under her tutelage. The autobiographical chapters give us some sweet memories of how he was brought up by his beloved mother with great affection, meticulous care and constant accompaniment in the family traditions, prayers, customs, and practices.

Kainakary, some two centuries or more ago, must have been gradually taking shape and the men folk would be away supervising agricultural activities of rice cultivation. They would go to the distant fields early in the morning with a number of labourers in the slowly moving country boats and would return only late after sunset. Little children would get a glimpse of the father of the family mostly only on Sundays and might not get much time to spend with him. That may be the reason why we do not see any mention of the influence or instructions Kuriakose received at the hands of his father. However, he is eloquent about the part played by his mother in grooming him as a young boy.

From the available sources we come to know that there was no formal education system in Kerala at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The earliest attempt to start formal Malayalam schools in Travancore is attributed to Dewan Veluthampy between 1804 and 1808. However, it does not seem to have been successful. The next attempt from the part of the government was taken by Queen Parvaty Bhai in 1817 with the active support of Col. Thomas Munroe, the British Resident, who simultaneously served as the Dewan of Travancore. The system of education available before that time was *kudippallikudam* or *kalari* run by a single experienced teacher called *asan*. The *kalari* was run practically in every village and the male children of upper caste families, including Christians, attended them and the teacher was paid some remuneration by the families concerned.

Children were taught to read and write Malayalam and Tamil and elementary arithmetic which were considered sufficient for conducting ordinary transactions. But to those desirous of higher knowledge, other grades of studies including Sanskrit grammar, *keertan*, parts of speech, ornamental prose, rules of poetry, figures of speech, etc., were also taught. Kuriakose spent five years in the *kalari* and got a higher and better level of education which enkindled in him a great desire to acquire more knowledge. However, he was not sure how to acquire it.

### **3. Seminarian at Pallippuram**

God's ways are mysterious, says the Psalmist. It was at that juncture that Kuriakose had a chance-meeting with the venerable Malpan Thomas Palackal of Pallippuram seminary. The Malpan was on a visit to his auntie's family Kalacherry, which was also related to Chavara. Young Kuriakose was at Kalacherry. The Malpan was highly impressed by the innocent-looking, well-mannered, and graceful youngster and he thought that Kuriakose would be a fitting candidate to priesthood and for studies in his seminary. The thought of further studies on religious subjects and the prospect of becoming a priest was something Kuriakose had cherished and the rare opportunity of meeting the Malpan himself was considered a divine confirmation of his vocation. The Malpan visited the Chavara family and persuaded Kuriakose's parents to send him to the seminary.

Though the prospect of their son becoming a priest offering the divine sacrifice on the altar of God and praying for them and others was very welcome, the parents of Kuriakose could not think of parting with their youngest child even for a moment. It was with the sober counsel of his maternal uncle Kurian Thoppil of Pulinkunnu a decision was finally made in favour of Kuriakose pursuing his vocation to priesthood joining the seminary at Pallippuram. As he was quite young and to assuage the feelings of his parents, it was agreed that he would stay with the parish priest of the church at Chennankary for a while. Finally, in 1818, at the age of 13 he joined the seminary as its youngest member. With his suave and sweet nature, friendly and amiable behaviour, sharp intelligence, quick perception, and readiness to help others, he became a friend of all and the favourite of the Malpan.

Kuriakose made quick strides in his studies and the Malpan sent him even to other places to learn languages like Latin and Portuguese. From personal experience and with keen observation Chavara realized that Malpan Thomas Palackal was a man of wit and wisdom, deep knowledge and solid piety, a teacher who taught more by example than by preaching, ascetic to the core and eagerly looking for the renewal of the Church. He was more a 'guru' than a teacher. The highly inspiring and deeply authentic life and work of the Malpan made such a strong impression on young Kuriakose that he decided to follow him closely, putting himself at his disposal. Kuriakose took for his motto a verse of the Psalmist, "the Lord is my portion and

inheritance" (Psalm 16:5) and dedicated himself totally, confiding firmly in the Divine Providence, to the Lord and his service.

The young seminarian's resolve to pursue his divine call was severely tested by the sudden demise of his dear parents and only brother falling prey to a killer epidemic raging through several parts of Kuttanad, including Kainakary. His brother died leaving his only girl child and her mother. Kuriakose was under tremendous pressure from his uncles and other relatives to give up seminary life and to return to the family to continue the lineage of the family. After several days of intense prayer and penance, with full confidence in the Providence of God, he was able to persuade one of his sisters and her family to go and live at Chavara taking care of their niece until she was given in marriage. Greatly relieved from the shock of his life, he returned to the seminary with a grateful and joyful heart, renewing his dedication and devotion to serve the Lord and his people wholeheartedly.

Kuriakose was particularly impressed by the Malpan's ascetic way of life and prayer, his love of the Church and its renewal, his thirst for deeper knowledge on theological subjects, which was beneficial to himself and the new generation of priests, thus heralding a new dawn for the Malabar church as a whole. As years went by, Kuriakose became the trusted friend and leader of the pack both in studies and devotion so that the Malpan began to depute him to give classes in his absence.

The Syriac breviary the students used for canonical prayers were only in its rudimentary form and some copies lacked certain parts which was sometimes an excuse not to regularly conduct it. The Malpan procured some copies of the book from various sources and entrusted the work of compiling the whole text to Kuriakose who, with the help of some of his companions, came out with a better and comprehensive text of the breviary to the satisfaction and appreciation of the Malpan.

After eleven years of diligent and purposeful studies and fervent spiritual practices, he was ordained a priest by Vicar Apostolic Maurelius Stabilini of Varapuzha on 29 November 1829 at the parish church of St Andrews, Arthunkal where the Bishop was temporarily stationed. On the following day, Fr Kuriakose Chavara offered his solemn first Holy Mass at his parish church of Chennankary. He spent about a month there visiting his relatives and a little longer at Pulinkunnu visiting his maternal uncles and other relatives. He concluded that sojourn after preaching at St Sebastian's chapel, which was highly appreciated by the congregation. He then went to

Pallippuram seminary where Malpan Palackal was anxiously waiting for him. Chavara had already decided to follow the Malpan in everything, his ideals and ideas, as he was guided to priesthood by the Malpan's wisdom. Because of his close contact with him, Chavara was aware of the project of Palackal and his esteemed friend Fr Thomas Porukkara, then secretary to the Bishop, to start a religious house, and he shared their vision and had actually dedicated his first Holy Mass with the Bishop for the realization of that dream. Now, he began to be fully involved, along with them, to make it a reality.

#### **4. Mount Mannanam**

From their experience, observation and studies Fathers Palackal and Porukkara were convinced that the absence of prayer houses for men and women was the main reason for the lack of vibrant Christian life in the Malabar Church. In order to remedy the situation, both of them were ready to move to a remote place and start a house of prayer for which they sought the permission of the bishop. The bishop had high esteem for them as he knew them very well, one as his secretary and the other as his consultant and the Malpan at Pallippuram seminary. He advised them to start a religious house with more members who can avail themselves for pastoral activities beneficial to the faithful. On 1 November 1829, he readily gave them a recommendation letter for collecting funds for the purpose and immediately donated two hundred rupees. With hearts full of joy the two Fathers went around the parishes and people contributed generously to the very worthy cause.

After some time, Palackal and Porukkara set out in search of a suitable location to establish the prayer house. They were accompanied by a young man named Jacob Kaniathara, a friend of Porukkara who wanted to spend his life in prayer and penance. They went through the main waterways in the north and found several places where people were willing to help them. They wanted a place sufficiently high and slightly remote, at the same time, accessible both by land and water. When the Malpan was away, he deputed Chavara to give classes to the seminarians and to look after the affairs of the seminary.

After a small interval the search party started again, this time going a little to the south. They came across a suitable place called Pullarikkunnu; but on enquiry they found it was near a Hindu temple, and respecting the religious sentiments of the Hindu brethren they moved away to look for another place. Not very far from there, but on

the opposite side, they noticed two hillocks sufficiently high and remote. They went to the place and looked around and were pleased with the location, its height, and the refreshing breeze with the western expanse reaching very far and wide. It was also accessible by land and water. They decided that it was the location designated by God to start their house-on-hilltop (*beth-rauma*). They met two prominent men of the locality, Kurian Tharakan Perumalil and his younger brother Kochupothan Mappila Thayil, who agreed to do everything to get the place registered for the purpose of setting up the prayer house (*darsanaveedu*), where they could have the vision of God for his people and going down to the plains announce it to them and persuade them to adhere to it steadfastly.

Finally, the place was bought by the priests and, later, it was there that the foundation stone was blessed and laid by Fr Thomas Porukkara in the presence of Bishop Aurelius Stabilini, Malpan Thomas Palackal, Fr Kuriakose Chavara, Jacob Kianthara, many priests from the ranks of the diocesan clergy, and a large number of people belonging to all denominations and religious traditions on 11 May 1831 under the patronage of St Joseph, the name suggested by Fr Porukkara. It was an event written in golden letters in the annals of the history of the Malabar Church and that of the Church in India at large.

Already in the life and practice of the founding fathers one could discern the spirit of the future religious community. The deeply prayerful, ascetic, and exemplary life of Malpan Palackal, preparing the seminarians for a prayerful and vibrant pastoral life, the apostolic zeal, enlightened preaching, fraternal counselling, and the innovative and dynamic pastoral services anchored in a deeply prayerful life of Fr Porukkara, and the highly motivated life of prayer and broader vision of life and services of Fr Chavara blended together in shaping the spirit and vision of the fledgling community.

The pioneers could not always live together. Fr Palackal being the Malpan of the seminary had to be engaged at Pallippuram visiting Mannanam only occasionally; Fr Porukkara, with his dynamism and wider acquaintance with men and matters, was often on the move for collecting the necessary funds for construction of the house. Young Fr Chavara and Jacob Kianthara supervised the ongoing construction works though they also went for such purposes when Fr Porukkara was at Mannanam. Fr Chavara used to go to the seminary also to help the Malpan in teaching.

The smooth sailing of the project was severely jolted when Bishop Stabilini returned to Europe in 1832 and Bishop Francis Xavier

Pescheto was appointed in his place. He appointed Fr Chavara as parish priest of South Pallippuram which was promptly obeyed, but when a new deacon was ordained in the parish, Chavara found it convenient to go to Mannanam entrusting the affairs of the parish to the new but inexperienced priest. Unfortunately, there occurred something objectionable to someone in the parish and he made a complaint to the Bishop highlighting the continued absence of Fr Chavara as the main reason for the incident. Chavara got the bitter pill at the hands of the Bishop who severely warned him and sent him to Pallippuram. Then came the unkindest cut of all: Porukkara, the backbone of the whole project was transferred to Kayamkulam as the parish priest; that was more than bearable to the pioneers. They were baffled, battered, and bruised. With a heavy heart they considered several options, but Porukkara came out with the best solution: putting full trust in the Lord he would promptly obey the command and go to Kayamkulam.

Chavara took that opportunity to plead once again in all candour and simplicity to the Bishop to relieve him from Pallippuram and permit him to go to Mannanam, lest the entire work of constructing the monastery would come to naught. The Bishop was thoroughly displeased with Chavara's persistence and demonstrated his ire again; however, finally, he relented and relieved him from Pallippuram and appointed someone else there as parish priest. Porukkara's prompt compliance with his order, the zeal and vigour he showed in the pastoral field, and the tangible results of his services and the style of life of the pioneers, etc., gradually turned him favourably inclined to them and he permitted Porukkara also to go back to Mannanam and engage himself in the work for the prayer house. Later, the Bishop became a friend and supporter of the Mannanam project.

From 1833 a seminary started functioning from the new house at Mannanam and Chavara taught the gradually increasing number of seminarians under the guidance of Malpan Palackal, who from time to time visited them. The first two students of Mannanam seminary were Bro. Alencherry and Bro. Valiaparampil from the parish of Athirampuzha, who were seminarians at Pallippuram and who found it more convenient to attend at Mannanam which was nearby. In the beginning, candidates for the diocesan clergy and for the religious community lived together, but later a separation between the two was made by Fr Porukkara which was strongly objected by some diocesan seminarians under the leadership of Antony Kudakkachira. Kudakkachira, a highly talented and very gifted seminarian, left



Mannanam in protest, later got ordained, started a religious house of his own at his native place Plassanal and later went to Baghdad to persuade the Chaldean Patriarch to send one of his Bishops to Malabar. He died there in 1858 and was buried there.

The first diocesan priest to join the pioneers was Fr Gheevarghese Thoppil on 21 November 1838. He was the son of Chavara's maternal uncle Kurian Thoppil. As the group was slowly getting stabilised and a way of life giving prominence to prayer and preaching was gaining momentum, they formed themselves into a fraternal community. Chavara noted in his chronicles: "On 18 June 1840, the feast of the Blessed Sacrament, following the example of Peter in the beginning, Fathers Thomas Porukkara, Kuriakose Chavara, and Gheevarghese Thoppil decided to put all what they had and what they might earn in common so as to form a community externally also as they have a similar internal unity." In the meantime, Malpan Palackal's health was steadily waning. Chavara spent his time between Pallippuram, looking after his beloved guru, and Mannanam. Malpan Thomas Palackal finally expired on 16 January 1841 with the satisfaction of seeing his dream slowly becoming a reality.

Mannanam community was steadily growing and Fr Thomas Porukkara was leading it now. Though Chavara tried to serve in the seminaries at Pallippuram and Mannanam, the going was hard. The number of seminarians at Pallippuram was on the wane whereas it was on the increase at Mannanam, and at long last Pallippuram seminary ceased to function. The spiritual, intellectual, and humanitarian training at Mannanam was highly esteemed and the service of young priests trained there was much appreciated. On the other hand, the construction of the building for the community with sufficient facilities and the church was getting completed with the generous help from the people.

People in general had a high opinion about the newly started community and their apostolic activities. Bishop Francis Xavier also became more appreciative of the new community as reflected in him even giving them occasional donations and gifts. He would send to Mannanam priests who needed correction and renewal to spend a few days there in prayer and getting good counsel. In 1844, he raised Porukkara and Chavara as Malpans of the seminary at Mannanam and as examiners of the Malabar Vicariate, though he declined to take steps to recognize their community as a religious congregation in spite of Fr Porukkara's formal request. In the same year, the Bishop became ill

and passed away on 7 December 1844. During the memorial service on the seventh day at Varapuzha, Fr Chavara preached the homily.

Malpan Porukkara's prayerful and hard life, his constant journeys to raise funds, to get things done, etc., were beginning to take their toll. He was also severely affected by diabetes. By the end of 1844 he became seriously sick. The treatment of his doctors could not give much relief to him. Although a change of place and climate temporarily helped him, his health deteriorated. He spent a few days at Champakulam, his native place; then he bade farewell to his beloved mother and members of the family and returned to Mannanam. He was preparing well to meet his dear Lord on any day soon. Finally, the end came on 8 January 1846 and he entrusted his beautiful soul to St Joseph to whom he was very specially devoted. Now, the whole responsibility of wisely guiding the religious community with its original spirit and the demands of the times rested with Fr Kuriakose Chavara.

### **5. Visionary Leader**

The quick departure of the two senior pioneers within a span of five years was a heavy blow for the community though a small but significant beginning had already been made. The multifaceted programme for personal sanctification and the integral development of the Malabar Church was based mainly on two points: (1) a deep personal relationship with the Eucharistic Lord and (2) the renewal of the Church and people on a variety of fronts from a Christian and biblical perspective. The self-sanctification and deep personal relationship with Jesus can take place only from a better and deeper knowledge of Jesus of the gospels. Chavara diligently cultivated such an intimacy with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and helped others, including the students in the seminary at Mannanam, to develop a strong relation with Jesus together with a deeper and wider knowledge of theology.

One of the burning issues faced by Chavara at this time was the lack of books on the Bible and other theological subjects. Similarly, they did not have the breviary in print and whatever they had were not complete either. Chavara had invested much time and energy in compiling a full text of the Syriac breviary which was quite long. He felt the acute need of having several copies of such books which can be made available only if they were printed. The immediate need of making copies of those books and the wonderful benefits from the print media for nourishing the spiritual life of the priests and that of

the community as a whole was very convincing. Therefore, he wanted to establish a printing press by all means about which he had only heard and not seen. He started working tirelessly for the establishment of a press at Mannanam already from 1844 while Porukkara was still alive.

At that time there were apparently only two printing presses in Travancore State, a government press at Trivandrum and the CMS (Church Missionary Society) press at Kottayam. The CMS press was established by the Anglican missionary Benjamine Bailey by importing a press from England already in 1821 and had printed a Malayalam translation of the four gospels in 1829. They were also publishing some Christian pamphlets based on the Bible. Since Kottayam was not very far from Mannanam and since it was run by Christian missionaries, though ecumenical movements were not strong at that time, Chavara went there with great expectation to see the press and its working, with the help of one of his disciples Fr. Pazhukachan. He was accompanied by his cousin Kurian Kuruvila Thoppil, brother of Fr. Gheevarghese Thoppil. Chavara recorded in his chronicles that although he went there twice with great expectation, on both occasions he was greatly disappointed as he was not permitted to see the press and its working. Since the establishment of the press was pivotal for the spiritual and intellectual progress and development of the clergy and laity, Chavara decided to pursue it; to this effect, later, he undertook a hazardous and long trip to Trivandrum by boat. Putting his trust firmly in the Lord he set out to Trivandrum together with Fr. Paulose Parampil of Muttuchira who was his seminary mate at Pallippuram and who had also good taste and expertise in skilled work. Praying intensely for the success of the mission, they reached Trivandrum, and by divine Providence met some Catholic employees of the Government press. With their help the fathers got the opportunity to have a good look at the press and its working. Returning to Mannanam Fr. Paulose made a model of the press with the pith of a banana tree. It was shown to an expert carpenter who made a replica of the press in wood and got it fitted to a granite base and a bronze sheet. With tremendous goodwill and generous financial help from well-wishers Chavara was able to buy enough paper and ink for printing. At that stage, he was confronted with another serious problem. CMS press had the monopoly of casting Malayalam letters and the authorities there were not willing to sell Malayalam letters to Mannanam press which they probably mistook as a rival. That problem was ably solved with the timely help of some of his friends,

especially by the bold and effective intervention of his cousin Kurian Kuruvila Thoppil by getting the services of Sivaraman, a skilled blacksmith, who was casting the letters for the CMS press, Kottayam. Kurian Kuruvila took Sivaraman to his home at Pulinkunnu, where he completed the work from the basement of his house. Employees necessary for printing, book-binding, etc., were also appointed. Ecclesiastical permission was received for starting the new press and Royal permission was granted with the warm recommendation to the British Resident Cullen. The hectic and heroic efforts and the generous co-operation of many, led to the foundation of St Joseph Press, Mannanam on 16 July 1846. It was from this press that the first Catholic newspaper in Kerala *Nazarani Deepika*, later abridged as *Deepika*, came out on 15 April 1846.

However, Chavara was quite clear that printing press and printed books alone will not serve the purpose unless there were schools where young people were educated, thus, opening channels for spiritual, intellectual, and social growth and progress. By 1840 schools in the vernacular, besides one-teacher *kalari*, were established in several places by the state government. Church Missionary Society (CMS) and London Missionary Society (LMS) had established English schools in several places like Alleppey, Kottayam, Nagarcoil, and Mattancherry. Travancore state government had started an English school at Trivandrum where people from the middle class including non-Catholic Christians like the Jacobites attended. However, English education, which was considered to be a stepping-stone for progress and development of the society, was not encouraged among Catholics by the foreign bishops who ruled over them, for fear of getting influenced by protestant ideas and theological views. Under such circumstances Chavara took the bold initiative to start a Sanskrit school at Mannanam in 1846. The school was open to all irrespective of caste, creed, or colour, thus, paving the way for the creation of a common civil society through higher education with a healthy grounding in the fundamentals of the culture and ethos of the motherland India. It is known that one Mr. Warriar from Trichur was appointed as teacher and that some Fathers from the Mannanam community also used to attend the classes along with a few other students.

The conviction of Chavara that education was the engine for development and progress of the society witnessed another audacious step when, later in 1864, as Vicar General he issued a circular to all parish churches under his jurisdiction to start an elementary school

each, under threat of ecclesiastical sanctions. At that time, he even provided books, clothes and noon meals for the poor and dalit children to encourage them to attend school and even invested some capital for their ongoing support; indeed, for him, all were children of God and they were all brothers and sisters and deserved equal treatment.

## **6. First Religious Community**

In the meantime the community at Mannanam received new members from the ranks of the diocesan clergy, seminarians, and other young people. They lived a life of assiduous prayer and asceticism and the priests among the members preached retreats and sermons regularly on Sundays and feast days. They made sincere efforts for self-sanctification and the salvation of their brothers and sisters. The new Bishop Bernardine Baccinelli, who was made Archbishop by this time, was keenly observing the life and apostolic activities of the community at Mannanam and their progress. He was better inclined to recognize them officially as a vowed religious community in the Church. Chavara submitted to him a petition for the formal recognition as a religious community. The Bishop, in turn, asked him to submit in writing the aims and nature of the community and the set of rules and regulations they were following. Being satisfied with the details submitted the Archbishop gave them the rules of the Carmelite Order with a few modifications to suit the natives. He fixed 8 December 1855 for the formal recognition of the community and for profession of the first vows of the first group of members. During the retreat in preparation for the vows, the rules were read out in common more than once and only those who completely accepted them were allowed to make the vows. Almost half of those who were in retreat found it very hard and so declined to take the vows which caused great grief and embarrassment to the entire body. Finally, eleven priests with Chavara as their leader pronounced their first religious vows, formally constituting their religious community.

Twenty five years after the foundation stone was laid for the *darsanaveedu* (house of vision), the first indigenous religious congregation in the Malabar Church was inaugurated with the name "Society of the Servants of Mary Immaculate of Mount Carmel" on Mount Mannanam. Chavara was appointed the Prior (superior) of the community by the Archbishop. The unprecedented ceremonies were witnessed by a large crowd of priests and people, and everyone was

happy at the turn of events which promised good tidings for the future.

Chavara devoted the following few years of his life to consolidate the religious movement. On account of the salvific effects of the Mannanam community, priests and people from different parts of Kerala wanted to have a branch of the Mannanam community in their parish. More candidates began to join the seminary at Mannanam. Archbishop Baccinelli, who wanted to establish a similar religious house for Latin Catholics, built a small house and a chapel at Koonammavu and selected four seminarians from Varapuzha seminary to start a religious house and eventually a community. Unfortunately, within a short time all of them decided to not to continue. Hence, in 1857, the Archbishop entrusted the whole establishment to Chavara and as per the instruction of the Bishop, Chavara sent some priest-members from Mannanam to Koonammavu. However, eventually some Latin candidates also joined the community and it became a religious community where both Syrian and Latin members lived together. In 1889, following the ritual division of the Malabar Vicariate and the creation of two Vicariates for the Syrian Catholics, Rome decided to give that house to the Latin Catholics. Later, new monasteries were established at Elthuruth near Trichur (1858), Vazhakulam near Moovattupuzha (1859), Pulinkunnu in Kuttanad (1861), Ampazhakad near Mala (1868), and Mutholy near Pala in 1870.

A decision was made to start a house at Chethipuzha near Changanacherry, though it did not materialize soon. Although, as directed by the Archbishop, the house founded by Fr Antony Kudakkachira at Plassanal was taken over by Chavara and some members were sent there, religious life in the house did not last long owing to the inclement conditions of the location. It was closed down in 1860 and the property was transferred to the parish of Aruvithura. Chavara was appointed 'Common Prior' by the Archbishop and superiors of other houses were his vicars.

## **7. Champion of Christian Unity**

Hand-in-hand with the foundation of monasteries and various other activities, Chavara was making all efforts to realize an original dream of starting a religious community for women for which already in 1859 a plot of land was taken on lease from the Syrian parish of Puthenpally and a very high wall was erected following the direction of the Archbishop. Before making any further move, an unexpected serious

challenge was faced by the Malabar Church by the arrival of Bishop Thomas Roccas from Baghdad on 9 May 1861 without the valid permission of the Pope to exercise faculties here.

Since Roccas belonged to the same rite as the Syrian Catholics of Malabar they had a soft corner for him and so in spite of a letter of warning by the Archbishop and a little later another letter from Chavara, a substantial majority of people including several Malpans received him enthusiastically. Buoyed by the enthusiastic reception he got from the people, he gradually began to exercise faculties such as ordaining candidates to minor orders and even to priesthood. He desired greatly to meet Chavara, who he knew was practically the religious head of the Syrians but Chavara did not create an opportunity to meet him. At that crucial time Archbishop Baccinelli appointed Chavara Vicar General for the Syrians on 9 June 1861 and relied on him and his confreres to face the challenge of Roccas.

Chavara wrote a letter to Pope Pius IX on 19 June asking clarification on the validity of Roccas' claim of authority over the Syrians of Malabar, and requested to give him a reply in Syriac language which all the priests in the Malabar Church understood well. As the reply was getting late, he wrote to Cardinal Barnabo of the Propagation of Faith twice and at last came the Holy Father's reply both in Syriac and Latin stating in clear terms that Bishop Roccas did not have any jurisdiction over the Syrians of Malabar. There was also a letter of the Patriarch to Roccas asking him to return to Baghdad. Roccas did not consider those letters as genuine, and was infuriated against Chavara and his companions for not recognizing him and now for exposing his pretension and warned him of possible dire consequences. Baccinelli, then, excommunicated Roccas. It was Fr Mathai Kappil, one of Chavara's companions, who courageously took the document of excommunication to Roccas. The latter received another letter from the Patriarch commanding him to return. Chavara negotiated his return to Baghdad, provided the funds to defray his expenses for the journey back and, finally, saw him off at Kochi. Chavara and his companions did all these even risking their lives for keeping the Church united and to avoid by all means another split in its ranks.

The sustained hard work of Chavara and his companions following the departure of Roccas brought almost all the dissident churches and faithful back to the Church. However, the Roccas episode once again brought to light the simmering dissatisfaction of the people with the Latin rule of the foreign prelates and the strong desire of the Malabar

clergy and faithful to have prelates of their own rite and tradition to rule over them. Chavara saw very clearly the writing on the wall and wrote to Cardinal Barnabo, Rome, on the need to have a separate prelate exclusively for the Syrians.

The calm after the storm was a time of growth for the religious community though not without jerks and jolts. In 1861, the Archbishop informed Chavara that the General Chapter of the Carmelite Order in Rome at the end of 1860 had decided to recognize the religious community of Mannanam and its branches as Third Order of Carmelites Discalced (TOCD) and, so, it would be a beneficiary to the spiritual treasures of the Order. This apparently generous gesture without any application from the part of the community irritated them and created a storm among the members. Many were openly critical of the decision, especially regarding their status as the Third Order. They questioned the legality of affiliating an ecclesiastically recognized clerical religious community as the Third Order of a different, though related, religious Order. However, Chavara used all his charm, stature, and paternal solicitude to calm nerves, and explained it as part of "the benign designs of our Blessed Mother to accept us as her beloved children knowing well our weakness," and pacified the members, though opposite sentiments persisted. After the affiliation, brothers co-operators were admitted to the congregation and the first one so admitted was Brother Jacob Kanianthara who was the companion of Malpan Thomas Porukkara and who was working hard together with the founding fathers from the very beginning. He made his first vows on 2 February 1865.

### **8. Religious Congregation for Women**

Chavara's change of residence from Mannanam to Koonammavu in 1864 as desired by the Archbishop found him taking new initiatives and making continuous efforts towards achieving the overarching goal of the sanctification and development of the Church and people of Kerala. Already the pioneers were grieved by the fact that although the Church in Malabar had very ancient origins, religious communities were not established either for men or for women which was considered as the reason for the stunted growth of the Church and society. Now that a religious congregation for men was established and got recognized by the authorities of the Church, it was now time to start one for women who wished to live as religious and who would be able to give a better Christian formation including cultivation of



skills for girls, who would become the backbones of exemplary Christian families, thus benefiting the whole society.

The first attempt to start a convent for women at Puthenpally did not materialize because of the Roccas episode. Another opportunity presented itself in September 1865 and both Chavara and Fr Leopold Beccaro OCD, the parish priest at St Philomena's parish, Koonammavu and the Delegate Provincial wanted to make use of it. Eliswa Vakayil, a widow, 34 years old, and Anna her daughter aged 14 wanted to live a consecrated life. Teresa Vaippassery, aged 18, younger sister of Eliswa also wanted to join them. Fr Leopold had spoken to them and was convinced of their vocation. Both the Fathers considered the matter well and it was decided that a small house could be made for them and religious life for women could make a beginning. Chavara had known the strong desire of Anna Puthenangady, aged 37, also a widow from the Syrian parish of Vaikom, to lead a consecrated life; accordingly, she was also asked to reach Koonammavu.

A small house was made of bamboo and palm leaves and other necessary accessories were also provided. It was decided that the new house for the convent would be consecrated and religious life started on 13 February 1866. The Archbishop was in agreement and he gave them the Rule of the Third Order Carmelites Discalced (women) (TOCD). Although Anna Puthenangady was present, Beccaro spoke to her only after the ceremonies and she was admitted to the community on the next day. Thus, the first ever community of religious women in Kerala was founded at Koonammavu.

The bamboo structure was not in a position to withstand the forces of nature for long and, so, a new solid structure for the convent had to be built. Chavara set out on a collection drive for the purpose placing his whole trust in the Lord, and within a short time a fund amounting to Rupees 8,000 was collected. Chavara managed to build a sufficiently large two-storied building for the convent and equipped it within one year and the sisters were shifted to the house on 27 March 1867. An attached boarding house for girls (*educantatu*) was also built in 1868 where the sisters could give sound Christian formation and training in various skills to the boarders. It was the happy design of God that Blessed Euphrasia Elavathunkal CMC was a member of that boarding house from 1888-1897. The first four sisters took their first vows on 16 July 1868. The convent being not far from the monastery, Chavara and Beccaro used to go there from time to time to give instructions on both spiritual themes as well as on aspects of religious life and

administration. Chavara also used to write letters to the community or the superior when he was not able to visit them.

Chavara was happy to see the original dream of the pioneers and much more fulfilled within his lifetime, though the two seniors did not live to see them. Now, his attention was mainly to consolidate and embellish Christian life and practices by concentrating more on Christian families. In February 1868, he wrote to the parishioners of Kainakary, his native place, a rather long, possibly the longest letter he had ever written entitled "The Testament of a Good Father." Kaiakary naturally evoked sweet memories of his childhood and early years spent with his beloved parents and siblings and the way he was groomed by his dear mother, relatives with friends and neighbours, participation in worship in the Church and prayers in the family, education in the *kalari*, and a host of other things.

With all these in the background and his vast and varied experiences with men and matters and the variety of learning, experience and observation of different people and circumstances, Chavara wrote his Testament as a "Charter of an Ideal Christian Family." Most of his sublime ideals on the Christian family, the bond of love and blood existing in the family, upbringing of children, value-based education, interpersonal relationships, care and concern for others, readiness and eagerness to help others, behavioural and ethical principles, just wages, individual and social responsibility, prayerful atmosphere, the duty of parents to know how their wards study, who their friends are, how do they spend their free time, etc., are insights valid even today.

Chavara wrote a second letter to the parishioners at Kainakary on 15 October 1869 urging them to start a confraternity for happy death and under its care to begin a Home for the Poor (*upavisala*) where a few poor and old people could be accommodated and looked after, thus, creating the first home of that kind probably in the whole of India. There is a third letter which he also termed his *testament* to his brethren in the religious community written in October 1870 where, again, one can see the inner flame of a soul burning with love of God and concern for his brethren and for the good of the community, the great value of obedience, mutual love, and selfless service.

His concern for the spiritual life and growth of priests and people was such that he spent time and energy to codify the rules and regulations for the Holy Mass, compiled a breviary systematically codifying and abridging the traditional one in the Syrian rite and sent it to Rome for permission to print it. He adapted and translated the

Holy Saturday ceremony from Latin to Syriac. He adopted some pious devotions like the forty-hour adoration, devotion to the Holy Family, the Rosary, etc., from the Latin rite because he found them helpful for deepening the spiritual life of his brethren.

## 9. The Writings

During the last years of his life Chavara was busily engaged in writing some of his major works, if we may call them so. One should remember that those were times when no major literary work was done in the native tongue Malayalam. Almost all his works were collected and published in four volumes from Mannanam in 1981. An English translation of the volumes was published in 1990. The first volume is his *Chronicles*, the second is entitled *Literary Works*, the third is called *Spiritual Works*, and the fourth *Letters*.

Going through the *Chronicles* one comes across a clear-headed and conscientious writer, a responsible historian and a creative and innovative thinker. Chavara's *Chronicles* present a mine of precious information not only on the events leading to the establishment of the first religious house and foundation of the first indigenous religious congregation of India for men at Mannanam (CMI) and that of other houses of the community in various other places, but it provides us also with information regarding the state of secular education, seminary system called Malpanates, biographies of Malpan Thomas Palackal and Malpan Thomas Porukkara, the rule of the foreign Carmelite prelates in Kerala, history of the Malabar Church and that of the secular society in the nineteenth century, the longing for reunion of the separated brethren and self-rule for the Malabar Church, history of the Roccas schism, story of the establishment of the first indigenous religious congregation for women in India (CMC-CTC), and a host of other related matters.

*The Chronicles* also brings to light the strong desire and concerted and sustained efforts of the founding fathers to bring about an integral renewal of the Church and society of the nineteenth century Kerala, leading from the front with creative ideas and collective service. It provides clear indications to the state of harmony and brotherhood existing between the clergy and the laity, on the one hand, and the fraternal and collaborative spirit prevalent among the different religious groups and traditions in those days in the civil society as a whole. The perceptive reader can also discern some of the sterling qualities of heart and mind of the author, Chavara, his deep sense of dedication and strong determination, his enduring faith in the

Providence of God, his fervent devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, his audacious and even adventurous efforts to attain the precise goals he had fixed, his candour and simplicity, nobility and kindness.

The literary works of Chavara include *Atmanutapam* (compunction of the soul) with three autobiographical chapters and several other chapters mainly depicting the life and activities of Jesus and his mother Mary with plenty of anecdotes, imaginary conversations, and prayers. Scholars are of the opinion that for his chapters on Mary, he was influenced by a Spanish author and mystic Maria de Agreda who wrote a large volume on *The City of God* which he would have read in its Italian translation which was available with Fr Leopold Beccaro OCD, his friend and with Archbishop Baccinelli.

The first two autobiographical chapters of *Atmanutapam* are reminiscences of his beautiful childhood, baptism at the parish church of Chennankary, his parents and family, how endearingly his beloved mother brought him up, imparting in him a sense of the sacred, his annual visits to the shrine of Mother Mary at Vechoor where he was dedicated to her as a little child, his education at *kalari*, the ambience and climate existing there, his extreme sense of sin and sorrow for sin, his vocation and the reluctance of his parents to part with their youngest child, how it was resolved, his reflections on those and other incidents, his discerning the Providence and plan of God for him from all those events, etc.

The third chapter is an exquisite, imaginative description of Infant Jesus with his Mother Mary and the intense longing and desire of Chavara to see each and every movement of Jesus in person on those situations, to his heart's content and satisfaction. One can only wonder at his creative imagination, his choice of words and the literary style of the language which was probably only beginning to develop in full measure. He sometimes borrows words and phrases from Sanskrit and Tamil which speaks of his familiarity with those languages.

Another poem included in the literary works is entitled *Anastasiayude Raktasaksitoam* (The Martyrdom of Anastasia), a rather small work compared to *Atmanutapam*. The work on Anastasia is said to have been written previous to *Atmanutapam*, most probably at the time of the Roccas episode. It is the story of a young and beautiful sister Anastasia in a convent in Rome. That was the time of Christian persecution in Rome and sister Anastasia was summoned by the governor to appear before him. As soldiers came to take her away forcefully from the convent, her mother superior exhorts her to muster courage and to make haste to go with the soldiers, to confess her faith

boldly before the governor and meet her beloved bridegroom Jesus as the soldiers would certainly kill her on the orders of the governor.

This poem was meant to encourage the members of the Malabar Church not to follow the intruder bishop Roccas for fear or favour but to remain faithful to the Church and its legitimate authorities even risking their very life. Once again the creative imagination of Chavara making the characters alive and vibrant with his brilliant choice of words, figures of speech, and style is all the more commendable. The two works described above belong to the literary style of *Mahakavyam* and *Khandakavyam*, respectively, and are now considered the first of their kind in Malayalam language and literature.

The third volume of his complete works is entitled *Spiritual Works* and contains some beautiful pieces of meditation and spiritual colloquies. In a way, those works give a taste of the purity of his soul, his meditations on the fact of being a beloved child of God, his sorrow for offending God even slightly by being disobedient to him, his return to the Father like that of the prodigal son and the lost sheep in the gospel, his loving conversation with his beloved father, etc., give the readers a picture of the beautiful filial relationship he had with God the Father and Jesus Christ.

The last volume is a collection of letters which he personally wrote to several people including the Pope and Cardinal Barnabo in Rome, to the Prior General of the Carmelite Order in Rome, to the Archbishop on many occasions when he was either asked to investigate some litigation or a report given to the Bishop on how certain people, including priests, spent a few days in prayer and penance in the monastery and returned reconciled, etc. One of the last official letters he wrote was a letter to Fr General of the Carmelite Order which he sent through Fr Leopold Beccaro OCD when he accompanied the new Archbishop Leonard Mellano when the latter went to Rome to attend the Ecumenical Council Vatican I, in August 1869. In that letter, Chavara had mentioned the desirability of appointing a native Bishop of their own rite for the Syrians of Malabar. It is known that the letter reached the Archbishop and he did not like the suggestion. Somehow he had an inkling that the missionary brothers Fathers Leopold and Gerard Beccaro also were supporting the opinion of Chavara and so after the sad demise of his great friend Chavara, Fr Leopold and Fr Gerard were sent back to Italy never to return to India.

Then, there are a good number of letters which he wrote to the sisters of the newly founded religious congregation for women at

Koonammavu. All these bear testimony to their author, Chavara, as a person with clarity of mind, definiteness of purpose, equity and suavity in dealings, strong determination and time-bound execution. In some of his letters to the sisters, where he deals with spiritual matters, he speaks in mystical terms which clearly point to the state of his mystical soul, his filial relationship to Jesus as a loving Father, deep sentiments of Christian charity, family virtues based on gospel values, filial love and devotion to Mary Immaculate Mother of Carmel, the Holy Family, his devotion and attachment to the Catholic Church and its authorities, etc.

### **10. The Last Days**

The heavy responsibilities Chavara was holding practically from his days in the seminary at Pallippuram which continued to increase as years went by, the long and hazardous journeys he undertook, the never-die spirit and strong determination with which he realized his goals, all those started taking their toll on him. Although his health had begun to deteriorate in 1869, he became very sick in the beginning of October 1870. He began to have headaches and severe pain in the eyes. The treatments he received for remedying pain of the eye resulted in partial loss of sight. It was a great consolation for him that his friend Fr Leopold returned from Europe in November 1870. As Chavara knew that he was approaching the final days of his earthly sojourn, he made his last confession to Fr Leopold on 1 January 1871 and, then, asked for the sacrament of anointing. Fr Leopold was so much stricken with grief at the thought of his friend's final departure that he was unable to administer the sacrament.

As the community gathered around him, Chavara calmly exhorted them not to be sorry for his departure:

By God's graces I was keeping in mind this moment... I always kept in mind and heart and honoured the Holy Family ... thus their help was always available to me. By God's grace I can say that with their help I never had an occasion to be deprived of the grace I received in baptism. I dedicate our humble congregation and all its members to this Holy Family... let them reign in your hearts...

At 7:15 in the morning of 3 January 1871 with his confreres around his bed in tears, Chavara calmly slept in the Lord. Fr Mathai Kappil, one of the first eleven members and a renowned preacher, started the funeral oration with the words "today the flag of Malabar has fallen!" He was buried in St Philomena's Church, Koonammavu. Later his mortal remains were transferred to Mannanam in June 1889 after the

division of the Malabar Vicariate and were interred at the monastery chapel. The process of his canonization was initiated in 1958, was declared blessed by St John Paul II at Kottayam on 8 February 1986 and is canonized at the Vatican on 23 November 2014.

## 11. Chavara Spirituality

A deeper analysis of Chavara's life, vision for the congregation, innovative and epoch-making initiatives, his thirst for knowledge, insatiable yearning for the vision of God and the variety of new steps taken in view of the spiritual, intellectual, and social development and growth of the society made him a *karmayogi*. He was certainly a yogi concentrating himself on God in Jesus Christ and thirsting for mystical union with him; at the same time, his intense love of Jesus and his heart's desire to conform himself to the mind of Jesus made him a person totally dedicated and fervently devoted to his brothers and sisters for whose growth and welfare he spent himself without reserve. In that sense he stands a better comparison to St Teresa of Avila than St John of the Cross, both Carmelite mystics. In this background the questions that demand an answer are the following: what was the driving force that motivated him so strongly to strive for the vision of Jesus, on the one hand, and the growth and happiness of his brethren, on the other? What was the pivotal point of Chavara's spirituality? A satisfactory answer to these questions requires a thorough analysis of his spiritual and literary works, which is beyond the scope of this short article. Still an attempt is made here to gauge the broad parameters of the golden thread that inspired him to do whatever he did in the manner he did.

One of the earliest indications of his awareness that he was called by the Lord is seen in his enthusiasm to respond to the invitation of Malpan Thomas Palackal to pursue studies for priesthood at the Pallippuram seminary; he was ready and courageous even at that tender age to stay at the parish house in Chennankary, away from his home and parents, learning Syriac language and serving Holy Mass daily. It was the same kind of conviction that led him to follow his vocation and return to the seminary after the sudden demise of his beloved parents and only brother falling prey to the devastating epidemic. In the seminary he realized that he was called to be a member of the family of God and hence his motto: "God is my portion and inheritance" (Ps 16:5). The idea of the family both human and divine seems to have a dominant place in his spirituality. His life in the seminary together with other seminarians under the paternal care of

the Malpan may have strengthened and widened the idea of family for Chavara. As a member of that wider family he was eager to sincerely love others and do whatever possible whether helping in studies or discharging the duties of the household in the company of others, finding time and energy to do everything to the satisfaction of the Malpan.

Life in the seminary for about eleven years broadened his views on the larger family of the Church for whose service the Malpan had dedicated his whole life and was preparing the seminarians to build a similar bond of devotion and dedication. The thought that he was preparing himself for a total dedication to the Church filled Chavara with joy and reminded him of the serious responsibility of shepherding the flock for whose sake Jesus the Lord had given up his life, suffering even the most ignominious death on the cross. This sublime thought resulted in visions of the good shepherd who knew his flock, was aware of their strengths and weaknesses and the need to lead them to green pastures and restful waters, the need to be with them to look after their welfare even risking his life. The vast and varied needs of the ecclesial family beckoned him to do his best. He responded to this call not by means of solitary efforts but by means of community efforts which would synergise the whole work bringing in tangible and durable results. Therefore, he decided to join hands with his venerable Malpan and Fr Thomas Porukkara, the Malpan's dear friend, to launch the movement of the *darsanaveedu*.

The studies that Chavara made on the Bible and theology ushered in new insights on the theme of the family. The people of Israel were Yahweh's chosen people and He was their Father who adopted them to the Family of God. The central theme of the New Testament is the incarnation of the Son who belonged to the Trinitarian family, his life on earth beginning in the Holy Family of Nazareth, manifesting in word and deed that God has forgiven the sin of Adam and his children in view of the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus restoring the adopted sonship to all humans, thus, accepting man back to the Family of God. The restoration and adoption as children of God is for all humankind and, henceforth, there is no discrimination between Jews and gentiles, rich and poor, man and woman before God, thus, raising all people to the dignity of the children of God. This beautiful vision of the 'sonship of God' and the consequent universal brotherhood in the universal family of God offered the most powerful images that filled Chavara's mind with tremendous possibilities for his own self-



realization and a variety of apostolic activities for the growth of the society and salvation of others.

These sublime thoughts were all the more strengthened, on the one hand, by the countless images of his childhood and the tender love and affection he received from his parents especially from his mother, his dedication to Mother Mary at Vechoor and the awareness that he was now a child of the Blessed Mother and, consequently, an adopted son of the Holy Family and a brother of Jesus; the devotion to the Holy Family to which he was led by his mother from early childhood, the prayers she taught him and the way she groomed him with loving corrections and tender care. On the other hand, it also reminded him that being a member of the family of God, he has a serious responsibility to the wider human family which prompted him to dedicate himself for the spiritual, intellectual and social growth and development of the society. Thus, it is fairly certain that his intense awareness of the 'adopted sonship of God' became the most powerful anchor and the non-negotiable spiritual foundation, the igniting motivational force which urged him strongly to become a man of intense prayer and relentless action.

It was indispensable to invest his time and energy in prayer in order to see the plan of God for him and for others. Hence, he longed to be a part of the *darsanaveedu* which the Malpans were planning to make, which in turn would help him to dedicate himself totally for others. The intense love and seriousness of purpose which guided him became evident in his child-like candour and respectful audacity with which he begged Bishop Francis Xavier Pescheto, the Vicar Apostolic, to relieve him from the appointment as vicar of the parish at Pallippuram.

The ardent love and devotion of Chavara to the Eucharistic Lord whom he often addressed with the endearing phrase 'my father' (*ente appa*) and the long hours he spent before the Eucharist in prayer vouch for the intense flame of his personal love for Jesus and zeal for salvation of his brethren. Some of the themes of his meditations like that of the prodigal son and the lost sheep in which he identified himself with the younger son and the lost sheep, and his sentiments of great confidence and courage flowing from the personal experience of the compassionate love of his father, the loving concern of the shepherd and the trouble he takes to recover the lost sheep even risking his very life, etc., proclaim eloquently the abiding sense of being the beloved son of the loving father and the love he had experienced as a son while at home.

In the early chapters of *Atmanutapam*, Chavara gives vent to the theological reflections based on his loving experience as the youngest son of his family, his insertion into the Holy Family, his solidarity with the entire human family, his becoming one with the family of God and receiving the adopted sonship of God through baptism. In this context, his acknowledgement that by the grace of God he was able to keep that precious gift untarnished until the end speaks volumes on how carefully and prayerfully he strived for a continuous growth and deepening of his filial relationship to God. Similarly, his testaments and some of his letters bear eloquent witness to his strong bond of mystical love and commitment to Jesus the Lord, on the one hand, and his deep love and concern for his brethren in the congregation, for the newly formed community of the Carmelite sisters, and the solicitude for a vibrant life of Christian discipleship in families and parishes. In this context, it is to be noted that some of the letters he wrote to the community of sisters are expressions of his mystical love of Jesus in which he scaled to great heights.

The impact of his enlightened consciousness on the 'adopted sonship of God' found expression in his personal pursuit of holiness, becoming a pioneer together with the two Malpans in the unprecedented and daunting task of starting the first religious 'house-on the hill-top' (beth-rauma) and it took also an allied direction, namely, his daring steps to launch into the deep to enlighten the society as a whole in spiritual, intellectual, and social fields. He gave special emphasis to the sound and enlightened training and pastoral service of the priests who had a leading role in the formation and training of Christian communities. He was convinced that unless they were awakened to their 'adopted sonship of God', it would be difficult for them to bloom and blossom to Christian perfection and sainthood. That was the guiding spirit behind the establishment of the common seminary at Mannanam in 1833, the printing press and Sanskrit school there in 1846, the issuing of the order to all parishes in 1864 asking them to start an elementary school.

Religious communities for women were unheard of in Kerala in those days. This was an inadvertent denial of opportunities to women to follow Jesus more closely through the practice of religious vows. Similarly, girls were kept away from value-based Christian education. However, Chavara knew well that mothers at home played a key role in the Christian and value-based education of children and, consequently, of the society at large and, therefore, the role of sisters in awakening the spirit of 'sonship of God' in children and the society

was very important. The relentless attempt to start the first ever indigenous religious congregation for women in Kerala can certainly be seen from his spirituality of the 'adopted sonship of God'.

The special care and concern of Chavara for the education of the dalits and the poor, his starting the first ever 'home for the poor' (*upavisala*), probably the first of its kind in the whole of India, must also be seen in this light. In other words, the 'adopted sonship of God', which is the central idea of the 'new creation' of the New Testament, was the overarching, dynamic spiritual force, which was behind the extraordinary vigour and vitality of the life and activities of Kuriakose Elias Chavara.

## 12. Conclusion

A brief study and reflection on the life, insights, and activities of Chavara shows that he was a person filled with the Holy Spirit, was spurred by the Spirit to have a deep experience of the length, breadth, height, and depth of the love of God manifested in Jesus who restored man to the 'adopted sonship of God'. In all his activities Chavara gave prime importance to man not only in relation to his immediate and external dimensions but also, and very importantly, in relation to his internal and ultimate dimensions, having a *darsan* of the unfathomable contours of his inner space, which awakened him to the fact that he is a 'child of God' by the very fact that he is a human being. To awaken humans anywhere and everywhere to that integral vision of man is the great mission that Kuriakose Elias Chavara has left to posterity.

## Bibliography

- Kochumuttom Thomas, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Mumbai, 2014.  
Kochuparampil Mathai, *An Unknown Karmayogi* (Mal.), Cochin, 1978.  
Kureethara Joseph Varghese, *Thoppil Gheevarghese Joseph Kathanar* (Mal.), 2012.  
Menachery George, *St. Thomas Christian Encyclopedia of India*, Madras, 1973.  
Mundadan Mathias, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bangalore, 2008.  
Valerian TOCD, *Very Rev. Fr. Kuriakose Elias* (Mal.), Mannanam, 1939.  
Vallavanthara Antony, *Epic of Dreams*, Mannanam, 2004.