

DOCUMENTATION

Appointment Order to Fr Kuriakose Elias Chavara as *Malpan*

Date: Issued in 1844

Content: designating Fr Chavara as the *Malpan* (Professor) and the examiner of priests

Language: Original in Portuguese

Francis Xavier of St. Ann, a member of the Carmelite Discalced Order, by the grace of God and the benevolence of the Holy See Archbishop of Sardia and Vicar Apostolic of Malabar, greetings and benediction to Father Kuriakose Chavara, a parishioner of Chennankary Church.

Being persuaded by your virtues and dynamism, we do hereby appoint you the examiner of the priests belonging to the Syrian Rite of our Vicariate, and the *Malpan* (Professor) of all sacred sciences. You are authorized hereby to grant to deserving candidates permission to be ordained as priests and to grant to priests permission to hear confessions as well as to preach sermons.

Therefore, we command all those coming under the purview of this order, to accept and obey you as *Malpan* and examiner.

Given at Varapuzha under our signature and seal on the 16th day of February 1844.

Sd/
Archbishop Francis Xavier,

Sd/
Father Michael Correa, Secretary

HOMAGE TO SAINT CHAVARA

Francis Vineeth CMI

“A man truly filled with the Holy Spirit”
People called him based on his own merit.

The tiny boy Elias lost his mother dear
Was brought up by an aunt, in relation near.

She brought the baby to a priest learned and holy
Father Palackal, to whom was he surrendered wholly.

Years went on and training passed on
And there came the day, ordination was on.

The young priest had a chosen dream, very dear
To go to mounts and forest, not very near;

Far away from nearby soil, polluted lands
To the pure nature untouched by human hands.

But Alas! A bishop’s suggestion or a game of grace!
A call to serve God and people, in one embrace.

What a wonder, God increased their number,
Ten new priests joined them as true members.

Then came the awaited day of total oblation
Cutting all the threads of earthly relation.

Yes, Spirit was awakened in all with Grace,
And now let us thank God, in hymns of Praise.

BOOK REVIEWS

Thomas Kadankavil, *Chavara: A Multidimensional Saint*, Kottayam: Deepika Book House, 2014. Pages 235; Rs. 130.

As the title of the book speaks clearly, St Kuriakose Elias Chavara was a multifaceted person who lived in the nineteenth century, totally committed to God and to the service of His people responding to the needs of the time. Being sensitive to the salvation of their own souls and of other priest confreres, Chavara, along with Frs Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara were pondering over the possibility of going for a life of solitude, establishing a *tapasu bhavanam*, a *darsanaveedu*, a house of discipline and vision (an *ashram way of life*). When this desire was intimated to the then Vicar Apostolic, Bishop Maurilius Stabilini, he suggested that they might begin a religious house closer to the people of God so that their pastoral services could be made available to them. As a result, the first indigenous religious house was instituted. This charismatic community was established in order to seek and do the will of God the Father always and everywhere. That was the beginning of a great legacy lived and left behind for the coming generation. Chavara lived fully for God and for the people. That is the history.

The author of the present book is not satisfied with just drawing historical sketches again and again. What is accomplished by people who created history is always an inspiration for the subsequent generations. It is always pertinent to ask what they have done, but what is more relevant is to ask what such people would have done if they were living today. Such queries are more inspiring, action oriented and capable of making people dream of doing something responding to the need of the time. This approach is positive and creative. As far as Chavara is concerned, he is not a person to be imitated; rather he invites others to become an inspiration for the members of the present generation leading them to creative and innovative actions in the present world causing transformation in the person and reformation in the society. The author has very successfully projected Chavara in that sense. The author is very keen to present what Chavara stood for, what he did and said in his time through a historic narrative, before presenting him as a real inspiration

to understand the present world and to act to bring about its transformation.

One could say that the author is exploring what is said about Kuriakose Elias Chavara – ‘a pearl truly Indian and Oriental, a model to follow Jesus of Nazareth, who showed us how to love and serve others in family, religious and priestly life.’ The whole work is presented in two parts. The first part is the narrative of Chavara’s life. However, it is more than a presentation of his biography. In the fifth chapter of part one, very specifically the author investigates into the profile of the person of Chavara identifying his characteristic features that indeed spell out what he said, did and the way he lived in the short span of his life in his relationship to God, man and society. In his relationship with man, Chavara was 1) a man of compassion, 2) a man of letters and communication, and 3) a man who stood with and for marginalized people. In his relationship with God, he was 4) a man of God, 5) a man of prayers, and 6) a mystic. In his relationship with the society, Chavara was 7) a loving father, 8) a champion of the cause of dalit and women, and, 9) a man committed to a dedicated (or consecrated) community. Only such multifaceted persons could become innovators, trailblazers, pioneers, inventors, trendsetters and visionaries to usher in a new world.

The second part of the book is a philosophical reflection on the life and ideals of Chavara. It is an attempt to explore the hidden dimensions of his personality viewed from various philosophical perspectives. It is indeed a fresh and novel step taken by the author, which should be applauded greatly and the author is appreciated for this contribution. Chavara was a man who lived with farsightedness and visions for a new world where people would enjoy freedom, equality and unity.

As a whole, it is one of the best contributions to the growing body of literature on Chavara, widening and deepening the knowledge about the saint. However, the work is unique in so far as, unlike other works on him, it is done from a philosophical angle. It explores the esoteric horizon of the life of Chavara making it shine with the dawning light of wisdom.

The author is a great scholar and philosopher, and he is also a prolific writer with numerous scientific articles and several books on Philosophy and Spirituality. However, if we expect the same scientific mind applied in the book, we will be disappointed. The book is a meditative reflection on Chavara’s spiritual writings and exhortation, and as it is, the author does justice to the topic.

However, to the critical eye, going through the pages of the book, certain drawbacks stand out. This could have been avoided if a thorough proof reading were done. I would like to point out some of them in the work: i) On page 17, first line considers Chavara as a "...dependable historian of the Catholic St. Thomas Christians from 1805 to 1871 through his chronicles." However, since he was born only in 1805 and died in 1871, there is an inaccuracy in the statement. ii) Although there are few references given in the content of chapter one and chapter seven, the author has not given either a footnote or the endnote. Moreover, in chapter seven, the reference number begins with no. 6 on page 114 while nos. 1-5 is missing. Therefore, the references and endnotes are confusing in some places.

In the philosophical reflection on the life and spirituality of Chavara in the second part of the book, the author begins stating the complementarity between faith and reason. We could agree with what John Paul II said in his encyclical *Fides et Ratio* – faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth, God. However, it is doubtful whether we could naïvely dismiss the distinction as the author makes, by defining the term philosophy 'as a discipline that deals with beliefs that are speakable or communicable' (p. 163). Philosophy indeed goes far beyond the speakable, searching for the depth of this speakable reaching the uncommunicable.

In spite of these few downsides, we could definitely say that this work is one that opens the portals of Chavara Spirituality and welcomes more serious researches in this field. There is no doubt that the preparation and publication of this work right at the time of the canonization of the saint is the result of well calculated *tapasya* of the author. I wish that the readers of this book may be inspired by the spirituality and enthusiasm of Chavara and come forward with such and deeper researches.

Thomas Muppathinchira CMI

Thomas Kochumuttom, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bombay: St. Paul Society, 2014. Pages: 372; Rs. 210; ISBN: 978-93-5015-204-1.

A melange of prayer and action helps one foster an individual charism and it is not a daunting task for anyone to grow spiritually and intellectually motivated by others. We have gone through various biographies of great saints by renowned authors. However, a perusal

of the biography titled *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara* is definitely a soothing and joyous experience since it has a spiritual core, the content of which has been embellished with appropriate expressions to sustain the interest of the reader.

A meticulous planning has preceded the appealing accomplishment of the work by Fr Thomas Kochumuttom CMI; the narrator. Bound in three parts, the 33 chapters pave the way for the zenith of perfection that the book is. Since the manner of presentation is highly scientific, the book has shed light on every nook and corner of the illustrious life of Chavara. Hence, it is easy for the reader to grasp the spirituality and the enlightenment achieved by the sage during his life.

In the "Ascent of mount Mannanam," which is Part I of the book, the author has given a descriptive narration of Chavara's quest for the divine as well as his early life. The book has clearly captured the remarkable rise of Chavara out of a significant personal catastrophe which he had to face during his childhood. Later on, moving through the pages of the book, we find that Chavara moulds and sharpens the community preparing the members of the community to grapple with the forthcoming problems. The 1st part of the book comes to a close with the three strong-willed sages, namely, Fr Thomas Palackal, Fr Thomas Porukara and Kuriakose Elias Chavara, giving shape to a monastic life. In this initiative, they leave open a new path for the Indian Church to seek for holiness.

In Part II, we come across with an unsurpassed leader whose prudence and integrity stood firm amidst the Roccas Schism, in spite of the threats he faced from the opposite camp. With extreme zest and passion Chavara made strengthened others in prayer. Moreover, the exemplary manner in which he came forward as a roaring lion in the face of troubles, is nurtured by those who knew him. His courage galvanized others to agitate in the face of highhandedness and injustice. Thus he became a socio-religious reformer by causing epoch-making incidents.

One of the irksome aspects of the society during his days was women's plight. They had no significant public role in the society. Moreover, they were deprived of proper education. In this pathetic situation, Chavara stepped forward with a voice in favour of women. His message was taut was aimed at the emancipation of marginalized women. He looked for ways and means to bring the empowerment. This liberative ideology is the crux of Part III. In this part, the author has had his extreme best in elucidating the major contributions of Chavara, the unrivalled leader, to the society.

The strenuous effort of Fr Kochumuttom bear fruit as he successfully shows Chavara as a pillar that supported the Catholic Church in Kerala. The zeal that Chavara demonstrated helped the Church in the expansion and the protection of faith. The exactitude employed by the author enables the readers to capture the various dimensions of the life of the saint.

In brief, the author of *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara* deserves high admiration for his ability to retrace the exact spiritual journey of the saint in all details, as the book drops a message that Chavara was a sterling personality with relevant message for the age which broke the fetters of disappointment that had descended over the society and the Church in Kerala.

Lince Jose CMI