

*Editorial*

**IN DEFENCE ALONG THE  
ECCLESIASTICAL FRONTLINE  
Chavara and the Ongoing Struggle**

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**1. Introduction**

One of the remarkable contributions of Chavara was the defence of faith and the integrity of the Church at a time divisive elements were eating into the very fabric of the Church in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Kerala. The Church, throughout the history, has produced brave sons and daughters who stood up and faced challenges, marched to meet threats head on, wrote treatises after treatises in defence of faith as it was attacked. Some of them brought great applause and some of them were sorely misunderstood. A few of them sacrificed their life for the defence of the Church and faith. Chavara, a champion of faith, who has gone before us negotiating considerably large waves of crisis that rose in his time, invites to make a review of the crises that the Church is facing today.

**2. Chavara Negotiating the Waves**

There was a serious challenge that was faced by the Church in Kerala at the arrival of Bishop Thomas Roccas from Baghdad on 9 May 1861. The oddity of his arrival was that he did not have a valid permission of the Pope to exercise faculties in Kerala. However, since Roccas was a bishop and belonged to the same rite as the Syrian Catholics of Malabar, in spite of a letter of warning by the Archbishop and a further letter from Chavara, a substantial number of the parishes including several Malpans welcomed him enthusiastically. Having been welcomed by the people, he gradually began to exercise faculties such as ordaining candidates to minor orders and priesthood. It is at this crucial juncture that Archbishop Baccinelli appointed Chavara Vicar General for the Syrians on 9 June 1861 and counted on him and his confreres to face the challenge.

In extremis, the first step taken by Chavara was to ascertain facts. He wrote a letter to Pope Pius IX on 19 June asking for a note on the validity of the claim of Roccas that he has authority over the Syrians of Malabar.<sup>1</sup> He requested that the reply from Rome be given in Syriac language which all the priests in the Malabar could read. As the response did not come in time, he wrote to Cardinal Barnabo of the Propagation of Faith twice addressing the same issue. In the reply from the Holy Father both in Syriac and Latin, dated 5 September 1861, the Pope stated clearly that the bishop did not have any jurisdiction over the Syrians of Malabar.

Roccas did not only consider the letter genuine, but also was infuriated. He was extremely angry with Chavara and his companions one the one hand for not recognizing him and on the other, for exposing him. He warned Chavara of dire consequences. In response, Baccinelli excommunicated Roccas, who eventually received a letter from the Patriarch charging him to return. In the spirit of mercy and not to add insult to injury, Chavara negotiated his return home, provided the funds for his expenses during the journey back and, finally, saw him off at Kochi. In order to keep the Church united and to avoid another split in its ranks as it happened at Coonan Cross, Chavara and his companions negotiated all these hurdles risking their lives.

After the departure of Roccas there was the follow-up activity of Chavara and his companions in the sustained hard work which brought almost all the dissident churches and faithful back to the Church. However, considering the longing of the Syrian Christians of Kerala for a bishop of their own, the reason for the warm reception that people gave Roccas when he came and the spirit of Roccas still lurking in some corners of the Church, in 1869, Chavara wrote a letter to Alexander Cardinal Barnabo, Prefect of the Congregation for the Propagation of Faith suggesting that it was good to have two bishops in Kerala: one for the Latin Church and other for the Syrian Church.<sup>2</sup> The added advantage, according to Chavara was the reunion of Christians in Kerala. He mentioned in the letter that "there are also many non-Catholics in our midst who are our own kith and kin, now

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<sup>1</sup>See T. Kadankavil, "Role of Chavara in the Establishment of Syro-Malabar Hierarchy", in HE 10, 1 (2014) 65-74, pp. 65-67.

<sup>2</sup>See the transcript of the letter Chavara received from Pope Pius IX in T. Kadankavil, "Role of Chavara in the Establishment of Syro-Malabar Hierarchy", in HE 10, 1 (2014) 65-74, p. 66.

known as Jacobites. The above solution will help them renounce schism and return to the unity of the Catholic fold." As Kadankavil observes, the letter materially influenced the Congregation for the Propagation of Faith to grant an indigenous bishop for the Syrians at a later point in time.<sup>3</sup> However, it also raised a severe storm in Varapuzha and caused great displeasure in Archbishop Leonard for Chavara.

Both the instances narrated above, the stance that Chavara took in the face of the crises and the aftermath of them clearly outlines his concern for the Church which he placed above any personal considerations. The Church today is in need of people like Chavara for it is facing problems that need solution and crises that need surmounting. In the following lines we are exploring some of the modern issues that the Church needs to address in a spirit of mercy and understanding as Chavara would have done.

### **3. The Looming Crises**

Crisis was ever part of the Church right from the inception and will remain so as long as it is set as a lamp on the hilltop. Each era presented unique crises of its own and uniquely they were faced or dealt with. The resilience of the Church in such matters on all these occasions is phenomenal. Some crises left its scar on the mystical body and others chipped a block off it, but healing was always there thanks to divine intervention through human agents. The horizon of the Church today sends us an alert as it challenges us to spring into action on behalf of the Church of our era. The challenges are both external and internal.

### **4. External Forces**

In this section, we consider those external factors that pose a challenge both to faith and the very existence of the Church. These forces that threaten the wellbeing of the Church do not belong to the Church and are often malignant in their intentions.

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<sup>3</sup>T. Kadankavil, "Role of Chavara in the Establishment of Syro-Malabar Hierarchy" *Herald of the East* 10, 1 (2014) 65-74, 67. Serving the Church and defending her from attacks internal and external, in various ways, Chavara worked hard to the point of self-destructiveness. Moreover, he harboured the displeasure of no less a person than the bishop, and at home, of fellow-Christians who should have been his natural allies, had he crossed over.

#### **4.1. The International Fundamentalist Surge**

When it comes to religious fundamentalism, it is the Abrahamic monotheistic religions that are in the forefront. Chronologically, each of these religions would be intolerant toward any other religion in its formative years and gradually it would wean off. This is exemplified in the Jewish *cherem*, Christian crusades and Islamic *jihad*. However, since modern hermeneutics has no place in Islam, the weaning has not happened as in the other two. The reading of Quran today seems to be the same as it was in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC.

##### **4.1.1. The Position of the Church**

John Paul II, in his Apostolic Exhortation “*Ecclesia in Europa*” (1999), maintained that a “proper relationship with Islam is particularly important. As has often become evident in recent years to the Bishops of Europe, this needs to be conducted prudently, with clear ideas about possibilities and limits, and with confidence in God’s saving plan for all his children. It is also necessary to take into account the notable gap between European culture, with its profound Christian roots, and Muslim thought” (EE 57).

John Paul II has nothing against the Muslims. In fact, he is the first Pope to set foot in an Islamic place of worship as he went to the historic Umayyad Mosque in Damascus in 2001. He also gave his blessing to the construction of the mosque in Rome after there was opposition to the building’s construction.<sup>4</sup> The Pope also instructs: “Christians living in daily contact with Muslims should be properly trained in an objective knowledge of Islam and enabled to draw comparisons with their own faith. Such training should be provided particularly to seminarians, priests and all pastoral workers.” The exhortation of the prophetic pope, it seems, has remained a far cry as the enfolding European scenario can tell. The immigration that swells Europe is a clear example of the changing face of the continent.

##### **4.1.2. The Modern Immigration**

The recent Syrian crisis that caused thousands of refugees to seek asylum in Europe is one of the examples. Many of those seeking asylum are not refugees. Many of them are not even Syrian. Many of them who were granted asylum are missing from the camps. Those in

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<sup>4</sup>The construction costed €40 million, which was partly funded by the Saudi Arabian royal family. The land for the mosque, which can house up to 12,000 worshippers, was donated by the city of Rome in 1974.

the camps, having been accepted as refugees, with all their basic needs – food, housing, healthcare, religion – taken care of, the immigrants will keep demanding more from the government, giving them time to form domestic Islamic foothold and eventually take over the host country and its citizens from within. (Nigeria, northern Kerala are perfect examples).

Islam considers a non-Islamic nation, state or country to be *haraam/kafir* (bad). So, how do you win a war without anyone knowing? Syria is 90% Muslim population with neighbouring Islamic countries. Syria goes into Civil war (or at least, so we are led to believe). Mass migration of more than 750,000 Muslims migrants occurs. Syria is surrounded by Muslim countries. None of the rich countries in the Gulf region will accept them. They would fund them happily over £9 Billion in aid to re-settle them in Europe. Europe accepts them and suddenly a democratic country suddenly goes from a majority Christian population to a mixed population. This is the interesting bit. In order to conquer a country you either go to war with it and win or win over it democratically where majority wins.

#### **4.1.3. The Long Term Plan**

Here I am well aware of the charge of bigotry that can be levelled against me. However, I would rather face the charge more gladly than would wallow in silence that political correctness would impose on me. Now look at the scenario. Thousands upon thousands of immigrants are settled in the European countries, so how long before they outvote the Christians and claim the majority? The stage managers of such organized migration have a long view, they are thinking 50 to 100 years from now. Let a few million people suffer and move now. Sooner or later, they will get voting rights in the host countries. Vote in politicians from the community, with the majority, force a change to a different set of laws. This is a very sad future for Europe and this is what John Paul was warning against. Democracy only works when everyone respects each other's beliefs, not in a scenario in which you consider other religions as *haraam/kafir*.

#### **4.1.4. A Glimmer of Hope**

In January, Pope Francis went to the Great Synagogue of Rome where he called on Christianity, Judaism and Islam – the world's great monotheistic religions – to work together against terrorism and build

peace.<sup>5</sup> The Pope has consistently shown a desire to have a dialogue with Islam during his papacy. In Turkey he visited the Blue Mosque and also visited a mosque in Bangui, in the Central African Republic.<sup>6</sup> Here, he asked the local Imam to join him on the popemobile.

In January, Pope Francis received an official invitation to go to the mosque from a Muslim delegation. He is poised to become the first Pope to visit the Great Mosque of Rome, understood to be the largest site of Islamic worship outside of the Arab world. Speaking to TV2000, a television network sponsored by the Italian Church, the president of the Union of Italy's Islamic Communities, Imam Izzedin Elzir said the need for dialogue between religions was needed more than ever.

## **4.2. The National Awakening**

The most immediate challenge in India is posed by the Hindu nationalist elements. Those elements, often represented by the various wings of the nationalist party often push their agenda targeting the minorities in the country. The saffron brigade's efforts are to declare India a Hindu rashtra where their interests will be safe.

The ruling political party (BJP) supports fundamentalist outfits fanning communal passions for their political advantage. The Khandamal massacre, Muzaffarnagar riots, the Dadri incident, the vandalism and destruction of centres of worship and many individual instances of harassment taking place all over the country have sent waves of uncertainty and insecurity among Christians all over India. The party is brazen about their move to end the quota facility for the downtrodden given by the Constitution under the garb of reviewing reservation.

### **4.2.1. Covert Activities**

The Ayodhya dispute is a political, historical and socio-religious debate, centred on a plot of land in Ayodhya, located in Uttar Pradesh. The main issues revolve around access to a site traditionally regarded as the birthplace of the Hindu deity Rama, the history and location of the Babri Mosque at the site, and whether a previous Hindu temple was demolished or modified to create the mosque.

Bahu Lao, Beti Bachao is a campaign by Bajrang Dal to encourage young Hindu men to marry non-Hindu girls and to create awareness

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<sup>5</sup>In the same week it was confirmed that Islamic State (IS) destroyed St Elijah's Monastery in Mosul, the oldest Christian monastery in Iraq.

<sup>6</sup>It is here that Muslims were persecuted by Christian militia groups.

among Hindu girls about Love Jihad. The movement has been successful in West Bengal.

Ghar Wapsi is a series of religious conversion activities, organized by Indian Hindu organizations Vishva Hindu Parishad and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, to convert non-Hindus to Hinduism which became the subject of public discussion in 2014. It became a household phrase that year when Hindutva hotheads backed, by the VHP and the RSS, went the campaign. The leaders of the saffron parties claimed that such a move was constitutional. Under pressure, the Prime Minister made it clear that the government would not tolerate such religious discrimination. However, the VHP leaders defended ghar wapsi saying that since the Supreme Court has observed that Hinduism is not a religion but a way of life, ghar wapsi cannot be termed as unconstitutional.

#### **4.2.2. Attacks on Christian Worship Centres**

The low tolerance of the Hindutva brigade towards other religions is well known, but India saw its ugly side repeatedly recently after the Modi-led BJP came to power at the centre. There were repeated attacks on churches across the country, including in Delhi several times in 2014, in Mangalore in February 2015 and the latest was the attack on Navi Mumbai's St Sebastian's Church in March. The numerous harassments and persecutions unleashed by the various Hindu outfits in the rural areas against activists of other denominations often go unnoticed. The worst was the gang-rape of a 71-year-old nun in West Bengal's Nadia district. This incident saw harsh criticism towards the Modi government from all sections of society.

#### **4.3. The Accelerated World: Media Communications**

*Inter Mirifica* is the decree on the Media of Social Communications, by Pope Paul VI (1963) addresses the concerns and problems of social communication. It identifies social communication as the press, cinema, television, and other similar types of communication interfaces. Later, a follow up and expansion of *Inter mirifica*, the document *Communio et progressio* was written in 1971, which updated it. A further document, *Aetatis Novae*, was published in 1992. In 2005, John Paul II wrote his final apostolic letter, *The Rapid Development*, on the topic of social communications.

In his message "The Priest and Pastoral Ministry in a Digital World: New Media at the Service of the Word" to priests for the 44<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day (2010), Pope Benedict XVI invited them to

become digital citizens and engage with the information society, saying, "Priests stand at the threshold of a new era: as new technologies create deeper forms of relationship across greater distances, they are called to respond pastorally by putting the media ever more effectively at the service of the Word ... by his competence in current digital technology, making God concretely present in today's world and presenting the religious wisdom of the past as a treasure which can inspire our efforts to live in the present with dignity while building a better future."

Life is speeding up. Modern life demands speed and growth. Driven by scientific and technological progress, data, money and goods flow around the clock and more quickly than ever before. Communication is an excellent example - it's become about one hundred times faster over the past century. The tools for this speed-up have been supplied by industry, which is under constant pressure to cut production times. The push to get products to market ever more quickly has fuelled the rate of industrial innovation, with no end in sight. All this cutting-edge technology promises to save us time. All these relevant technological innovations are designed to save time and we communicate at top speed, we travel faster than ever before, and our consumption knows no bounds. But are we really saving time? And what happens to the time we do save? In this accelerated world, is the time taking us in its stride or are we taking the time in our stride? If acceleration becomes the very point of our existence, something important is lost in the process.

In order to respond to this acceleration of the world, Pope Francis established the new secretariat this year, to oversee all of the Vatican's communications offices, including Vatican Radio, *L'Osservatore Romano*, the Vatican Television Centre, the Holy See Press Office, the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, Vatican Internet Service, the Vatican Typography, the Photograph Service, and the Vatican publishing house. The leadership of the newly established Secretariat for Communications claims that under the department, internet content and video production will assume a greater role in Vatican communications in the years to come.

## **5. Internal Forces**

More distressing than alarming are the forces within the Church that challenge the traditions and ethical norms of the Church. Backed by modernism and post modernism, and on the basis of some of the experiences of the believers, they call into question those teachings of



the Church that they are unable to subscribe to. There is a growing number of Christians who are either disoriented or frustrated or disillusioned for various reasons. They either become non-conformist members of the Church or leave it. Sometimes they want to make their voices heard in a forceful manner with the support of those who are no longer part of the Church. Some of these voices pose a challenge to the organizational, doctrinal and ethical teachings of the Church as they clamour for their rights.

### **5.1. Same Sex Marriage/LGBT Rights**

The thirty-fourth Amendment of the Constitution of Ireland removed the constitutional prohibition on same-sex marriage in Ireland, which was approved at a referendum on 22 May 2015 by 62% of voters on a turnout of 61%. This was the first time that a country legalised same-sex marriage through a popular vote.

In India, several LGBT rights activists have acknowledged that a step by step approach is required to tackle all the issues and rights of the LGBT citizens of India. At the moment, the focus of the activists remains to repeal the Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, workplace equality and non-discrimination. Nevertheless, LGBT rights organisations are optimistic and are working on winning the right to same-sex marriage, inspired by the progress achieved in several countries. In April 2014 Medha Patkar of the Aam Aadmi Party stated that her party supports the legalisation of same-sex marriage.

### **5.2. Adoption and the Missionaries of Charity**

The new protocol issued by the Ministry of Women and Child Development allows single, divorced, and separated individuals to participate in adoption services. In addition to allowing single individuals to adopt, the new guidelines will also include a choice in which child is adopted, giving prospective parents the ability to pick one of six different children at the orphanage.

Following revision in guidelines on adoption by the Centre, the Missionaries of Charity, set up by late Mother Teresa, had said in a statement yesterday that it had stopped adoption at their orphanages two months ago, because the new guidelines violate natural law and their religious views. The Missionaries of Charity, who have a policy of only placing children with a married mother and father. "This decision was arrived at by the Missionaries of Charity, in Kolkata soon after they received the new "Guidelines Governing Adoption of Children, 2015."

The new guidelines are aimed at boosting the number of adoptions within India, where the adoption process is notoriously complex. According to the Ministry of Women and Children Development, opening adoption services to a wider group of prospective parents will help increase adoptions within the country. The Women and Child Development Ministry had recently said they would identify those child care homes, which are not complying with the revised guidelines of the Juvenile Justice Act, one of which includes orphanages run by the Missionaries. However, Sister Amala, who serves at Nirmala Shishu Bhawan, a New Delhi orphanage: "The new guidelines hurt our conscience. They are certainly not for religious people like us." The sisters are concerned about the moral upbringing of the children who are adopted by single individuals, rather than a mother and a father. However, Mrs Maneka Gandhi, Women and Child Development Minister, said that her ministry is "trying to persuade them, they are good people," but that the MC did "not want to come under a uniform secular agenda."

### **5.3. Spread of AIDS and Related Maladies**

The church is one of the biggest providers of HIV/AIDS care in the world, with more than 117,000 health facilities worldwide, because she is concerned about the wellbeing of all people. However, a conference held in Vatican City by theologians, health officials and researchers to discuss the treatment of HIV and AIDS. The conference was convened amid ongoing controversy about the Catholic Church's opposition to using condoms to control the spread of AIDS. AIDS groups around the world had hoped the church would use the conference to announce a reversal of its position. The answer turned out to be a resounding no. A statement by the head of the UN population agency observed that the Vatican claim that condoms do not protect people from HIV is scientifically incorrect and could contribute to the spread of the virus. However, he later said that it could be used in "in certain cases."

### **5.4. Rebel Parody and Eclectic Religious Life**

In several parts of the world, especially in Europe and the United States, Reverse Christian Groups have come up with professing faith that is diametrically opposed to that of Christianity/Catholicism.

Having found no meaning in the organised religions and finding them to be inadequate to meet their spiritual needs or having been disillusioned by them, people have taken to alternative religions, some of which are parodies and caricatures of some existing religions. The

*Flying Spaghetti Monster* is the deity of the "Pastafarian" parody religion, which asserts that a supernatural creator resembling spaghetti with meatballs is responsible for the creation of the universe. Its purpose is to mock intelligent design. The *Invisible Pink Unicorn* is a goddess which takes the form of a unicorn that is paradoxically both invisible *and* pink. These attributes serve to satirize the apparent contradictions in properties which some attribute to a theistic God, specifically omniscience, omnipotence, and omnibenevolence.

*Discordianism* is centred on the ancient Greco-Roman goddess of chaos, Eris, but draws much of its tone from Zen Buddhism, Christianity, and hippie countercultures of the 1950s and 1960s. Its main holy book, the *Principia Discordia* contains things like a commandment to "not believe anything that you read," and a claim that all statements are both true and false at the same time. Although many people do not take this group seriously, yet it represents a symptom of the defunct official Church, at least in their lives.

*Theistic Satanism* is the belief that Satan is a supernatural being or force that individuals may contact and supplicate to, and represents loosely affiliated or independent groups which hold such a belief. Hence, it is theistic as opposed to atheistic, believing that Satan is a real entity rather than an archetype. Another characteristic of Theistic Satanism include the use of ceremonial magic. Most theistic Satanism exists in relatively new models and ideologies, many of which claim not to be involved with the Abrahamic religions at all.

*Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence* is a street performance organization that uses Catholic imagery to call attention to sexual intolerance and satirize issues of gender and morality. All these groups, including the New Age movement, invite and challenge the postmodern Christians to review the relevance and meaningfulness of Christian life lived today.

## 5.5. The Western Scandals in the Church

This challenge involves those weak members of the Church who for one reason another get involved in a scandal and cause a great deal of stress in the Church and disillusionment and anger among the faithful.

Of late, there has been a growing fascination among film-makers with the child abuse scandal in the Catholic Church. The latest, *Spotlight*, has just been released in Britain. It depicts an institution concerned first and foremost with its own protection. The plot is an investigative probe into the role of the Boston archdiocese in covering up the sexual abuse of children by priests. The major concern of the

movie is the way power operates in the absence of accountability. When institutions convinced of their own greatness work together, what usually happens is that the truth is buried and the innocent suffer. Breaking that pattern of collaboration is not easy. Challenging deeply entrenched, widely respected authority can be very scary. Gone are the days of *Boys Town* (1938), an Oscar-winner in which Father Flanagan who accuses the American system of abusing young men by its arrogance and careless punishment. In *Spotlight*, the rhetoric is reversed.

The theme is further explored in *A History of Loneliness* by John Boyne, an account of one middle-aged Irish priest's fear that he has been an unwittingly complicit in the abuse of minors by being a supportive friend to a fellow priest who turns out to be a serial abuser. This is a harsh and unsparing novel in which the church is stripped bare of trust and affection between priests and people, with no credit given to its work for the poor and dispossessed. Bishops are depicted as conniving with cardinals to ensure that the message of concealment is enforced from the top down. If literature is the mirror of the society, these forms of literature that the common people, including Christians, read must be taken seriously into account.

### **5.5.1. The Physical Abuse of the Young**

The Physical abuse of Children and young people in Industrial Schools, Juvenile Homes and corporal punishments meted out to them recently came to light. In March 2010, Pope Benedict XVI wrote a pastoral letter of apology for all of the abuse that had been carried out by Catholic clergy. Two months later, Pope Benedict established a formal panel to investigate the sex abuse scandal, saying that it could serve as a healing mechanism for the country and its Catholics.

### **5.5.2. Paedophilia and the Cover-Up**

From the late 1980s allegations of sexual abuse of children associated with Catholic institutions and clerics in several countries started to receive wide publicity. In the Republic of Ireland and the United States, starting in the 1990s, a series of enquiries established that many priests had abused children in previous decades and several priests were convicted between 1975 and 2011 and some of the dioceses were bankrupt settling these cases. In many cases, the abusing priests were moved to other parishes to avoid embarrassment or a scandal, assisted by senior clergy, who are accused of great cover up.

In many of these cases, a blatant abuse of trust was also made. The members of the Church are taught from early childhood to respect priests and to believe what priests tell them about God and religion. It is these same people who would psychologically scar the innocent young people beyond easy repair.

### **5.5.3. Clerical Celibacy**

The abuse in Ireland included cases of high-profile Catholic clerics involved in illicit heterosexual relations as well as widespread physical abuse of children in the Catholic-run childcare network. In the light of the many instances that were in the media recently, some maintain that enforced celibacy leads to scandals. In some cases, celibacy encouraged men who were "confused or in denial about their own sexuality" to become priests. Such celibacy drives one's sexual energy to murky, awful forms of expression. They have different moral standards from society as a whole. Perhaps the scandals arise because of its unnatural structure that, by eliminating healthy sexuality, encourages clandestine perversion.

### **5.5.4. Clerical Homosexuality**

Some Catholics, especially in the wake of the scandals, have blamed the high number of homosexuals in the priesthood for priestly paedophilia. However, since absolutely no scientific evidence has been presented of such a connection other than people's conjecture and opinions, some dismiss the charge as sheer bigotry against unnatural sexual choices.

### **5.5.5. Concealment of Facts**

Bishop Finn of Kansas City was convicted in 2012 of concealing child pornography from the police. A certain priest, who worked under Finn, had indecent images on his computer. According to the prosecution, Finn knew about the offenses during 2010 to 2011, but failed to report the evidence to legal authorities. Finn remained in office for 3 years despite this conviction and resigned belatedly in 2015.

## **5.6. Politics and Inter-Ritual Strife**

The first Christians in India were evangelized by the apostle Thomas in what is now the state of Kerala. For most of their history, they were in communion with the Chaldean-Assyrian Church. Indian Christians

first encountered the Portuguese in 1498, when they warmly received the representatives of the Church of Rome, whose special status they continued to acknowledge despite long isolation.

The Portuguese didn't initially accept the legitimacy of the Malabar Church, and in 1599, Latinizations were imposed on them by means of appointments of Portuguese bishops, changes in the liturgy, Roman vestments, clerical celibacy, and the Inquisition. In 1653, after years of bitterness and tension, most Indian Christians severed their union with Rome. Alarmed, Pope Alexander VII sent Carmelites to India to repair the situation, and most of the Christians eventually returned to full communion with the Catholic Church.

In 1934, Pope Pius XI initiated a process of liturgical reform to restore the historic Syriac nature of the Latinized Syro-Malabar Church. Unfortunately, tension with the Latin Church remains over the extension of Syro-Malabar jurisdiction in other parts of India where Latin dioceses already exist.

### **5.7. Fallen Number of Church Attendance**

Post-war Britain has seen a very sharp decline in religion and nowhere is this seen more markedly than in church attendance in the established Church. By 2009, church attendance had fallen to 50% of that of 1968, despite an increase in population.

He also said that while 60 percent of British people are not in the church, that figure rises to around 80 per cent among the under-15s and around 75 per cent among 15 to 29-year-olds, with 59 per cent of all churches in England having no members between the ages of 15 and 19. Prediction is that almost all counties would have a churchgoing population of less than 4.5 per cent by 2020. The most recent figures, for 2010, show a very similar picture with Christians accounting for 44%, other religions 6% and no religion at 50%. The Church is losing the battle in the very area which has the most impact in the long term, at the younger end of the 'market'. These trends together show a very poor long-term future for the church.

Other trends also point to a major rejection of Christianity. The number of ministers and the number of church buildings has declined but not so fast as the fall in membership, but the sharpest decline has been in attendances showing that the proportion of those who actually call themselves Christian who go to church has declined sharply. It has been observed that if the Church in England was the national football team we would have sacked the manager long ago.

## **5.8. Failure to Recognise the Laity**

In *Lumen Gentium*, theoretically the Church brought down the pyramid and levelled the gap between the clergy and the laity. Although, the laity found their rightful place, they have not been able to lay claim to their right.

### **5.8.1. Lay Ministries**

Prior to 1972, no Lay ministries existed, only the Minor orders and Major orders. The Minor Orders were the lower orders of the clerical state and were reserved for those preparing for the Priesthood: Acolyte, Lector (Reader). Both these ministries are now being performed by the laity. They are increasingly at the forefront of the ecclesial life.

### **5.8.2. Lay Councils**

The 1983 Code of Canon Law does not permit the Laity to have any kind of executive or juridical powers in Ecclesiastical affairs. This therefore curtails the extent of influence the Laity has over how the Church is governed on a day-to-day basis. However, Lay experts and advisors were appointed to participate during the deliberations of the Second Vatican Council. Post the Second Vatican Council members of the Laity are routinely appointed to sit on Commissions and Committees established at every level – Curial, Bishops Conference, Diocesan, Deanery, and Parish.

The National Council for Lay Associations (NCLA) is one of the Consultative Bodies of the Bishops' Conference in England & Wales. In 2003 the NCLA celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Today however the NCLA appears to no longer exist as a viable organisation. One country where a Council of the Laity appears to be thriving is Venezuela. The National Council of the Laity in Venezuela routinely issues statements and press releases. The Council of the Catholic Lay Apostolate Organizations of Korea was ratified in 2011. The structure of some Religious Orders allow for Lay branches to be associated with them. These are often referred to as Third Orders. There are also many lay Catholic guilds and associations representing a whole range of professions.

### **5.8.3. Lay Pressure Groups**

In recent years many lay pressure groups have formed. Many of these have been in response to the widespread clerical sex abuse that has

been uncovered. Much of this has been blamed on a lack of supervision and oversight by those in authority within the Church, poor and weak management and flawed decision-making, when such abuses came to light.

Some of the main demands of these groups are (1) a universal and comprehensive system of transparency and accountability relating to the governance of the Church (2) empowerment of the Laity to a degree of oversight and scrutiny at every level of the Church (3) automatic consultative and collaborative rights for the Laity at every level of the Church (4) increased Lay access to and involvement with ministry within the Church.

#### **5.8.4. Lay Media**

Lay blogs and websites express their criticisms of the Catholic Church and make their demands for reform. One of the best known in England is the London-based *Daily Telegraph* blog. There are also many Catholic newspapers and periodicals produced around the world by lay Catholics, which are independent of hierarchical control or oversight *The Catholic Herald* and *The Tablet*, *National Catholic Reporter*.

#### **5.9. Dwindling Number of Vocations in the Church**

In 2014, there are only two priests under the age of 40 in the archdiocese of Dublin. This scenario warns that the Church is facing a collapse in terms of vocations to the priesthood. The Church will implode if it does not start ordaining women. Ordaining women as deacons would be nothing unusual as they were ordained in the past. It is fairly clear historically that women have served in the Church, despite every effort to silence their voices since the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Women have to be a very major part of the future of the ministry in the church. Praying for more vocations is fine but not sufficient. If these warnings were not acted on, parish churches could continue to be decommissioned, although it is not an immediate concern in India.

#### **5.10. Unsold Spirituality**

Christianity, as a spiritual movement, thrived in the past as others joined them, for it offered the spiritual experience that many were seeking for. However, why would they come to Christianity any more if the followers have nothing anymore to offer or if better ones were available outside? A glance at the white people from the European countries to various Indian Spiritual destinations, Yoga going



international, European churches being turned into temples, we need to review our spirituality that often remains unsold.

### **5.11. Fakes in the Spiritual Realm**

Modern Christians and churches spend a lot of effort and energy giving a certain impression. This is particularly true in groups that are interested in growing numerically and those using "seeker-sensitive" methods. Typically, the idea behind this is that in order to be effective evangelistically, Christians and churches need to appear a certain way. So churches train their members to act a certain way and carve their image to fit the desired appearance. This would be especially noticed in the behaviour of church leaders and in weekend church services. Churches and people become enslaved to the bogus image they have created of themselves. First, Jesus spoke of false spiritual leaders. He used several terms and metaphors, including false prophets, hired hands, hypocrites, and whitewashed tombs. The key behind all of these is that 1) they made special efforts to appear a certain way and 2) the leader was not the same thing on the inside as they looked like on the outside. When we accept this, we are free to be real and have the authenticity for which we all yearn. We can finally give up the fake show thing that gets us all into so much trouble.

### **6. Back to Chavara and the *Herald***

The reflection that is made in the foregoing pages without suggesting any apparent solutions was triggered by the deep concern that Chavara had for the Church and the dogged tenacity that he displayed to thwart the various threats that the Church faced at his time. The unity and integrity of the Church was what guided him as he fought the adversaries and faced various challenges. Guarding the unity and integrity of the Church was not the only contribution that he made to the Church whom he considered his mother. By means of his writings, social and ecclesial renewal programmes he galvanised both the society and the Church. In order to have these programmes followed up, he also made arrangements by means of the foundations of no less than two religious congregations – one for men and another for women.

The present issue of the *Herald of the East* showcases the various ecclesial contributions of Chavara. First and foremost among his contributions is the saint himself – what he was. His personality is explored by three contributions that study his mysticism and another that unravels the vow of poverty that in some ways contributed to his

mysticism. The three contributions that follow studies how Chavara made the Church as an instrument of social and political transformation through education and his innovative programmes for the literary uplift of his people who lived far beyond the boundaries of the Church and to what extent he would go in order to put the available technology at the service of his vision. His farsightedness also enabled him to harness the immense spiritual and social power that resides in women. Two of the contributions appraise how he worked for women's cause and how he would ask others to continue to cherish them for the sake of the Church. Although pyramidal as the Church in his days was in its structure, he would not overlook the lowest layer of the structure since it the foundation. The final contribution is dedicated to the study of how Chavara would organize the laity into self-help groups for themselves and for the sake of the less privileged ones in the Church.

The relentless efforts that Chavara made for the sake of the Church remind you of the zeal that used to burn in his namesake for him to declare: "I am burning with jealous love for the Lord, the God of hosts" (1Kings 19:10). Or was Chavara gripped by the prophetic frenzy that had seized Isaiah who prophesied: For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and *for Jerusalem's sake* I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch (Is 62:1).