

LEADERSHIP AND COLLABORATIVE MINISTRY

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Abstract: Thomas Palackal, Thomas Porukara and Kuriakose Elias Chavara were revered priests and *malpans* with different charism and giftedness, but an inner desire to do greater service to his people and the Church led them to think beyond their individual differences and immediate interests. They were people with openness and could find common grounds to work and collaborate for the greater glory of God and God's people. All leaderships should have a sacred dimension, if they are to be authentic. St. Chavara sensed his leadership as a sacred duty.

Keywords: Spirituality, Chavara, religious, priest, mission, community, authority, service, Palackal, Porukara, faith, prayer, charity, eremitic life, monastic life, ministry, Spirit, prayer, *malpans* incarnation, leadership, myths, dreams, images, fantasies, stories, experience, legitimacy, Carmelite, contemplatives, women, culture, values, authority, discernment, generativity, humility, hierarchy, obedience, Kingdom, synergy, laity, wisdom, Roccas.

1. Introduction

Ministry is the expression of one's spirituality in action. It is one's relationship with God overflowing into an action. While an action may be good, it is not considered ministry unless, it is an expression and overflow of one's relationship with God. By baptism Christians are called to holiness and ministry, that is, to a spirituality that has two dimensions - a deepened relationship with God and an expression of that relationship in action. St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara, as a religious and priest was totally engaged in the mission of Jesus, continuing it in the immediate context through a personal commitment announced publicly. In the religious community, he saw himself as a servant leader. To him authority was for humble service. Moreover, early on, the members of the first religious community sensed as they began to live together, that an active life without strong prayer would not yield the desired results.

2. The Pastoral Triad

The triads Palackal, Porukara and Chavara joined hands with some common objectives, lived together and strove together in the bond of faith, prayer and charity to do all the good that was possible. They felt the need of organized efforts to achieve optimal good. The collaboration and association of Chavara that began during the seminary days with Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara, the *malpans*, blossomed after his ordination. These venerable fathers saw in young Kuriakose the needed aptitude for religious life, and probably shared their vision in words and desire. St. Chavara by his close association with these saintly priests easily took in and tuned himself to the dreams and desires of his associates and slowly started working for the realization of the religious congregation. Having no model before them to implement the new idea, they took some time to give any definite shape of the project. However, these people had something in common, namely, a solid spirituality, balanced thinking and mature way of handling things.¹

Chavara nurtured the initial idea of initiating an organized religious life mooted by the elders, held it close to his heart, eventually consolidated and completed the foundation of the religious community. During the gestation period, the two senior holy men who mooted the idea went for their eternal reward. Younger Kuriakose heroically took up their legacy and took bold steps. In the changing socio-political and ecclesial scenario, things were not easy. Unfavourable winds affected the boat but the ardent faith and commitment of Chavara kept it going. The ascetic discipline and pastoral zeal of Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara, the inspirers of the religious life had become his own.

Although the founders initially thought of eremitic life, having considered various options, when they realized they could enjoy some patronage and support of the Bishop, finally they opted for formal monastic life.² They were not sure how the monastic life and its requirements could be fulfilled without some royal patronage for it entailed considerable financial liabilities. However, the anxiety was settled when the bishop himself offered the first financial offer of 200

¹Thomas Kochumuttom, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Mumbai: St. Paul's, 2014, 138.

²Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2008, 78.

rupees immediately. He also recommended the cause by issuing a letter to the public to this effect.

In the new community, the founding members followed a discipline and scheduled prayer life. The spiritual vision they shared and the spiritual engine beneath them gave the needed energy for their life. Today, the charismatic movement acquiring strength and vision by living together, praying together and sharing together are very much valued. In the genuine charismatic retreats, designated people come together to pray for a few days as a preparation for the retreat so that it might be more fruitful. God is the main partner in a collaborative ministry. Though the founders of the monastery faced many problems in the beginning, they located the best place to build the monastery. They complimented each other's efforts, encouraging each other, for they knew they had been doing God's business and not their own.

Although the bishop had some initial misgivings regarding the new religious community that was envisioned, seeing the fervour, faith and pastoral zeal of the first members, which they continued to manifest, brought his wholehearted support. At the completion of the project, the bishop supplied them with articles, vessels, books etc., for the new chapel.

The people of God sensed their altruistic actions and concluded that they were not building any earthly kingdom but God's kingdom and they cooperated liberally. The three people were so transparent that the people around could see the divine actions performed through them. They had differences of opinion regarding the nature, name and identity of the new community they envisioned. The deep respect for each other and above all the openness to admit the good wherever it come from, helped the trio to move forward. Through community, communion and comradeship these three permitted the Spirit to move them and thus God's hand was seen through them. Through their collaborative ministry they awakened a Church that was in slumber and brought innumerable blessings to the Christian community and society at large. It is through the unified spiritual thrust, purpose and prayer experience that they could work together, they could feel the pulse of the other regarding the issues they dealt with.

When the senior *malpans* passed away, Chavara took the mantle upon himself and proceeded along respecting their spirit. Chavara had, by the time, assimilated and internalized the cherished spiritual vision of his colleagues. The spirit of Palackal and Porukara propelled him to complete the project. He believed that it was not his project but

God's own. Chavara collaborated with all people of good will. He identified with the people whom he served and thus brought about the incarnation of Jesus in his ministry, identifying with people in need and becoming one with them to save and lift them up. This kind of identification drew cooperation of people from all walks of life. He identified with the underprivileged and the privileged. The salvation Jesus envisioned was not simply the offer of heaven after death. It was not the rescue of a few individuals from their rottenness or sinfulness but a new future for humanity.³

3. Sacred Dimension of Leadership

Religious leadership has a sacred dimension. Bowles argued that as religious worldviews are displaced by scientific and economic ones, mythology has lost its sacral associations and has assumed secular analogues instead.⁴ Thus, myths about religious leaders are supplanted by myths about business leaders, heroes like Steve Jobs or villains like Kenneth Lay. We expect our ecclesial leaders to care – not just in an impersonal manner 'about' a project, but 'for' the organization and its people, indeed for each and every faithful. In this regard we expect leaders to care not as professionals, but as true leaders with a sacred duty. Chavara saw his leadership as a sacred duty and did not see it as privilege to be enjoyed.

A leader is one of the casts of archetypes that populate our mind, someone who may be a saint in some plotlines or a devious schemer in others and a sacrificial lamb in yet others. This is how we encounter the leader in myths, stories, fairy tales and other narratives that give expression to collective fantasies.⁵ Archetypes, as Jung argued, are elements of the great stream of ideas and images that flows through the soul of every human being, surfacing from time to time in dreams, images, fantasies and stories, ecstatic and other experiences. If the heroic archetypes underpinning leadership have received quite a substantial attention both from sacred and secular, the metaphor of the good shepherd, the archetype of the caring leader, was not much explored in the leadership discourses.

³Mundadan, "Mission in the Pluralistic Context of India," 51.

⁴Bowles Martin L., "Recognizing Deep Structures in Organizations," *Organization Studies* 11, 3 (1990): 395-412, 398.

⁵Carl Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, London: Routledge, 1968, 65.

At the level of archetypes, the caring leader may be even more significant than the heroic leader. A leader who is not caring can hardly be viewed as a true leader or as amoral agent. In fact, caring outweighs any other consideration. A leader may be strong, may be legitimate and may be competent, but if he is not caring, he is likely to be viewed as a failing leader. Not every leader is caring, but nearly every leader would lose his legitimacy if they are perceived as 'uncaring'. At the level of archetypes all leaders are expected to display some degree of caring. Therefore, all good leaderships are sacred. This is found in the parable of Christ as the good shepherd who abandons the ninety-nine sheep in order to search for the lost one (Jn 10:11-18; Lk 15:3-7).

4. Shepherd Leadership

The caring leader is compassionate and concerned for the well-being of his or her subjects, willing to go the extra mile to meet their needs and ensure that they flourish. The leadership Chavara manifested was the caring shepherd leadership after the model of Jesus. All the reforms he made in the Church, especially the liturgical and spiritual reforms were gestures of true care. It is the caring leader in him reported in the wake of entering the religious life to the Vicar Apostolic that it is hard for many of his companions to follow the strict and extensive rules prescribed after the model of the Carmelite contemplatives. It is the same care that prompted him to write letters to Rome stating facts about the tumultuous ecclesial context of his land. As a caring leader, he was ready to take the burdens of his actions.

5. Leadership with Soft Power

Although Chavara had many offices and ministries, his greatness is measured in terms of the services that he rendered and not his status. In our self-serving culture with its 'me first' mentality, Chavara acted differently. At a time when Christian leaders were jockeying for positions, power and prominence, he preferred to be a servant and showed the greatness of a servant leadership. Servant leadership needs spiritual and psychological maturity. Real servants put on the apron of humility and maintain a low profile. For example, Chavara, in his post ordination months, with his initial enthusiasm moved around preaching and teaching. Malpan Palackal was not very pleased with his journeys and activities. Without being told, he realized the displeasure, returned to Pallipuram seminary and settled with him.

There he lived a shared life, supporting and collaborating with the malpan. He says: "Thereupon in all matters, I followed his directions and advise."⁶

God raises befitting servants to deal with the socio cultural and religious context of the time. "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all" (Mk 9:35). Servants think like stewards and not owners.⁷ Although Chavara was equally involved in the planning and execution of the building of the new convent and thus founding a religious life for women in Kerala Church, he liked to give the entire credit to Leopold. In everything, he projected Leopold and preferred to take a back seat. As the result, many deemed Leopold as the sole person behind the opening of new convent. Similarly, he generously gave credit to the senior *malpans* as architects and champions for whatever he had achieved. In the Bible, the steward is a servant entrusted to manage the property. Faithfulness is their strength. It is this kind of unflinching faithfulness and commitment that made Chavara's leadership ministry acceptable to all. Like David, Chavara "served God in his generation" and God called David "a man after my own heart" is a compliment every saint rightly deserves.

If power is the dominant feature of the heroic leader, love is the *sine qua non* of the caring leader.⁸ Although Chavara was proposed to be a candidate for the bishopric, he did not care about it or made any attempt to secure it. Chavara derived his legitimacy not by the power he enjoyed by virtue of his designation, but by caring actions of a shepherd. Shepherd leadership is bound to the followers with a bond that reaches beyond expedience and mutual benefit. It is a deep emotional bond with desexualized erotic character, one in which libido becomes sublimated into powerful feelings of empathy, compassion and solidarity that tie the followers with each other through a common experience of being loved by the leader.⁹

⁶CWC I *Chronicles*, P. J. Thomas (trans.), Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Bl. Chavara, 1990, 22; CSK I, *Nalagamangal*, 25.

⁷Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, Grand Rapids: Michigan, Zondervan Publishers, 2006, 266.

⁸Parry K. and Kempster S., "Love and leadership: Constructing Follower Narrative Identities of Charismatic Leadership," *Management Learning* 45, 1 (2014): 21-38, 26.

⁹Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, London: Hogarth Press, 1921, 92.

A loving, caring leader is accessible and visible, especially in times of stress and crisis. An inaccessible leader who is not there when needed is one who deserts his flock and betrays his duty of care. Proper leadership is an area of soft power. Gone are the days of arbitrary actions and imposing one's will on others in the pretext of efficiency. Soft power is the ability to alter the behaviour of others to get what one wants. There are three ways to do it: sticks, carrots and soft power. With the help of soft power one can economize the sticks and carrots. Soft power rests on three resources namely culture, values, and moral authority.¹⁰

6. Pastoral Discernment

The dynamism and openness in Chavara's ministry was welling from his discernment. Discernment is born in the heart and mind through prayers when one puts the people and situations entrusted to him and are ushered into contact with the divine word pronounced by the Spirit. It is through the intimacy with the Lord that inner freedom matures and makes one firm. Only in the silence of prayer one can discern the voice of God among many choices. Discernment is a remedy for the immobility of "it has always been so" or "let us takes time." It is a creative process that does not apply schemas. It is an antidote against rigidity, because all solutions are not valid everywhere.¹¹ A sensitive and pastoral heart shall ask whether the proposals of yesterday are still valid today. Having only one answer to apply in all cases is reductionism. It may leave the Church relegated to the margins and may leave the Church barren. True discernment is always open; it cannot be reduced to the repetition of formulas. Chavara, guided by the Spirit, made discernment in order to come out of the routines and rigid patterns of his time. For discernment, humility and obedience are essential for they help one to forgo one's own project and place gospel values in their place. In the end, we will be measured not by counting our achievements but by the growth of His Kingdom. Chavara with his pastoral heart thought less of himself and more of God's kingdom and God's people.

¹⁰Paul Achandy, "Inaugural Address" in *Contextual Ecclesial Education, and the Evangelizing Mission of the Church*, 14-20, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2017, 18.

¹¹Pope Francis, "The Holy Spirit, Protagonist of Any Authentic Discernment," [online].

7. Collaboration for Synergy

Collaboration is the union of all gifts in the community. Cardinal Mahoney states in the USCCB Document *Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium*: “Priestly ministry of Jesus is not fully exercised if the gifts of the spirit are not exercised for the community and mission of the Church.” The union of gifts is the quintessence of collaborative ministry. Chavara connected his gifts with gifts of others in order to foster effectively the mission of Jesus. Initially, he was bent on developing his gifts and then maintained a sense of humility to accept variety of gifts in the community. In his ministry and leadership, he perceived the needs of the Church and discerned the gifts of the people and blended them to produce a right synergy. Collaborative ministry in the Church or in any society does not happen automatically or easily. It demands attention to both process and structures.

“Where there is no vision, the people perish” (Prov 29:18). Jesus had a clear vision of mission for which he had come into the world. This vision of bringing all people to the knowledge and union with the Father served as the criterion for all his activity.¹² Many good projects of the Church fail due to the absence of an articulated vision, which clearly defines the direction. If the goal is collaboration, then the ideal is to involve everyone who is potentially affected. In Chavara’s ministry and mission, we come across active involvement of people all the time. The community involvement is obviously evident in his educational apostolate, media and in women empowerment projects. The essence of all collaborative ministries is identifying, releasing and uniting all the gifts present in the community for the sake of mission.¹³ Discernment of gifts in each one and in each group is a critical part of collaborative ministry, while the gift of discernment is an affirming experience for those participating, affirmation is not the primary purpose. The goal is to discern the person’s call to ministry based on his/her gifts and to determine how those gifts can be combined with others for effective ministry.

Every Christian leadership is a call to advance the mission and ministry of Jesus in the world. Based on one’s particular call, this mission may take varying forms in practice. Church being a community and communion, all leadership shall essentially involve a

¹²Loughlan Sofield and Carroll Juliano, *Collaboration: Uniting our Gifts in Ministry*, Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2000, 148.

¹³Sofield and Juliano, *Collaboration: Uniting our Gifts in Ministry*, 153.

collaborative style. Jesus was a collaborative leader. Jesus, at the very beginning of his public life, gathered a group of disciples to minister *with* him. He taught, formed and instilled in them a sense of mission. Jesus the collaborative leader sent disciples in pairs into ministry even before they were perfectly formed.¹⁴ He was there to receive them and listen to them when they returned and he helped them to reflect on their experiences. He was a secure collaborative leader for he could leave them and return to the father and in his absence let them continue his mission through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In the new religious congregation, Chavara gave guidelines and instructions to his newly formed communities and left them to the providence of God. Without focusing on the giftedness of others no sustained ministry in the Church is possible. Many are unable to focus on the giftedness of others. People tend to work individually rather than to work collaboratively.

Chavara enlisted the support of influential people as well as the ordinary people in putting up the new monastery. In finding out the location, clearing it, and doing the initial work, he enjoyed the support of many people in the locality. Doing things by oneself was not his style of functioning. When planning the monastery, the spot identified first was Pullarikkunu. It was within the radius of a *Devikshetram*. Hence, some *Devi* devotees expressed concern and Chavara did not hesitate to shift the spot and thus began to look for a new place. What he wanted was a peaceful co-existence of all God's people. Speaking of the importance of solidarity, John Paul II noted that for the disciple of Christ, solidarity is a moral duty stemming from the spiritual union of all human beings who share a common origin, a common dignity and a common destiny.

Palackal, Porukara and Chavara had a vivid sense of the world's need for the Christian life and message. They knew their difficulties, environments and their personality differences. Paul and Peter were the pillars of the Church. Their lofty positions did not do away with the differences among them. Paul took Silas in one direction while Barnabas went with Mark to Cyprus because of a sharp dissent. But all is overcome when they were united in a reconciliation that is "profitable to ministry."¹⁵

¹⁴Sofield and Juliano, *Collaboration: Uniting our Gifts in Ministry*, 104.

¹⁵Fulton J. Sheen, *Treasure in Clay*, Bangalore: ATC, 1980, 310.

8. Interdependence and Interconnectedness

Chavara was not independent but interdependent. He knew his identity as a priest and religious. As the Vicar General who was in charge of the faithful, he was bound to maintain communion among the faithful. It is the meaningful interconnectedness with laity and hierarchy that enabled him to accomplish numerous missions in a revolutionary manner.

It is when relating, sharing and trusting others that self comes to accept itself. As we grow in compassion, understanding, forgiveness and reconciliation, our networks of relationships acquire a qualitative dimension. Eventually, we are more kind to ourselves and our follies and to those people who are less intimate and less sharing. Gradually this will incline a human to be less absorbed in one's isolation and loneliness. Contemporary physics favours a perspective of interrelatedness and affinity. Nothing exists without a relation to the other - not even the tiniest atom. Elementary particle is not an independently existing entity. Properties are observable or definable only in terms of relationship. Since the Church is a pilgrim community making the journey to the heavenly Jerusalem, Chavara realized it is the interdependence and interconnectedness that would make it a community as God had envisioned it. Hence, according to him, "The strength of the monasteries does not consist in the thickness of their walls but in the religious zeal and virtue of their inmates... We are progenitors of the monasteries here. We are the corner stones."¹⁶ As part of the interdependence, we enjoy relationship with God and others and experience tensions in the relations too. Christians, by virtue of the ecclesial dimension of life, are part of a community, a religious group and a particular church etc. Chavara lived his life relating to this entire dimension in a meaningful and fruitful way.

In collaborative ministry, one needs discernment in order to know people's strength and weakness. One shall seek help or cooperation on a par with the goals envisioned. One will not reach the desired goals until people of competence and moral calibre in the respective areas are chosen and employed. When Chavara was deputed to counter the schism, he looked for the right people to line with him for the encounter. One may need people with communication skills and influence based on the nature of the objectives.

¹⁶CWC IV *Letters*, 65, 94, 95; CSK, vol. IV, *Kathukal*, Lucas Vithuvattical ed., Mannanam: CMI Prasadaka Committee, 1982.

9. Servant Leader with Wisdom

In serious matters he was particular to get consent from the Vicar Apostolic and Leopold. He always upheld the lofty ideal of charity before making decisions. He knew that open revolt and revolutions did not bring any good anywhere. He looked for more prudent and practical ways for a solution. The mass petition sent to Pope Pius IX by St. Thomas Christians on 13 January 1876 acknowledges the sagacity and wisdom of the Prior.

Many of the St. Thomas Christians were unwilling to submit to the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly but longed for a prelate of their own rite. When they began agitating for this, our venerable Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara, the first Prior of the Monasteries and founder of many monasteries in Malabar, Vicar General of his Excellency Arch Bishop Bernardine, by his wise counsel dissuaded them, telling them that although their desire and petition were good in themselves, they could present it at an opportune time, after first humbly submitting themselves to the reigning Vicar Apostolic. With this and similar counsels he, in a short time, made us obediently submit to the Vicar Apostolic.¹⁷

The letters that Chavara wrote on different occasions to the heads of the communities reveal his wisdom and his gift of counselling. As Mathias Mundadan observes, with least offence he was able to give correction, with prudence and humility he pointed out to the bishop that the rules crafted for them to initiate religious life would adversely affect the progress.¹⁸ The Vicar Apostolic did not heed to it and many things moved as the bishop has planned. However, the Vicar Apostolic realized the wisdom in Chavara's words and mitigated the laws after a lapse of one year. Chavara's good office was used to settle disputes among factions. Chavara was given the duties of mentoring erring priests. He was wise and prudent in dealing with Roccas and Antony Kudakkachira, two people who disturbed the ecclesial and religious life of the time. He was firm and never lost his temper and charity at any time while dealing with them.

The Vicar Apostolic on many occasions sought the counsel of Chavara and acted accordingly. When the Vicar Apostolic raised the issue of the financial difficulties of the Vicariate, Chavara proposed a solution to collect ten per cent of the income of the parish, it was

¹⁷Posito: *Super Introductione Cause et Super Virtutibus ex Officio Concinnata*, Vatican, 1977, 358.

¹⁸Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 458.

accepted and promulgated. Chavara in his life time, embarked on many projects of spiritual, social and educational in nature. In none of them he burdened the people in any way. Chavara's leadership did things differently, it never burdened people; at the same time the project gave the people involvement and participation. His projects of *pidiyari* and *kettuthengu*¹⁹ were simple but effective ways to raise funds without burdening the people. For the maintenance also he found ways and means; setting apart cultivable lands so that the yearly produce could be used to maintain the schools and provide lunch for the children.

10. Generative Leadership

Collaborative leadership and ministry are possible only for people who show a developmental readiness for collaboration. The more a person has developed psycho-socially and psycho-sexually, the greater is the person's ability to minister collaboratively. When people reach the level of development called *generativity*, they are capable of greater collaboration. Erikson, the psycho-social developmental theorist calls the period of middle age the stage of generativity. Generativity includes care for others beyond one's family, and for future generations and for the kind of world in which those generations will live. Erikson observes that one must accept one's own identity and have intimate relationship to community and others before one is ready for generativity.²⁰

A generative leadership will have the sensitivity and forcefulness to nourish and nurture the people one is in charge of. A harmonious blend of forcefulness and sensitivity becomes visible in his life. When Chavara taught his people as the Prior of the religious community and the Vicar General of the Malabar Church, his words had the ring of authority as Jesus did it (Mk 1:22). In his confrontation with the schism, we witness his magnetic boldness. His forceful repudiation of the intruder and the warning letters that he wrote made people turn their back on the schismatic Bishop Roccas.²¹ He was courageous and bold in the face of opposition. He was assertive when speaking the

¹⁹Setting apart a handful of rice as house makers take rice to cook and kept it separately and collected at the end of the month; reserving a coconut tree and its income for any noble cause proposed.

²⁰Mathew Linn *et al.*, *Healing the Eight Stages of Life*, New York: Paulist Press, 1987, 188ff.

²¹CWC I *Chronicles*, 161.

truth, warm and empathetic when working with persons as is displayed in his social interventions and ecclesial administration.

Generativity has two sides: care for oneself and care for others. A common way of generativity is through parenting children; it can assume more sublime forms such as teacher, mentor, spiritual guide, reformist, etc. Chavara transmitted life and meaning to the next generation in manifold ways. In his generativity, he moved beyond his family and community to all the people of God, which is seen in the *Testament of a loving Father* that he wrote to the members of his home parish, his larger family.

11. Conclusion

Chavara never projected himself anywhere. He liked to be in the background and always valued others better than himself and offered prominence to others. He gave prominence to his seniors and gave them credit on all occasions. In the same vein, he gives credit of founding the religious community for women to Leopold. He observed the fasting and feasting of the community without distinguishing himself in anything. Chavara accomplished several missions for the people of God not by the power of wealth, influence or status but by the spiritual capital he acquired and invested. Arrogance and self-righteousness can affect anyone's ministry. People in position of authority may perceive themselves as superior to those they lead. It is important for leaders to remember that leadership abilities are not superior to other gifts, they are only different. The ministries in the Early Church were not free of conflicts as we witness in the Acts of Apostles. Suppression of conflicts in any group or section results in apathy and tension, which may preclude collaboration. If collaboration is to occur, conflict must be confronted and dealt with in a generative manner.