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SAINT KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA
Marriage and Family

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Editorial

CHANGING RULES OF ENGAGEMENT
The Christian Marriage

Benny Paul Thettayil
Editor-in-Chief

In a small Russian village, a rabbi shares the wisdom of God, three Jewish sisters come of age and a matchmaker works her magic, wreaking havoc and breaking the long-standing traditions of a conservative family. This is the plot of the musical, *Fiddler on the Roof* (1971) directed by Janet Lazarus. The story depicts a Jewish father and the challenges that he faces as three of his daughters' marital choices begin to unravel his religious traditions and beliefs. The story transpires in 1905, in the beginning of a revolution as the tsar starts evicting Jews from the territory. He is in a *traditional* mode, and the daughters say, 'I don't want to marry who you ask me to marry; I want to marry outside the faith.' Marriage outside the Jewish faith is a line that he cannot cross. Part of the story is of the father having to come to the realization that he can no longer be rooted in rigid tradition, it is going to change around him, and he will have to give in a little bit.

The scriptural understanding of marriage is that it is willed by God as a sacred covenant relationship between man and woman based on a public vow of lifetime faithfulness (Mt 19). Worded positively and based on the scripture, we believe that marriage is ordained by God at creation as the sacred union of one man and one woman (CCC 1601). However, there is much confusion about marriage among the young people today, and the Church has an important responsibility to teach God's truth on this matter and to show them God's way. It is the clear teaching of the Church that all sexual relations must therefore be reserved for that union. Christian marriage is a representation of Christ's relationship to his Church. We also believe that children, who are the fruit of such union, are a blessing from the Lord. Hence, all human life is sacred and worthy of protection right from the moment of conception.

Marriage has been one of the important social institutions around the world. From a sociological perspective, marriage plays a significant role in regulating the human social life. It is considered primarily a complex of obligations, religious and moral, on the one hand and social and economic on the other. In some cultures, the institution of marriage is sacred and it enjoins the husband to regard his wife as a God-given gift. However, this view of marriage has undergone a drastic transformation in the modern times.

The traditional perceptions and ideologies on the institution of marriage are reshaped under the influence of westernization, modern education, urbanization and reformed legislations. These have affected the implications of marriage within the Indian society and the Church. The young people today look at this socio-religious institution through a different lens. As a result, the institution of marriage has seen many trends some of which are harmful, and they question the traditional meaning, significance and purpose of marriage. The youth of the modern era have less regard for the institution of marriage as a sacrament of companionship, love and trust. They rather subscribe to a marriage of convenience.

1. Marriage and Sexuality as Gifts of God

In the first story of creation, God created human being male and female. In the second story of creation, God saw that it was not good for the man to be alone. God brought the woman to him and united them. The Bible celebrates them and their relationship. Later, according to the biblical teachers, marriage and sexuality are good gifts of God. "He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favour from the Lord" (Prov 18:22). The teacher also blesses the married state: "May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer ... may you ever be captivated by her love" (Prov 5:18-19). And there is an entire book of the Bible devoted to the topic of romantic and sexual love in marriage - the Song of Solomon.

With the gift of marriage and sexuality, God wants his people to have a fulfilling, intimate relationship with their spouses. In a few biblical restrictive instructions, like "Marriage should be honoured by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral" (Heb 13:4), God is not taking away the joys of marriage. He is protecting his people from those things that will hurt them and damage their relationships with others.

2. Challenges to the Married

The marriage vows that couples make to stick together "for better, for worse ... in sickness and in health ... for richer, for poorer ..." presuppose the snags that are in store for them as they are entering married life. These promises presuppose tough times. Every marriage faces these hardships. Many well-meaning newly married couples start their lives together dreaming of a happy thereafter under the blissful delusion that they will never face any problems in their marriage. Regrettably, that is never the case. For the lack of a realistic view, the married couples are led to feel disappointed and disillusioned.

Marriage, both as a sacrament and a contract is one of the most wonderful and fulfilling unions in the world. However, for the sake of the future generations as well as the present one, it is very important to reflect on the realities of married life and understand that all marriages go through good seasons, and seasons that are not so good; ups and downs are sometimes vital for crucial lessons in reality. If individuals go into marriage with eyes open, we also need to be open minded to bring the challenges to discussion when, once in a while, things go a little twisted. Although we are aware of the fact that each situation is unique, the following reflection contains a list of most of these common troubles.

2.1. Physical Separation of the Spouse

Marriage is a coming together of two individuals. However, many people are forced to move as they go in search of a job and as they are transferred from place to place. Sometimes, career can cause a change of location. That would entail moving across the state, country or across the world. Moving as a family is a huge stress. Immovable property, education of the children, living conditions of the place where one is working, and a million other factors contribute to the situation in which the husband and wife live separately for a long time.

In an agrarian and traditional society, the spouses would work together, interact and see each other for most of the day. There was more intimacy among the members of the family and all helped each other in their work. With the separation of work and home the interaction between the spouses has been considerably reduced. With one of the spouses working in the industry away from the family, the intimacy in relations has been adversely affected. However, the most

poignant of these separations is the physical parting of the spouses immediately after marriage. Some of them are so pressed for time that they have leave enough just to get married, immediately after which, they take off for their work. This is a real threat to the marital bonding. In such a situation, the husband and wife are forced to live in separate worlds.

The fabric of the society and the Church becomes a bit loose when one of the partners is employed abroad and his/her circumstances do not permit him/her to take the spouse along. Some of them are forced to live separately at the very outset of their marriage. The regular or odd telephone calls and in the modern times, the video calls are the only means available to them to express their mutual affection and emotions. Since the spouses are kept away from each other immediately after their marriage they fail to know each other and to have intimacy in relationship. Not only they fail to fulfil their biological needs but the bonding that is essential for life does not take place. The adverse effects of this lack of bonding and relationship often remain with them for the rest of their life. This type of physical separation of the spouses for employment not only affects their marital life but also badly affects their children, because the child lacks the physical presence and support of his/her parents.

2.2. Challenging Children

Children are a gift of God. However, even the most well-behaved children in the world occasionally present challenges. After his son was picked up from the street after a night of binge drinking along with his schoolmates, Tony Blair, the British Prime Minister, declared that it was easier to run a country than to manage your children. Children are challenging and often, the stress that is resulted will tell upon the relationship between the father and the mother. Spiritual directors would want you to remember that marriage comes first and not the children. The wisdom inherent in such an advice is that only if you nurture and foster your relationship with your wife, you will be better equipped to deal with whatever the children dish out to you as they go around exploring the world.

Together, the father and the mother make strategies to bring their children up in a disciplined manner. The absence of the father or the mother in the family, even for the reasons of career, has an adverse effect on the children. In such families, children are often unruly and undisciplined. Single parents find it increasingly hard to accomplish the task of bringing up the children in discipline.

2.3. Immature Spouse

Traditionally, it is when a boy and a girl come in to maturity, and when this fact is established by the elders, that they are given the responsibility of a family through the sacrament of marriage. In loving relationship, they grow further in maturity over time. Most of the hurdles that are faced by the married couples are caused by emotional immaturity. The immature decisions they make regarding themselves and those related to them aggravate the situation. If they enter family life immature, and despite the passage of time, if they still relate to one another the same way they did when they were married, it is past time to wake up; it is time for the marriage to grow up.

Traditionally, it is living in the family with the parents that the young couple learned the hard lessons of family life. However, when this traditional life in extended families is not possible due to migration, and when the couple is away from the family, their world shrinks and they are confined to themselves. They look for ways and means to remedy the situation in their limited immature world. Spiritual directors advise such individuals to invest in the marriage as if their life depends on it, because it really does. This is when various pious organizations of the faith community or parish to which they belong, come in handy. They are advised to get involved in one of such groups where they can live out their love for one another loud.

2.4. Lurking Unfaithfulness

It is an everyday struggle all married people face, as they act or speak differently from the standards, which they claim to live by. Marriages run into this hardship often. Sometimes, married men and women tell themselves that they are doing okay, although they know deep inside that they are not. When the author of the letter to the Hebrews says that "the marriage bed should be kept pure" (Heb 13:4), he is talking about the sexual relationship within marriage, only where it is pure and holy and good, but outside of marriage it is displeasing to God.

Sometimes the stress of life becomes overwhelming, but some couples carry on as if they are in control. The falseness and inconsistency in which they live is enough to pull them further down and make them feel depressed, anxious or disconnected from their hearts. All these are perfect ingredients in the recipe of the breakdown of marriage.

New is always fascinating and sometimes time takes away the sheen of the new and it gradually becomes uninteresting. This is the

case also with husband and wife – gradually, each can become disinterested in the other. Sometimes it happens early on. Sometimes it takes a decade or so. The fact is, disinterest and boredom can easily creep into marriage. Not feeling anything special about the relationship with the spouse is a hardship. However, in order to keep the relationship ever new and fresh, both the wife and the husband need to become intentional about it. The constant renewal of the vows of marriage alone keeps them together for ever.

Unfaithfulness in marriage and family life often makes us think of marital disloyalty. However, the definition of “unfaithfulness” stretches beyond adultery. Unfaithfulness does not necessarily have to involve a third party. Many husbands and wives are guilty of being unfaithful when it comes to time, attention, priorities, the way they use their resources, and the list would go on and on. Most people are guilty of infidelity, because at one time or another they have professed to believe something that they really do not. If the husband is not happy with the wife, and something is bothering him, it is likely that he becomes impatient or rude. He becomes undependable, and if left unhandled, the breach in the relationship continues to grow and both physical and emotional intimacy becomes rare. Usually, there is falseness in his statement as his actions do not show love, rather hostility. Conscientious husbands and wives nip such weeds germinating in the garden of marriage in the bud. Some seek spiritual help and some need emotional help. Some might even need psychological help. In the sacrament of reconciliation, most of these hitches are taken care of and help is found in the grace of God.

2.5. Debilitating Maladies

In a healthy marriage, as we mentioned earlier, the husband and the wife undergo a process of gradual but uneventful bonding. This bonding can be so strong that sometimes they do not realize how much they rely on one another until one of them breaks down physically. If the marriage is healthy, the possibility of psychological breakdown is narrowed. However, there are also times when some people go through a rough psychological patch. The challenge here is to cope with a malady that is not very obvious.

To a certain extent, the psychological effect of the debilitating illness on the healthy spouse is similar to that of the physical absence of the spouse. The one who is still standing, with the heart of a servant, does everything in his/her power to be at the service the spouse. He/she goes the extra mile and places the needs of the spouse ahead

of his/her own. Although such an all-inclusive service is tough, some spouses render it with an obvious willing spirit that makes all the difference.

2.6. The Decadence in Divorce

Marriage in the eyes of the Church is a vow of lifetime faithfulness. Divorce is a challenge to marriage as a lifetime commitment. Jesus said: "I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery" (Mt 5:31-32). When a man and woman get married, they are joined together by God. Hence, Jesus said further: "What God has joined together, let man not separate" (Mt 19:6).

Too many people enter marriage with the thought, "If it does not work out, we can always get a divorce." And too many marriages end simply because the couple think that divorce is the easy route and are not willing to work out their problems together.

There are no perfect marriages in the world. Some people face serious problems in their marriages. Real hurt and emotional suffering can be caused when a marriage goes off the track. It takes both the spouses working together with the grace of God to bring it back to track. Each has to put the concerns of the other first in order for that to happen. Divorce is a challenge to the *lifetime* part of the marriage vow of *lifetime faithfulness* on which it is founded.

3. Challenges to the Prospective Spouses

Today, unlike any previous ages, the would-be spouses are on the cross-roads. They look at the married couples, their families and the children who are growing up in the family. They look back at the married life of their parents and their upbringing. In the light of these, they look into their future and consider a life that is worth living. Depending upon what the society and the Church are able to present to them, and they are able to see, decisions are made independently of the family they belong to. Gone are the days when the elders wielded autocratic power in the family. Today, children are independent, earning and capable of decision-making.

3.1. Liberal Sexual Orientations

Homosexuality is no more a taboo. Those who have such orientation have come out with pride in public to assert it. The Gay, Lesbian,

Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society maintains an extensive collection of archival materials relating to their history. The society also sponsors the GLBT Historical Society Museum, a unique museum that has attracted international attention.

Following the western society, on 6 September 2018, the Supreme Court of India decriminalised homosexuality by declaring Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code unconstitutional. Although same-sex couples are not legally recognized currently by any form, performing a same-sex marriage is not prohibited under Indian law either. It is in these national and international contexts that we need to look at homosexuality, which is a challenge to the Christian understanding of marriage, especially as seen in the second part of the definition that was given initially, according to which, marriage is a sacred covenant relationship between *a man and a woman*.

Once, Jesus was asked about marriage. In reply, he pointed back to the beginning, when God created human beings: "Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?" (Mt 19:4-5). The Creator made human beings male and female, and for this reason *a man* is united to *a woman*.

Legalizing homosexuality was a gateway to legalizing same sex marriage, which altered the nature, aim and purpose of marriage. On 26 June 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down all state bans on same-sex marriage and legalized it. As of 2019, sixteen European countries have legally recognised and they perform same-sex marriages! An additional twelve European countries legally recognise some form of same sex civil union.

Although the court has decriminalized homosexuality in India, our culture is confused on this issue, and the Church seems to be confused too, especially in the context of the Christian west going down this line. Indeed, every genuine and innate orientation in a person is to be respected in the Church.¹ However, for the best interest of humanity

¹When Pope Francis was asked how he might act as a confessor to a gay person in light of his interrogative remark in a press conference in 2013: "If a person is gay and seeks out the Lord and is willing, who am I to judge that person?" Answering the question, the Pope said: "I was paraphrasing by heart the Catechism of the Catholic Church where it says that these people should be treated with delicacy and not be marginalized ... because before all else comes the individual person, in his wholeness and dignity. And

and a healthy society in the future, the biblical demands of marriage are to be respected and awareness must be spread in the Church.

3.2. Convenience of Cohabitation

Cohabitation refers to a living arrangement in which an unmarried couple lives together in a long-term relationship that resembles a marriage. This kind of an arrangement is not only accepted in some cultures, it is almost expected of the young people. They cohabit, rather than marry, for a variety of reasons. In this arrangement some of them want to test their compatibility before they commit to a legal union and see it as a step on the way to marriage, as they are led to think that living together before marriage will increase their chances for marital success. Others live together out of convenience and still others do so for financial reasons.

There are various plus points that are inherent in the practice of cohabitation. Certainly, there is wisdom in this arrangement as an experimental prelude to marriage, especially in the light of the negative experiences stemming from various incompatibilities that are discovered later on. However, experience teaches that more than eight out of ten couples who live together break up either before the wedding or divorce after the wedding. More than half of those who cohabit do not marry. Couples who cohabit and marry are more likely to divorce than those who had not. Only a small percent of couples who began their relationship with cohabitation have a marriage that is lasting.

Living together lack the stability and security that marriage with a public vow provides. The disastrous consequences of the lack of commitment in cohabitation are seen in the life of the children. Children of cohabiting separated and/or divorced parents are far more likely to be sexually abused by a step parent than by a parent. Experiences show that the children of cohabiting parents are more

people should not be defined only by their sexual tendencies: let us not forget that God loves all his creatures and we are destined to receive his infinite love." What is noteworthy is that the Pope continued: "I prefer that homosexuals come to confession, that they stay close to the Lord, and that we pray all together." The Pope does not say that the path that they walk is okay. They need to come to confession to be close to the Lord. He invites the Church to "show goodwill, show them the way, and accompany them along it."

likely to be drop-outs from school or to get into trouble as teenagers than children from a home with married parents living with them.

Viewed in the light of the teaching of the Church, cohabitation is a challenge to marriage as a public vow. In the Church, marriage is not a private agreement between two people. It is a public, legal relationship that takes place within the community. The situation of cohabitation dishonours marriage because in such a situation, those engaged in it enjoy the benefits of marriage while avoiding the responsible commitment demanded by the sacrament. The commitment which should lead them to joy is lost sight of. It is in the security of commitment that the love relationship grows in intimacy and depth to reach its full potential.

3.3. Premarital Sex

As St. Paul warns the Thessalonian church, marriage is a sacred and covenant relationship. Hence, it is the will of God and your sanctification that you abstain from unchastity; that each one of you know how to take a wife for himself in holiness and honour, not in the passion of lust like others who do not know God; that no one wrong or exploit a brother or sister in this matter (1 Thes 4:1-4). In this instruction, Paul tells them how to live pleasing God. And one of those instructions is to avoid sexual immorality. *Unchastity* here is a general word for any sexual activity outside of marriage. The message is, you cannot engage in sexual relations outside of marriage and please God.

As the biblical definition of marriage holds, having sex before marriage is a particular challenge to marriage, a sacred, covenant relationship. *Sacred* denotes "something that has been set apart for a purpose." Sex is sacred because God has set apart the sexual relationship for marriage and for marriage alone.

Now of course, this is a huge challenge to the sacrament of marriage in the western Church today. In the western society in general, sex before marriage is not only accepted, but it is expected in some quarters for various reasons. In some societies, those who wait until marriage are seen as strange, old-fashioned or *out of step with the times*. However, it is the strong view of the Church, as instructed by Paul, that it is those who do not wait for marriage that are *out of step with God's word*. When marriage was removed from sex, and it was placed independently, promiscuity thrived. Such a process resulted in a culture of broken relationships, debilitating diseases and thousands of children born into the world without a stable mother and father to

take care of them and many of them ended up as orphans and some of them in the streets.

It is when sex and marriage go together that we have a stable and balanced society. Sometimes the place of sex within marriage is compared to the fire in the fireplace in a well-decorated sitting room where it provides warmth and comfort and lifts the atmosphere of the room that everything around is beautiful, making the room more welcoming. Similarly, it is sex within marriage that gives safety and stability to the home. Placed out of the fireplace, fire causes untold damage to the house and hurt to those within. Hence, premarital sex is a challenge to marriage as a sacred, covenant relationship, because it isolates sex from the marriage relationship where it truly belongs.

4. Challenging Trends of Marriage

It is a fact that today marriage has apparently become less popular, more fragile and less of an exclusive setting for having children. There is a decline in marriage rates. It is not perhaps due to the wholesale rejection of marriage; rather, people tend to get married at increasingly at older age. This is one of the trends that have gripped the society. The changes that happen in society affect the young faster than it affects the old. The following are the few changing trends of marriage among the youth today.

4.1. Aim and Purpose of Marriage

Traditionally, the purpose of marriage was considered to be companionship and procreation. Concerning the aim of marriage, the Catechism of the Catholic Church states: “The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature *ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring*; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament” (CCC 1601; see also CIC 1055 §1; GS 48 §1). By virtue of the sacrament, the husband and wife become life-long companions of each other; the husband becomes the protector of his wife as they live a life fulfilling the vows and aim of the marriage. However, in the modern era, the young generation perceives marriage as a bonding of a male and a female for life-long companionship. However, some men and women shun the responsibility of a family and the second aspect of marriage is often lost sight of.

4.2. Process of the Selection

Traditionally, structural influences played a significant role in the process of choosing a partner with whom to form a marriage bond. Parents, elders and relatives used to select the spouse for the eligible adult. However, many educated men and women in the modern times, do not believe in the old patterns of arrangement of a prospective husband for marriage. In the modern society, personal preference of the individual is a key component in the selection process. They believe in seeking the prospective spouse and making their choices on their own terms, accomplishing this task themselves, because they feel that marriage is a bonding for lifetime and hence, their spouse should be of their own choice.

The criterion of selection of the spouse also has been altered. For the elders in the family, security in life, which is brought about by employment, housing, working status, prestige, goodwill, attitude, etc., are of prime importance in the selection process. However, the young individuals give more importance to their personal interests, preferences and considerations rather than to the traditional family considerations.

4.3. Range of Selection

In India, the society has long been in the shackles of grave discrimination on grounds of religion and caste. There have been extremely stringent rules enforcing the same. Marriages were arranged within the framework of the caste and ethnicity. Marrying across the caste kindles strong community resentment, leading to the extent of honour killing. And most marriages are governed by the specific personal laws governing the religion that the individual belongs to.

However, in the modern world, increasingly, couples dare to defy this stringent social norm. The youth rejects the structures of the caste system, ethnicity and race, resulting in the inter-caste and inter-ethnic marriages. Many educated young men and women look for a good person as the life partner irrespective of his/her religious and ethnic identity.

We have come a long way in developing liberal perceptions thanks to a society where intermingling between people from different religions and castes is happening at forums both educational and professional.² Consequently, marriage arrangements also involve such

²The youth of today focus more upon personal and professional advancement. They concentrate on higher education, which can land a good job.

intermingling. The youth of today are quite receptive to the idea of inter-caste/inter-religious marriage.

5. Conclusion

As we mentioned earlier, marriage and sexuality are good gifts of God. When we follow God's plan, they work for our benefit. Unfortunately, when the members of a culture or people abandon God's plan, they run into real challenges to marriage. The requirements of a healthy marriage are really demanding that sometimes spouses feel discouraged, defeated, and beat down, as they fall far short of God's standards in these areas. This is what, in a different context Paul tells the Roman Church: "We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23).

The challenge before the leaders of the Church and the society is to orientate the modern youth of our times to perceive the sanctity of the institution of marriage. When the youth are embracing the companionship of a husband or a wife on the foundation of trust and mutual consent, they must be taught to provide space for each other's growth and preferences so that they might grow together into a healthy family. They need to be made aware of the challenges that can arise at various stages of their life together in order to face the challenges and work through them as a team and overcome them together.

The current issue focuses on marriage and family. The overall emphasis is on how to keep the integrity of the sacrament of marriage and how to preserve our families intact. Chavara, in his own way, implicitly warns the community of this threat. Today, the *Chavarul* of Chavara invites us to become aware of the destructive side of the modern trends that call the sacramentality of marriage and the sacredness of the family into question. The main entries of the present issue of the *Herald of the East* focus on various aspects of marriage and family in the light of *Chavarul*.

Reflecting on the spirituality of marriage and the family, Jossy holds that family is a treasure, which must be always protected and defended. From the *Chavarul*, she gleans a definition of family, according to which, family is a God-given place to members to grow in

Only when they are secure financially, they think of getting married and settled. Hence, many men and women get married at an older age. The women used to get married at the age of 18-22 and met at the age of 23-25. Today, the average marrying age is 24-26 for women and 25-30 for men.

love, sanctity and human virtues and find self-fulfilment, where one ensures one's salvation. Chavara calls for a family-centred spirituality, of which marital and family spirituality is part. Marital spirituality is the spirituality of the bond, in which divine love dwells. *Atmanuthapam* is strewn with expressions of mothering experiences as motherhood involves a special communion with the mystery of life, as it develops in the woman's womb. Sacredness of human sexuality is based on the fact that God himself created sexuality, which is a marvellous gift to his creatures. Hence, the celebration of love in conjugal love is the greatest form of friendship. Feminine style of holiness for the church would stem from the genius of woman and mother's role in upbringing children in mutual respect and equality in the family. The reflection comes to a conclusion with a thought on the challenges to families.

Saju Karukaparampil reflects on the challenges that the sacrament of marriage faces in the modern world. Some of the serious challenges to the sacrament of marriage and family are enumerated. There is a phenomenal increase in the number of inter-faith and inter-ethnic marriages both in the West and in the East. For several reasons, some Catholics opt for civil marriage, some of them neglecting the sacramental marriage. Break-up of marriage which often leads to divorce is one of the most profound crises in the society as the spouses deny each other and in the process, deny themselves. Due to issues related to dowry, even among the Catholics, often from the beginning of married life, there are conflicts between the couple and between the bride and her in-laws. Although migration, which takes people away, has its advantages, it has enormous effect on the institution of marriage and family in varying degrees.

Benny Mukalel explores the challenges of children, youth and families in the context of the year of youth and in the light of *Chavarul*, a holy legacy that Chavara has left for his people, which presents a vision of the family, which surpasses its historical context. Drawing inspiration from the procedural methodology of the Synod on the Family, the writer invites to *see* the Challenges made by the *Chavarul* in the light of *Amoris Laetitia*, to judge oneself and the society in the light of the Word and to act in the path of mercy that religious institutions might become centres of family ministry.

Cinderella Sequeira looks at the *Chavarul* a prophetic voice for Christian family in the modern world. Chavara stands as an outstanding apostle to a land plagued with the caste system, slavery, illiteracy, female degradation, to which he brought the message of true

faith and social order. He believed that family was the source of all morality and spirituality and his own spirituality was rooted in his experience of the Holy Family within his home. The need of the hour is to resort to 'the plan of God' for a family because it is a community of a few people joined together in blood relation and bound together by a bond of love, which makes it the fertile ground for individuals to nurture their creative energies and realize their full potential for the glorification of God and the good of their neighbours. *Chavarul* instructs the families on devotion to the Lord, unity in the family and peace with neighbours, conscious distancing from evil, management of personal property and ideal upbringing of children, which includes formation of faith, conscience, intellect and discipline.

Mathew Maniampra explores how Thomas Palackal, Thomas Porukara and Kuriakose Elias Chavara were revered pastors and *malpans* with different 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. What is called for is a generative leadership, which has the sensitivity and forcefulness to nourish and nurture the people one is in charge of.

Sophy Rose gets closer to Chavara and see how his pastoral mind works as he goes around making various contributions to the Church. The author is making this study in the light of the contributions made by the Apostolic Fathers. Going through the writings of Chavara, she explores the pastoral and eschatological character of his literature, his discussions on the doctrine of baptism and efficacy of good works for salvation. She makes a detailed study of the Christology of Chavara to see how a picture of Christ is drawn as both divine and human, the titles of Christ and how he is seen both as father and mother. Finally, she reflects on how, like the Apologetic Fathers, Chavara defended and protected the unity of the Church.

Jose Eroorickal makes an Indian reading of the spiritual vision of Chavara whose spirituality was a combination of Indian, Eastern and Carmelite features of mysticism. Rooted in these age old traditions, Chavara and his companions took to a life of contemplation that led them to intense apostolate. Initially, the writer explores the basic characteristic features of the mystics and goes on to survey the general features of Indian spirituality. In this background, he reflects on the

mystical experiences of Chavara, which are expressed in his *darsanam*, *vasam*, and *sallapam* by means of which, he practised the Christian spiritual values in the Indian society, which was very unique for his times.

All of us, no matter which vocation we follow, are fiddlers on the roof trying to concentrate on producing good music, perched precariously on a slippery slope that the roof is. Like the fiddler, who could fall if he leans too far to one side that is liberal or the other side that is conservative undue importance given to any view will take away our balance - life is a balancing act. Our times are times of change. The *Chavarul* invites the believers to balance life between acknowledging the tried and proved wisdom of the tradition of the elders and allowing growth for the young in freedom.

THE SPIRITUALITY OF MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Josy Maria CMC

Abstract: Family is a treasure, which must be always protected and defended. It is a God-given place to members to grow in love, sanctity and human virtues and find self-fulfilment, where one ensures one's salvation. Chavara calls for a family-centred spirituality, of which marital and family spirituality is part. Marital spirituality is the spirituality of the bond, in which divine love dwells. *Atmanuthapam* is strewn with expressions of mothering experiences as motherhood involves a special communion with the mystery of life, as it develops in the woman's womb. Sacredness of human sexuality is based on the fact that God himself created sexuality, which is a marvellous gift to his creatures. Hence, the celebration of love in conjugal love is the greatest form of friendship. Feminine style of holiness for the church would stem from the genius of woman and mother's role in upbringing children in mutual respect and equality in the family. The reflection comes to a conclusion with a thought on the challenges to families.

Keywords: Holy Family, values, society, spirituality, family, marriage, Chavara, generosity, commitment, fidelity, patience, children, *Chavarul*, salvation, prayer, virtues, parents, Eucharist, Church, couples, women, mother, saint, *Atmanuthapam*, literature, Christmas, motherhood, femininity, holiness, love, sexuality, catechism, convent, school, equality, religious, homosexuality, evangelization, mission.

1. Introduction

"The family is a treasure: it must always be protected and defended. May the Holy Family of Nazareth protect you and illuminate your path always." This was the instruction Pope Francis gave to the people gathered at Saint Peter's Square on 30 December 2018. No country or culture is spared from the impact of the global upheaval that has affected family life. Many are experiencing the heat and pressure of the massive changes and the swift erosion of traditional values and ethos, which have held the social, cultural and even religious fabric of

the society together. It is in this context that we reflect on the spirituality of marriage and the family that we see in St. Chavara's writings and two recent Apostolic Exhortations of Pope Francis, namely, *Amoris Laetitia* (AL) and *Gaudete et Exsultate* (GE). These documents come as an invitation to Christian families to value the gifts of marriage and the family, and to preserve those values in love strengthened by the virtues of generosity, commitment, fidelity and patience (AL 5).

Some people say: "Father and Mother I Love You" is what the term 'family' stands for. This is generally the experience or expression of the children in the family. In order to build and maintain this atmosphere of free expression and experience of love, joy, acceptance and belongingness, according to Saint Chavara, several aspects of the families should be taken care of. Hence he notes in *Chavarul*: "Praying for God's light and peace, I have framed this rule of conduct for families."¹ 150 years ago, he noted down his conviction: "The only sweet consolation for a person experiencing trials and difficulties in this valley of tears is the membership and life in a family where love, order and peace reign." He was aware of the opposite possibility as well: "It is most distressing to live in a family where there is no order or peace and where the members are unconcerned about the service of God and their own salvation." These convictions prompted him to meditate on the joys and sorrows of the families.

2. Family-Centred Spirituality

In the *Chavarul*, what St. Chavara propounded was a spirituality that is to be fostered in one's family. He instructs: Children must gather at home at the Angelus bell in the evening (gather not in the parish church); parents and children join together to pray in the family. The children kiss the hands of the parents and greet them, which is an experience and expression of bonding and parental relationship. He has given great importance to evening prayer (*sandhya namaskaram*) and has made the 'participation in the Holy Mass' part of the 'Daily Routine' of the family. He emphasised the parents' responsibility to teach their children prayers and train them in Christian virtues.² He

¹Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *The Testament of a Loving Father*, The Rule for Families written on 13 February 1868, addressing the parishioners of Kainakary. It has two parts, namely, the Rules for Family and Upbringing of Children.

²*Chavarul*, II: 2.

instructed the parents: "Parents should frequently commend their children to the protection of the Holy Family and pray for them. God will listen to mother's petitions as that of the child."³ One must learn and practice mutual love, respect, forgiveness, sharing with the poor and needy and such other virtues in the family.

He understood that the family prayer is a special way of expressing and strengthening the faith journey of the members. Regularity in prayer can do immense good to family life. The various expressions of popular piety are a treasure of spirituality for many families. Family prayer culminates in the Eucharist and there is a close bond between married life and the Eucharist. Both are communion of love and self-giving for the enrichment of the other. "For the food of the Eucharist offers the spouses the strength and incentive to live the marriage covenant each day as a "domestic church" (AL 318). Family is "a vital cell for transforming the world" (AL 324).

3. Chavarul's Definition of Family

A good family is the image of heaven, where persons live together, by the bond of blood and affection, duly respecting and obeying their parents and walking peacefully before the Lord and people, which ensure their salvation, according to each one's state of life. According to Chavara, family is a God-given place to members to grow in love and compassion, and it is also a place to grow in sanctity and human virtues and find self-fulfilment and actualization. Therefore, life in one's family ensures salvation.

4. Marital and Family Spirituality

In spite of its importance and relevance, marital spirituality is seldom talked about. According to *Amoris Laetitia*, marital spirituality is the spirituality of the bond, in which divine love dwells (AL 315). The couples have to strive for this spirituality in the midst of all their daily household activities, troubles and struggles, joys and hopes. The Pope says: "The spirituality of family love is made up of thousands of small but real gestures" (AL 315). It is not accomplished so much by doing extraordinary things, but by paying attention to small and seemingly insignificant things with love. Such actions of love are the ingredients of true marital spiritual life. God dwells deep within the marital love that gives him glory. If a family is centred on Christ, he will unify and illumine its entire life (AL 248). Jesus knocks on the door of families, to

³Chavarul, II: 1.

share with them the Eucharistic supper (AL 249). Spirituality of marriage is to be conscious of its communion with the Trinity, Christ, its sacramental character, living according to the Biblical narrative on marriage and living according to this faith both in the family and out in the world.

In Chavara's writings one could notice the festivity of family love or more specifically celebration of 'mothering experiences.' He records the life-cycle of women. Conception, pregnancy, child birth, joy and ecstasy of first kiss given to the baby, the embracing of the new born baby, joy and ecstasy of the mother in breast feeding, child rearing, and such other 'maternal concerns' are favourite topics in some of the literature from Chavara. The discovery of the spirituality of caring and nurturing is part of being created in the image and likeness of God who is a caring and protecting mother. This discovery becomes God-experience for a mother and living these experiences she becomes a saint.

By choosing to dwell in a human family Jesus shows the world that the ideal setting for God's love to abide with us is the heart of a home. For Chavara, the holy family of Nazareth became the meeting place of heaven and earth, where God reached out to humans in an act of bonding. Ever after, relationship within every human family assumes a divine dimension. However, we cannot assume that the family of Nazareth was something of a heaven on earth. Jesus, Mary and Joseph had to face many difficulties and troubles. But the love that reigned supreme in the holy family could tide over any sort of trials and crises. That is the example Jesus has set for us to imitate.

The third canto of *Atmanuthapam*, Chavara's autobiographical poem, offers contemplation on the deep mystery of Incarnation, which is a favourite theme for Chavara. He might have written this canto during the liturgical season of Annunciation or Christmas: Maybe because the Church, like Mary, is always awaiting the arrival of the Lord singing 'come Lord Jesus, come.' In the advent, in a very special way, "she is awaiting a birth." The virgin "sensed within herself, in body, and in soul," that the birth of her child was near. And surely in her heart she said to the baby she was carrying in her womb: come, I want to see your face, for they have told me you will be great!" Chavara accompanied Our Lady in this journey of waiting, giving birth to Jesus and all the experiences and we too wish to hasten the Lord's birth. Like Mother Mary he repeated hundreds of times, 'I long to see'.

For example, in *Atmanuthapam* Chavara contemplates deeply on the experience of the parents in embracing the new born baby:

പെറെറാരു മാതൃ തന്റെ പുത്രനെ കൈയ്യിൽ വാങ്ങി
കൊറ്റവർക്കധിപനാം പുത്രനെ വന്ദിച്ചമ്മ,
അനേരം കുഞ്ഞിപ്പെട്ടതൽ നയനം തുറന്നു തൻ
സുന്ദരമുഖിയായ അമ്മയെ തൃക്കണ്ഠപാർത്തു.

(*Atmanuthapam*, V/ 74/78)

Loving kisses: Seeing the new born baby for the first time the mother venerates and worships him. Then she kissed each part of his body; first his feet, hands, cheeks and the whole body. The poet contemplates the gestures of the mother and gives meaning to each kiss. Like the parents of Jesus, the poet too experienced joy and ecstasy of the first kiss of the new born baby. Chavara did not merely give us a sketchy account of the scene, but as a contemplative and keen observer of human behaviour, he gives the interesting details very meditatively:

അപ്പൊഴുതമ്മ തന്റെ സൃഷ്ടിതാവെന്നുറച്ചു
തൃപ്പാദേ മുത്തി ഭക്ത്യാൽ. (*Atmanuthapam*, V/83-84)

എത്രയുമിച്ഛിച്ചുള്ള തനുജൻ പ്രിയ സുതൻ
ചിത്ര കൗതുകത്തോടെ മുത്തി തൻ കവിളതിൽ.

(*Atmanuthapam*, V/87-88)

On the mother embracing the new-born baby he meditates:

The Babe on hearing His mother's voice
Stretched forth his lovely arms
The virgin holding Him closer still
Fondled him with her soft hands. (*Atmanuthapam*, V/97-98)

On the delight and ecstasy of the mother as she breast-feeds the he writes:

The mother fondly feeding her child
With milk at her breast I long to see
The holy awe, the mother enjoyed
While feeding him, I long to see. (*Atmanuthapam*, III/37-40)

In breast feeding, while accepting and enjoying the life-blood of the mother, there develops in the baby an intimate and strong bond of communion between the mother and child.

Chavara pictures the delight of St. Joseph in the presence of the new-born baby and sees the angels sing praises to the couple. The poet, with sincere feelings of love, describes the scene of St. Joseph fondling the child Jesus in his arms. With a soul-enthraling description of the Infant Jesus, Chavara concludes this section.

The poet describes the mother handing the baby Jesus to St. Joseph, her husband:

Accept, kiss him as you will,
 Welcome woe as well as joy!
 His foster-parent clasped him tight.
 With devotion he kissed His feet,
 His lovely baby hands. (*Atmanuthapam*, V/120-130)
 The limitless joy, Joseph felt
 While watching them both, I long to see.

(*Atmanuthapam*, III/41-42)

The poet pictured that seeing the mutual love and respect of the parents the baby Jesus smiled at them and blessed them. The birth of every child is a holy and joyful event and it unites the couples and the family members. The sleepless nights, nursing the children at their sick bed, postponing of so many activities, career sacrifices and so on are some of the self-sacrifices the parents make. The prize of parenting comes at a price. Pope Francis says: "I like to contemplate the holiness present in the patience of God's people: in those parents who raise their children with immense love and sacrifices..." (GE 7). Such expressions of 'mothering experiences' are not very familiar to male poets. However, in the Malayalam literature, it is commonly seen in the poems of Madhavikkutty, Balamani Amma, Sugathakumari and other poetesses.

Women should consider themselves as privileged co-creators with God in bringing forth human life. This perspective should enhance the way in which women see themselves. Women have very deep and intense experiences during pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding. Those are experiences that have sustained women through all the pain and discomfort of the bodily processes. These experiences are women's God experience and should be cherished, appreciated and valued as such. These experiences give women their dignity as women. Women, who are not able to or have chosen to conceive and give birth, experience God through nurturing others, especially children, the sick, the old and the infirm. Our bodies are created to love and bring forth in love. Loving and nurturing gives us the dignity derived from being created in the very image and likeness of God. In these presentations, Chavara is seen as a champion restoring dignity to women's body and their mothering experiences.

Contemplating on the dignity of women, Saint John Paul II notes in *Mulieris Dignitatem*:

Motherhood involves a special communion with the mystery of life, as it develops in the woman's womb. The mother is filled with wonder at this mystery of life, and 'understands' with unique intuition what is happening inside her. In the light of the 'beginning', the mother accepts and loves as a person the child she is carrying in her womb. This unique contact with the new human being developing within her gives rise to an attitude towards human beings – not only towards her own child, but every human being – which profoundly marks the woman's personality.⁴

He continues to remark on the responsibility given to women: "The moral and spiritual strength of woman is joined to her awareness that God entrusts the human being to her in a special way. Of course, God entrusts every human being to each and every other human being. But this entrusting concerns woman in a special way, precisely by reason of her femininity."⁵

5. Pope Francis' Presentation of Parents as Saints

In the history of the Church, very few lay people are canonized. This fact gives the impression that holiness or sainthood is not for those people who lead a family life. The statement of the Pope regarding our very parents becoming "*living saints* with all their self-emptying concern and care for us" opens the door of holiness to them. It assures the couples, parents and grandparents to live their marital spirituality more zealously. Declaring Louis Martin and Zélie Guérin, the parents of the Little Flower, saints, Pope Francis assured that parenting is a way to holiness.

We are called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever we are. Our parents become living saints with all their self-emptying concern and care for us (GE 6, 14). If you are a parent or a grandparent, you are instructed to be holy by patiently teaching the little ones to follow Jesus (GE 14). Pope Francis contemplates the holiness present in the patience of God's people in their ordinary living. He lists several examples: holiness present "in those parents who raise their children with immense love, in those men and women who work hard to support their families, in the sick, in the elderly religious who never lost their smile." Their holiness is the holiness of the Church militant. This is the

⁴*Mulieris Dignitatem*, 18.

⁵*Mulieris Dignitatem*, 30.

holiness, which we often find in our “next door neighbours” who live amidst us and “reflect God’s presence” (GE 7).

6. Chavara Considered His Mother a Saint

Before Pope Francis instructed the people of God to regard their parents as saints, Chavara considered his mother a saint. For him the life she lived in the family by caring for her children and husband was enough to take her as a saint. For example, after receiving the Holy Communion or in preparation to welcome Jesus into his heart, he invites Mother Mary and his other favourite motherly saints including his own mother “എന്റെ അമ്മ എന്നെ പെററവൾ” (“My mother who gave birth to me”). Chavara contemplated the holiness present in his mother who raised her children with immense love, devotion, self-sacrifice and patience and she attained holiness through ordinary, daily and mundane activities. He believed in the possibility of becoming a saint by living one’s holiness through small gestures. He instructed the sisters of the convent at Koonammavu: “When you open or shut the door, when you are in the room or at work, when you walk, when you spit, when you sit down, when you sweep with a broom or when you pray, remain united to God.”⁶

7. Celebration of Love

Amoris Laetitia is a celebration of love that is treated lavishly and extensively in its fourth chapter. Many call the chapter the masterpiece of the entire document. The chapter is aptly and appropriately named Love in Marriage. After the love that unites us to God, the document considers conjugal love as the ‘greatest form of friendship (AL 123). It is a tribute to married couples’ energizing and binding love for each other. Conjugal love is no more treated as a concession granted to the weak to save themselves from allurements of concupiscence. It is seen within the realm of God’s love and friendship. Love is not a conceptual, philosophical notion, but it is relational. It unites human beings who are made in the image and likeness of God; God is essentially love; and, thus, family becomes an image of heaven.

8. Sacredness of Human sexuality

Many approach human sexuality with fear and trepidation and often it is reluctantly discussed in hushed tones. In this way, some avoid scandalizing the weak or the sanctimonious. Unfortunately, there is a

⁶CKC 1.

certain amount of distorted notion about human sexuality and it is treated like a taboo by many. Today, the Church has come a long way to accept the reality and the sacredness of human sexuality, and yet, some sort of vague, hazy and fuzzy approach to sexuality still lingers on in some circles. A right approach to and a holistic view of human sexuality come only when one accepts the fact that all are made in the image and likeness of God. The male-female differences are not something one can casually dismiss as something of no importance.

In *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis clearly states: "God himself created sexuality, which is a marvellous gift to his creatures" (AL 150). Marriage was not instituted solely for procreation of children, but also for the expression of mutual love, that it should grow and mature (AL 125). It contends that the Church's official teaching has never rejected 'Eros' as such, but she has exposed the destructive form of it. With clarity the Pope writes: "In no way ... can we consider the erotic dimension of love simply as a permissible evil or a burden to be tolerated for the good of the family. Rather, it must be seen as gift from God that enriches the relationship of the spouses" (AL 125). Thus, he encourages the spouses to celebrate the gift of human sexuality and elevate it to the level of Christian virtue, which will enable them to build a family of love and compassion. "Sexual union, lovingly experienced and sanctified by the sacrament, is in turn a path of growth in the life of grace for the couple" (AL 74). *Amoris Laetitia* has given a holistic outlook on human sexuality, which every human person needs to accept as a great gift from God, whatever may be one's status in life - married, single, consecrated or celibate. No one could read these words of spiritual wisdom of Pope Francis and not be deepened in his/her commitment to his/her families and marital spirituality.

9. Children and their Upbringing

In the *Testament of a Loving Father*, under the title 'Upbringing of Children' Chavara numbered 16 points, which can be seen as a reflection of his satisfaction in the kind of upbringing he received from his family. He opens this session by powerfully placing the responsibility of parents in establishing good family relationship at home. "Parents, remember that it is your primary duty and responsibility to bring up your children."⁷ To his parents, family life was an experience, a period of self-sacrifice, commitment - a bond of

⁷Chavarul, II: 1.

love relation. Hence, he warns: "Children are sacred treasures entrusted to you by God. Know that these children have been entrusted to you, to be purified with the precious blood of Jesus, to be trained in his service and to be returned to God on the judgment day; your child belongs to God." Today many parents struggle with disciplining their children. Many families are child-centred, acting according to the child's likes and dislikes; as a result, very often the child gets spoiled.

10. Mother's Role in Upbringing Children

Chavara appreciated Thoppil Mariam's (his own mother) method of disciplining children. Parenting is difficult. Can a child be disciplined without beating, shouting and scolding? Thoppil Mariam proved it affirmatively for which Kuriakose is proud of her. He claims that his mother never beat him:

യാതൊരു കാരണാൽ കരുവാലും കരത്താലും തൊട്ടില്ല.

എല്ലാം കണ്ണുകൊണ്ടു കഴിച്ചിടും

ദുഃഖിപ്പിക്കും തോഷിപ്പിക്കും ചക്ഷുസ്സാൽ

നോട്ടം കണ്ടാൽ ഭയപ്പെടുമഹം. (*Atmanuthapam*, 1/81/84)

Chavara praised God for the infinite mercy He had shown through his parents, especially his mother (*Atmanuthapam*, 1/119/133). She disciplined him with her eyes; no shouting, no beating, no scolding. Looking into the eyes of his mother he came to know what he had done was right or wrong. Her approval or disapproval for his behaviour was written in her look. On account of this kind of an upbringing, Kuriakose became a favourite of God.

While breast-feeding, his mother instilled in him the divine virtues and the heroes of the Bible became his heroes.

Mixed in her sweet milk, she regaled me

With thoughts of heaven, and words of grace so pure!

And when reason grew strong, my little mind

Patiently, informed, to lisp holy names

Huddled close to her feet, I learnt aright

Gently, of matters sublime, of my faith

As at midnight she rose and knelt at prayer

Warding off sleep and petty dullness to the air

Long hours, on her knee in prayer she stayed

Leaning on her then I would seat myself.

(*Atmanuthapam*, 1/ 49/60)

Chavara gives wings to his appreciation for his mother's method of disciplining: He notes that she was a praying mother, she taught him

how to pray and instilled faith in him and she introduced to him other great mothers such as Mary of Nazareth, Teresa of Avila, the mother saint of mystical prayer, 3 Marys (Saint Mary of Egypt, Saint Mary of Cortona and Saint Mary Magdalene), whom he called penitential mothers (പരിഹാര മധ്യസ്ഥകൾ, എപ്പോഴും എന്നെ തുണക്കുന്ന അമ്മമാർ).

When John Paul II wrote a letter in 1995 thanking the women of the world for all they had done and continue to do for society and for the church, his words echoed St. Chavara's presentation of his mother:

Thank you, women who are mothers! You have sheltered human beings within yourselves in a unique experience of joy and travail. This experience makes you become God's own smile upon the new born child, the one who guides your child's first steps, who helps it to grow, and who is the anchor as the child makes its way along the journey of life.⁸

On 13 January 2019, Pope Francis reminded parents of their task of transmitting the faith to their children. He stressed that they must do so with their own example, with their own life of faith and not just through catechism classes, but at home, making their children see Jesus there and know Him.

11. Feminine Style of Holiness for the Church

Pope Francis acclaims the "genius of woman that shines in the feminine styles of holiness," which is the essential means of reflecting God's holiness in this world. Indeed, in times when women tended to be most ignored or overlooked, the Holy Spirit raised up saints whose attractiveness produced new spiritual vigour and important reforms in the Church. He mentions the examples of saints Hildegard, Bridget, Catherine of Siena, Teresa of Avila and Therese of Lisieux. But the pope also remembers "all those unknown or forgotten women who, each in their own way, sustained and transformed families and communities by the power of their witness (GE 12). In another place in the Exhortation, in order to explain how holiness grows through small gestures, Pope Francis gives an illustration of an everyday feminine style of holiness.

A woman goes shopping, she meets a neighbour and they begin to speak, and gossip starts. But she says in her heart: "no, I will not speak badly of anyone." This is a step forward in holiness, later, at home, one of her children wants to talk to her about his hopes and dreams, and even though she is tired, she sits down and listens

⁸Letter of Pope John Paul II to Women in 1995, no. 2.

with patience and love. That is another sacrifice that brings holiness. Later she experiences some anxiety, but recalling the love of the Virgin Mary, she takes her rosary and prays with faith. Yet another path of holiness. Later still, she goes out into the street, encounters a poor person and stops to say a kind word to him. One more step (GE 16).

Time and again Pope Francis has striven to highlight the importance of feminine genius in every area of the Church's life. What we saw in this example is yet another illustration of his commitment to the cause of highlighting feminine style of spirituality in the context of their family and motherhood.

This is true about Chavara as well. A number of motherly saints, he believed, always helped him. When he is in his meditation, he is surrounded by all these motherly saints. He pictures his meditation room in this manner: Jesus is seated on a throne of mercy, at his right side Mother Mary and at his left Saint Joseph are seated. Mother Teresa of Avila is kneeling down in front of the throne of Jesus in order to teach him how to meditate well. Those penitential mothers are there to intercede for him. [One may notice that except Saint Joseph he has not mentioned the name of any male saints in his life]. Whereas these motherly saints had great influence in his life. He seemed to believe that feminine style of holiness is an essential means of reflecting God's holiness in this world. May be because of such a belief, in his poem "*Anastasiayude Rakthasakshyam*," he presented Anastasia, a woman martyr as a heroic model of faith commitment to Jesus. He wrote this poem in 1862 when the faith of the Church of Kerala was shaken because of the arrival of a schismatic bishop Thomas Roccas and many parishes had accepted him as their bishop sent for them. That young martyr Anastasia is presented before the Saint Thomas Christians as a shining star who in the midst of great persecution and suffering stood firm in her strong faith. One may wonder why he was attracted by the story of this young girl while in the Roman martyriology hundreds or thousands of male martyrs are there.

Another example of his appreciation for feminine style of holiness can be this: In the collection of his daily prayers we see a prayer used by a fifteen-year-old Protestant girl who died in her sanctity. She prayed daily a particular prayer for attaining happy death. Saint Chavara kept it as his favourite prayer. She was not a catholic, nor a canonized saint. Still he allowed himself to be touched by the prayer of a teenage girl.

One may notice in his autobiographical poem *Atmanuthapam* that he wrote more than 100 happy lines about his mother. [But about his father he is totally silent.] He had a bright picture of his mother which enabled him to form a noble vision on the greatness of womanhood. He worked hard to empower women and raise their status in the society. He addressed the sisters in the convent at Koonammavu as 'O! Royal ladies' (മഹാരാജാസുതീകളേ), 'the spouses of my Lord!' He loved the sisters and they loved him too. He admitted the depth and beauty of that love as he writes to them: "You love me now more than you love your blood relatives. I, too, do the same." He gratefully accepted the contribution of women in his undertakings and recorded it for the posterity.

Chavarul clearly speaks of parents' accompaniment and their responsibility to give proper education to their children: "As soon as the children come to the age of reason they must be sent to school. Besides, parents should be enquiring how the children study and behave, and who their companions are. Their studies should be tested every Sunday."⁹ He seems to be aware of the possible influences outside the family, such as peers, adults other than parents and media that affect children in healthy or unhealthy ways. We also see many psychological insights in the upbringing of children in the *Chavarul*: "Do not send your children to stay with your relatives, for very often they leave your house as angels and return as devils."¹⁰

12. Mutual Respect in the Family

Chavara gives much emphasis to mutual respect in the family. He says: "Seeing the father respecting the mother, children must respect their mother. The mother should set an example to the children in honouring and loving their father. So also the father should show love and respect for the mother. If the parents do not respect each other, neither will their children respect them."¹¹ It means that if father does not respect the mother, children also will not respect their mother, sons will not respect their wives, boys will not respect girls, brothers will not respect their sisters and priests will not respect ladies or religious women... A good number of children have not seen their fathers respecting their mothers or fathers giving equal dignity to their mothers. Instead, a widespread understanding is that wife must be

⁹*Chavarul*, II: 6.

¹⁰*Chavarul*, II: 7.

¹¹*Chavarul*, II: 9.

inferior to husband – in age, size, beauty, talents, educational qualification, salary, etc. If the wife is more educated, earning more, more beautiful, more known than her husband, if the wife is earning and husband is jobless, ego clash begins and leads to wife-beating, belittling the wife's parents and family and the husband inflicts many other forms of torture, both mental and physical. In such families, children do not grow in the atmosphere of mutual respect and love as Chavara expects. For a good number of men, wife is meant for cooking, cleaning, procreating and giving sexual pleasure to her husband ..., in short, attending to *his* needs.

The husband looks at the wife as an unpaid servant, not as a partner equal in dignity. A father's first responsibility to his child is to show that he loves his wife. Poor parents who fight and do not have unity raise poor and unhappy children. Rich parents who do not have love and unity raise rich and unhappy children. Your gift to your children is your happy married life. Your child will become what you are, so be what you want them to be. The most favoured children in the world are those whose parents love each other.

13. Unequal Status of Boys and Girls at Home

Preferential treatment of the son is another reason for lack of mutual love and respect in the families. The birth of a boy child in a family, especially in the North Indian states, is celebrated in various ways, not only on that day of birth but continuously on different occasions of festivals and gatherings. Whereas, the birth of a girl child is not a welcome event; instead of celebrations some families raise a loud cry when a girl child is born. She is considered less important compared to the boy in the family. The boys are served first, after taking meals they can play; they are given the best education, best medical care, etc., but the girls are deprived of all these. Discrimination against the girl child and women in matters of food, health and education has direct repercussions on the health and education of the other members of the family. Since women are child bearers, discrimination against women results in the poor health of the children, infant mortality and/or maternal mortality.

Another area that women are most ignored or overlooked is the decision-making regarding the family matters, study of the children, etc., which also tells us that women have to fight for space in the decision-making power politics within the family, community, places of work and in the Church. Pope John Paul II says: "The awareness that in marriage there is mutual subjugation out of reverence for

Christ, and not just that of wife for husband, must gradually establish itself in the heart, consciences, behaviour and customs. This is a call which ... does not cease to challenge future generations."¹² The increasing number of sexual violence and atrocities against women, which is termed as 'epidemic of sexual violence' can be seen as the result of the lack of respect of the father for mother and husband for wife. "In creating the human race 'male and female', God gives men and women equal personal dignity, endowing them with inalienable rights and responsibilities proper to the human person."¹³ The unequal treatment prevailed in the families has been perpetuated in the Church in different forms. The services of the priests and men religious are considered great, not that of the women religious. Pope John Paul II observes:

Many forms of degrading discrimination still persist today in a great part of our society that affect and seriously harm particular categories of women, as for example, childless wives, widows, separated or divorced women and unmarried mothers. The Synod Fathers deplored these and other forms of discrimination as strongly as possible. I, therefore, ask that vigorous and incisive pastoral action be taken by all to overcome them definitely so that the image of God that shines in all human beings without exception may be fully respected.¹⁴

14. Challenges and Pastoral Care to Families

The global scenario of family life does not present a glowing and rosy picture but a bleak and grim reality of the contemporary society. The number of dysfunctional and broken families is on the rise, compared to yester years. Husband and wife living apart has become a common phenomenon. Life for everyone has turned harsh and family tragedies are on the increase: divorce, depression, rebellion, teen suicide, alcoholism and drug addiction are some of them. Mixed marriages need special pastoral care since these marriages provide occasions for interreligious dialogue (AL 248). Those with homosexual orientation are to be shown pastoral concern (AL 251). Care and respect need to be shown for the sufferings of those who have unjustly endured separation, divorce, abandonment or those who have been victims of maltreatment from a husband or a wife. Those who are divorced and

¹²*Mulieris Dignitatem*, 24.

¹³*Familiaris Consortio*, 24.

¹⁴*Familiaris Consortio*, 24.

have entered into new unions must also be made to feel part of the Church.

'The pastoral challenges of the family in the context of evangelization' or 'the vocation and mission of the family in the Church and in the contemporary world' is a great concern of Pope Francis and of the Church today. This is the first time in the history of the Church that two synods were convoked in consecutive years with almost the same theme - Family. It clearly discloses and strongly conveys the message that the Church is concerned with the family life of the faithful and she wants to visibly manifest her maternal care for all her children, especially during these times of desolation and turbulence.

When family life becomes weak in the society and the family is not valued - when goals become extremely individualistic - the society begins to deteriorate and eventually falls. The role of the family in building up a just, emotionally stable and healthy society has become an energizing topic and recurring concern of people of all nationalities and cultures. The call here is to make every family a loving home. The couples, elderly parents, those who are terminally ill and bedridden, parents who are worried about their kids' waywardness, etc., want to pour out their struggles and difficulties before someone. They may not expect from us ready answers or solutions. We need to equip ourselves in order to be effective pastors and in the family apostolate what we need is a listening heart.

THE SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE

Contemporary Challenges

Saju Karukaparampil CMI

Abstract: The sacrament of marriage faces various challenges in the modern world. Some of the serious challenges to the sacrament of marriage and family are enumerated. There is a phenomenal increase in the number of inter-faith and inter-ethnic marriages both in the West and in the East. For several reasons, some Catholics opt for civil marriage, some of them neglecting the sacramental marriage. Break-up of marriage which often leads to divorce is one of the most profound crises in the society as the spouses deny each other and in the process, deny themselves. Due to issues related to dowry, even among the Catholics, often from the beginning of married life, there are conflicts between the couple and between the bride and her in-laws. Although migration, which takes people away, has its advantages, it has enormous effect on the institution of marriage and family in varying degrees.

Keywords: Marriage, sacrament, family, society, pre-marital sex, trial marriage, civil marriage, mixed marriage, inter-religious marriage, extra-marital sex, dowry, domestic violence, divorce, remarriage, migration, bride, cultures, education, employment, children, plurality, ministers, faith, baptism, communion, civil marriage, cohabitation, sacrament, children, oppression, victimization, harassment, violence, suppression, murder, suicide, infanticide, abortion, globalization, poverty, injustice.

1. Introduction

Marriage has been one of the important social institutions that play a significant role in order to stabilize familial relationships and regulate the sex life of human beings. Marriage is a universal social institution that has been established by the human society and a sacrament that has been divinely instituted. It works as the cornerstone of the family. Marriage can have different implications in different cultures, its purposes, functions and forms might differ from society to society. However, the importance of marriage has been drastically diminished

in the modern times. Today, many members of the young generation perceive marriage as an old-established social institution and the relevance of marriage drifts towards several transformed visions.

Some of the serious challenges to the sacrament of marriage and family are pre-marital sex, trial marriage, civil marriage, mixed marriage, inter-religious marriage, extra-marital sex, dowry, domestic violence, divorce and remarriage, same sex unions, work pressure, migration and a multitude of other problems. Our attempt here is to look into some of the major contemporary challenges to marriage such as pre-marital sexual relations, mixed marriages and Inter-religious marriages, civil marriages, dowry, migration, etc.

2. Mixed and Inter-Religious Marriages

Mixed marriage is understood as a marriage between a Catholic and a non-Catholic (e.g., between a Catholic and an Orthodox Christian). Mixed marriages in the strict sense mean the marriage between a Catholic and a baptized person who is not in full communion with the Catholic Church.¹ Inter-religious marriage is the marriage between a Catholic and non-Christian (e.g., between a Catholic and a Hindu). This is also called a marriage in disparity of cult as it is contracted between a baptized person and an unbaptized person.² According to canon 85 of the *Motu Proprio Crebrae Allatae* of Pope Pius XII (1948) the mixed marriages between the Catholic and non-Catholic partners of the eastern tradition is not valid if it is not blessed by a Catholic minister.³

There is a practical difficulty even in the blessing of such a marriage. According to the practice of some regions the marriage has to be blessed by the parish priest of the bridegroom. If the bridegroom is a non-Catholic, the Catholic bride has to follow his tradition. Some of the couples are not interested in following any traditions and they want to live free of such rites. Such people go away from the Church leaving his/her Catholic faith and get married.

Of late, mixed marriage has become a universal phenomenon in the Church. In the modern society, because of the revolutionized social and religious consciousness, people are questioning age-old values,

¹The Code of Canon Law (CIC), can. 1124; *The Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* (CCEO), can. 813.

²The Code of Canons for the Eastern Churches, can. 803.

³Joseph Kallarangatt, "Marriage and Family in the Christian Tradition," *Indian Journal of Family Studies* 1, 2 (2003): 7-32, 28.

including marriage and family.⁴ In India, Christians live in a multi-cultural, multi-religious, and multi-lingual society; they cannot remain isolated from other cultures and communities. A natural consequence is the occasional mixed and inter religious marriages. The opportunity for higher education, employment, and wider cultural exchange has contributed greatly to this phenomenon. However, unless one is very careful while opting for such relationships, such a course of action can adversely affect the growing children. Some young people want to have complete freedom in life and so they opt for any type of marriage. This growing trend calls for serious attention to scientific inquiry into the level of marital and family satisfaction among these couples and the personality formation and interpersonal experience of their children.

As Albert I. Gordon has noted, there is a phenomenal increase in the number of inter-faith and inter-ethnic marriages both in the West and in the East.⁵ This trend of inter-religious marriages is on the increase in India today with the emergent cultural and social exchanges and encounters. Plurality in religions and customs are really a blessing, but the Church has to see to it that our relationship with people of different faiths should not lead to the depreciation of the sacrament of marriage.

The trend among the young generation to marry someone outside one's religious and faith background is a major shift from the traditional practice. The Catholic views on marriage such as sacramentality, life-long commitment, fidelity and indissolubility are considered too restrictive and unreal for them. More and more young people challenge the very custom and relevance of getting married within one's religious community.

The Extraordinary Synod of Bishops on "The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization" held in 2014, highlights the concern of the Church over certain widespread practices of the society today, which have been corroding the fundamental Christian principles and the essential family values.⁶ In India, we see Catholics opting for mixed marriages and inter-religious marriages. Sometimes, adherents of various religions are seen in a Catholic family, which is a

⁴Sebastian Payyappilly, "Mixed Marriage: A Pastoral Challenges to the Family," *Asian Horizons* 8, 2 (2014): 303-317, 303.

⁵Albert I. Gordon, *Intermarriage: Interfaith, Interracial, Interethnic*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1964, 5.

⁶Payyappilly, "Mixed Marriage," 303.

challenge for the upbringing of the children in faith.⁷ Those marriages highlight the inherent difficulties of these unions in the Catholic upbringing of children. As a general principle, the Church discourages mixed and inter-religious marriages because it is a challenge to the sacramentality of marriage and it adversely affects the upbringing of the children in Catholic faith.

There are many issues the couples who belong to two different faiths face as they want to get married. Mixed marriages always constitute a problem. This is aggravated in cases where the non-Catholic partner has strong religious convictions that are not in harmony with the Catholic teachings.⁸ In the open society of today, mixed marriages cannot be avoided. Yet, Catholics ministers feel that these marriages are often detrimental to faith and a threat to the harmony in the family.

It is true that the life style of every believing community is conditioned by faith; Catholics are no exception. In an inter-religious marriage, the faith practices of the couple, if they want to maintain their original observances, are negatively affected. For example, in the case of a marriage between a Christian girl and a Muslim boy, the girl is practically always lost to faith.⁹ If husband and wife do not agree on their faith and religious convictions, their longing for complete unity remains unfulfilled and tensions are caused. Inter-faith families create situations of 'double belonging' in faith and culture, which has a unique impact on the faith formation of the children. The love in such families is put to test because of the insistence of canon 1125, which expects the Catholic partners to obtain the assurance (promise) from the other partner for the baptism of their children.¹⁰

Another hurdle posed by inter-religious marriage is that it affects the social status of one of the partners. The partner who belongs to another religious faith does not usually want to appear before others during the family celebrations like birthday party, baptism, marriage,

⁷Third Extraordinary General Assembly of Bishops, "Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization: *Instrumentum Laboris*," http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20141018_relatio-synodi-familia_en.html [accessed on 3 August 2017].

⁸Karl H. Peschke, *Christian Ethics: Moral Theology in the Light of Vatican II*, vol. II, Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2016, 528.

⁹Peschke, *Christian Ethics*, 529.

¹⁰Indian Theological Association (ITA) Statement 2015, "Marriage and Family Today: An Indian Theological Search," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 79, 9 (2015): 701-716, 703.

etc. They find it difficult to face their own relatives and sometimes even feel loneliness. Hence, Karl H. Peschke states: "For these reasons the Catholic Church, conscious of her duty, discourages the contracting of any type of mixed and inter-religious marriages, for she most desires that her children be able in matrimony to attain perfect union of mind and full communion of life."¹¹

3. Civil Marriages

For several reasons, some Catholics opt for civil marriage. While opting for such a marriage, some of them neglect the sacramental marriage. Civil marriage is a marriage performed, recorded and recognized by a government official.¹² Indian Special Marriage Act of 1954 supports and sanctions civil marriage saying "parties who do not wish to marry in a religious ceremony can instead opt for a civil ceremony pursuant to the Act."¹³ Since civil marriage takes place without any religious affiliation, majority of the people opt for it because of various reasons. There are increasing cases of Catholics who for ideological or practical reasons, prefer to contract a merely civil marriage. They either reject or at least defer Catholic marriage. Some people prefer to have civil marriage because in certain circumstances it can be easily dissolved during the lifetime of the parties. These are ready to make certain commitment, but they do not want to renounce the possibility of divorce. By seeking public recognition of their bond on the part of the State, couples show that they are ready to accept not only its advantages but also its obligations. Nevertheless, this situation is acceptable to the Church.¹⁴

Civil marriage contracted by Catholics keeps them away from the sacrament of marriage. In the Western cultures, marriage is considered essential for the fulfilment of personal needs and happiness and many opt for civil marriage. As a result of globalization, the Western ideology of marriage is finding its way to the Indian Church. People of India also regard marriage as a personal matter concerned with love-

¹¹Peschke, *Christian Ethics*, 529.

¹²"Civil Marriage," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_marriage [accessed on 15 September 2017].

¹³"Marriage in India," <http://www.madaan.com/marriage.html> [accessed on 15 September 2017].

¹⁴John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* (22 November 1981), New York: St. Paul Publications, 1982, §82.

making, home-making and living together just as in *de facto* unions.¹⁵ Most of the Catholic marriages used to be arranged by parents in consultation with their children. Today, the concepts of 'love' and 'freedom' have altered the marriage system in Catholic families. However, when the parents do not approve the proposal their children bring, they opt for a civil marriage. The young generation considers marriage merely as a means of emotional fulfilment, which is possible in civil marriage or cohabitation.¹⁶

The Church is very much concerned about the institution of marriage and family. Marriage is understood as "The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament."¹⁷ Marriage between a baptized woman and a baptized man has always been considered the sacred union, a sign of the union between Christ and the Church. It is a perpetual and indissoluble union.¹⁸ Sacramental marriage demands the authentic personal love of the spouses with the qualities of permanence, continuity, fidelity and perseverance in the conjugal communion.

In the modern world, under the influence of social media, people lose the real meaning of love, sexuality and the sacramentality of marriage and thus many of them opt for civil marriage or cohabitation. In short, marriage is seen today as a 'vehicle of personal fulfilment' and not merely as something sacred and divine. When we analyse the nature of both civil and sacramental marriages, they are contradictory because there is no total commitment in civil marriage and the possibility of divorce is more in such marriage. The Church does not welcome civil marriage since it is against the sacramentality of marriage.

¹⁵Nobert Thomas, "Sociological Challenges of Marriage and Family in India," *Vaiharai* 18, 1&2 (2013): 150-172, 151.

¹⁶Thomas, "Sociological Challenges of Marriage," 157.

¹⁷*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994, §1601.

¹⁸Jorge L. Savino, "Christian Marriage: The Reality and Pastoral Care" in *Eleven Cardinals Speak on Marriage and the Family: Essays from a Pastoral Viewpoint*, ed. Winfried Aymans, 113-129, San Francisco: Ignatius, 2015, 113.

4. Divorce and Remarriage

Break-up of marriage is one of the most profound crises in the society because it is not just a matter of the institution or of the violation of rules and laws, but of the spouses' denial of each other and of who they are.¹⁹ One neither wants nor expects a divorce while entering into a marital relationship. It happens when selfishness takes control over self-giving. As a result, marriage dies even before one of the spouses dies.

There are various reasons for the dissatisfaction or failure in marriage. Couples living and working in cities and metros, are exposed to more economic and relationship options, which prompt them to opt out of their unsatisfactory or unequal marriages.²⁰ Stress is another reason for deterioration of family values and the quality of marital life.²¹ Stress can be caused because of the demands from the society, which the spouses have to contend with or because of expectations from each other. In an insecure and stressful work environment married couples carry work problems home and it results in deteriorating marital and family life. Another problem people encounter is the extended working hours in the office/company which leave little time for spouses to spend quality time together at home. Today, most of the married couples in profession are after making money and they find no time to be with the spouse. Finding less time with the partner and children in the family is yet another reason for dissatisfaction in marital life.

Coming together of two individuals in marriage and adjusting to each other involves investment of energy and adaptation. Communicating and understanding each other's needs and helping each other to grow together are a lifetime task. This requires constant effort and commitment. Sometimes, spouses fail to adjust themselves to their difficult situations. High expectation from the spouse to be an ideal lover, homemaker, etc., is said to be another reason for dissatisfaction that leads to break-up in marital life.

¹⁹Dominik Duka, "Reflections on the Family" in *Eleven Cardinals Speak on Marriage and the Family: Essays from a Pastoral Viewpoint*, ed. Winfried Aymans, 39-44, San Francisco: Ignatius, 2015, 43.

²⁰G. Felix, "Arbitration and Reconciliation in the Context of Pastoral and Marriage Dispute or Conflict," *Vaiharai* 18, 1&2 (2013): 190-205, 191.

²¹Cajetan D. Menezes, "The Effects of Stress on Christian Marriages in Urban India," *Indian Journal of Family Studies* 1, 2 (2003): 88-103, 88.

Due to the powerful influence of the virtual world on the real world of marriage, people lose the desire for a successful marital life and a stable family. Most of the divorced people opt for civil marriage because of their unpleasant experiences in the first marriage. Divorce disturbs the whole notion of marriage and deviates from the vision of God regarding marriage. It harms the human culture and system. The field study that was made in April 2017 reveals that the number of broken families is increasing in an alarming manner. People are really fed up with their marital life because of innumerable reasons. The divorce of the parents adversely affects the growth of the children in many ways. As a result, the children develop a negative impression on the institution of marriage. For these reasons, there is a tendency among today's young people to opt for civil marriage, cohabitation or single life.

5. The Curse of Dowry

Originally dowry was given to the daughter by her parents at the time of marriage in order to ensure her and her husband's economic and material security after the wedding.²² This practice was exploited by the families of the grooms and in the long run, the great demand for dowry encouraged female infanticide and neglect of the female children in certain poor quarters. Today, the dowry system has become a sort of extortion of money and property from the bride's family. It also has led to oppression, victimization, harassment, violence, suppression and degradation of women. There are many reports of dowry-related deaths.²³ In response to the negative effect, the Dowry Prohibition Act was enacted in 1961, which declared the dowry system illegal.²⁴ In spite of the Act and other legislative measures, it is practised in almost all regions, irrespective of caste and creed.²⁵

Dowry system prevails in the society and is widely practiced even among the Catholics in India. It is practiced widely in the southern

²²Thomas, "Sociological Challenges of Marriage," 162.

²³Johnson Pradeep R., "Psychological Challenges of Marital Life in India: A Christian Perspective," *Asian Horizons* 8, 2 (2014): 258-271, 261.

²⁴Thomas, "Sociological Challenges of Marriage," 162.

²⁵Vimal Kumar, Bala Kiran, Joseph Thambi, M. R. Sharma and Shaji George, "The Impact of Dowry System in the Christian Communities," *Asian Horizons* 7, 2 (2013): 357-375, 366.

states like Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.²⁶ Parents demand huge amounts of dowry at the time of the marriage of their sons because it has become a social custom. Though all sections of society suffer from the dowry system, the middle class and the poor suffer the most and as a result, their daughters cannot be given in marriage. Studies show that in most of the cases, in these families, dowry is not a onetime payment. The wife's family is often expected to offer the husband 'gifts' on many occasions, some of which are the birth of a child, the baptism, purchase of a new vehicle, construction of a new house, launch of a business etc. Moreover, the wife's family is expected to give 'gifts' to the in-laws on important occasions such as their wedding.²⁷

Due to issues related to dowry, often from the beginning of married life, there are conflicts between the couple and between the bride and her in-laws. These continuing demands make the woman feel that she is never a full member of her husband's family. Ultimately, it is the woman and her family who suffer the most. Many of them are compelled to take loan on excessive interest rates or to sell their property, including their house. The following are some of the violence related to the practice of dowry.

The demand for dowry often leads to several forms of ill-treatment, physical and mental harassment and humiliation of the bride. She has no choice but to suffer.²⁸ Her own family usually pleads with her to tolerate the suffering, including torture, since they think that a daughter leaving the husband is a disgrace to them. Moreover, the life of a woman is always considered as dependent on the man, and hence they are worried about her future if she would leave the husband. She does not get support from the neighbours, friends or relatives, since such a support would bring them in conflict with her husband's family.

Dowry is one of the major causes of domestic violence in India and its extreme form is murder. The official website of the Crime Records Bureau of India lists thousands of dowry deaths a year. The estimated number of dowry related deaths in India is above 25,000 a year.²⁹

²⁶Kumar *et al.*, "The Impact of Dowry System," 359.

²⁷Kumar *et al.*, "The Impact of Dowry System," 366.

²⁸Ram Ahuja, *Violence against Women*, New Delhi: Rawat Publication, 1998, 129.

²⁹Shaji George Kochuthara, "Dowry as a Social-Structural Sin," *Asian Horizons* 8, 2 (2014): 337-356, 341.

Parents like their girl child to be happy and her marital life to be peaceful. The parents of the girls spend huge amounts of money on weddings to impress the in-laws and try to meet all demands for gifts and valuables with the hope that the girl would never return home with a 'stigma'. But after the wedding, some young women discover that they are not as welcome to their in-laws as their dowry is. If the husband and in-laws consider the dowry received as 'insufficient', she is likely to suffer violence and humiliation. For the reasons cited above, she is not usually welcome to parents' homes either. Often, these girls contemplate suicide in a desperate situation to escape humiliation and violence. At times the husband and his family directly or indirectly force her to commit suicide.³⁰

In some cases, the wife is considered as a source of income.³¹ The husband's continuous demands for more often lead to mental and physical torture. Though there are dowry related murders in many parts of the country, only a few cases are reported. In order to stop offences of cruelty by the husband or his in-laws against the wife, new provisions were added to the Indian Penal Code: "If a death of a woman is caused by burns or bodily injury or occurs in suspicious circumstances within seven years of her marriage and it is shown that just before her death she was subjected to cruelty or harassment by her husband or in-laws in connection with demands for dowry, the husband or in-laws will be considered to cause her death."³² Though the law has brought some changes, the dowry related violence and murder are on the increase. With the death of the wife, the man becomes eligible to remarry and to obtain dowry again. Naturally, his family members also will benefit from the new marriage.

Consequences of dowry include female infanticide, late marriage for many girls, unsuitable matches for girls, low status of women, breakdown of marriages, unhappy married life, dissension between families, increase in immorality, increase in mental diseases, increased rate of suicide and impoverishment in poor and middle class families due to financial burden, etc.³³ The practice of dowry is an unjust

³⁰Mohd Umar, *Bride Burning in India: A Social Legal Study*, New Delhi: APH Publishing Corporation, 1998, 121. See also Kochuthara, "Dowry as a Social-Structural Sin," 351.

³¹Kumar *et al.*, "The Impact of Dowry System," 368.

³²"Dowry System in India," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dowry_System_in_India [accessed on 25 September 2017].

³³Kumar *et al.*, "The Impact of Dowry System," 367.

practice, which really contradicts the Catholic faith and practice. The lives of many women are made unbearable due to dowry and it creates constant tensions, conflicts and disharmony in family. Besides, it also affects the growth of the children and they undergo psychological and mental agony.

Dowry is one of the major instruments of patriarchy; perpetuating the oppression of women strengthening the view that girl child is a burden and curse to the families.³⁴ The financial demands and dowry related issues from the husband and relatives continue for the life time. In this way, a girl child becomes a continuous burden to her parents and family. Millions of female foetuses are aborted in India every year. Modern technological developments have made easy prenatal sex discernment and this has led to wide-spread sex-selective abortions in the Indian society. According to 2011 census of India, the sex ratio is 914 females per 1000 males and the main reason for this is selective female foeticide.³⁵ Many couples prefer sons to daughters because they consider sons as a source of income and girls as burden for the family. Christians are not an exception. Dowry is one of the major reasons for the preference of sons.³⁶

The dignity of the wife is violated due to the continuous harassment and humiliation from the part of the husband. When the worth of a person is calculated by the material benefit from that person, what causes it violates basic human dignity. Dowry commodifies and degrades women.³⁷ In some cases, even her basic needs of food, clothing and healthcare are denied when demands are not met. Her freedom to visit her parents, relatives and friends are curtailed as ways of isolating and torturing her mentally.

The dowry system results in the denial of justice to women. Parents feel that the male child is a source of income and hence they are ready to spend any amount of money on him. They feel that investment on the girl child is useless as she will belong to another family. This causes an unequal treatment of boys and girls. Parental property is also not shared equally and it is a great injustice done to them. They

³⁴Kumar *et al.*, "The Impact of Dowry System," 375.

³⁵Kochuthara, "Dowry as a Social-Structural Sin," 350.

³⁶Kumar *et al.*, "The Impact of Dowry System," 372.

³⁷Kochuthara, "Dowry as a Social-Structural Sin," 352.

are neither given equal opportunities nor equal share.³⁸ Dowry results in the denial of education for girls. The better she is qualified, the more burdensome she becomes for the family, because to find a boy of equal status means paying more dowry.³⁹

6. Migration and Cultural Encounters

Migration is the movement of habitation of people from one place to another. At present, it is a global phenomenon. As per the recent statistics, there are about 232 million international migrants and 740 million internal migrants and about 3 million people are moving to the cities every week.⁴⁰ This fact suggests that migration is actually a structural reality⁴¹ of the contemporary society. "Migration may be domestic or international on the basis of from where and to where they move. It may be forced or voluntary on the basis of the motive behind their movement."⁴² Irrespective of the fact, whether it is domestic or international, forced or voluntary, it has enormous effect on the institution of marriage and family in varying degrees and extent.

Globalization, unjust land acquisition, lack of employment and unsustainable agriculture, poverty, injustice, wars and conflicts contribute to the growing displacement and migration.⁴³ This situation leads to single-parent families, weakening of husband-wife relationships and results in dysfunctional families. Studies show that most of the migrant students as well as migrant workers are youth and they tend to live misusing their freedom.

³⁸Thomas Srampickal and Joji Chirayil, *To Act Justly and Deal Honestly: A Course in Justice and Truthfulness for Undergraduates in Theology*, Thrissur: Marymatha Publications, 2008, 39.

³⁹Kochuthara, "Dowry as a Social-Structural Sin," 350.

⁴⁰"International Organization for Migration: World Migration Report 2015," <https://www.iom.int/world-migration-report-2015> [accessed on 20 September 2017].

⁴¹Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi* (03 May 2004), Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004, §1.

⁴²Joseph Kuduppil, "Marriage and Family in the Context of Migration" in *The Pastoral Challenges of Marriage and Family: Response from India*, edited by Scaria Kanniyakonil, Dominic Vechoor and Anto Cheranthuruthy, 199-212, Kottayam: OIRSI, 2015, 200.

⁴³Indian Theological Association (ITA) Statement 2015, "Marriage and Family Today: An Indian Theological Search," 704.

Since there are different types of migration and each type has got its own reason, we focus on migrant students who are going away from their parents/family for higher studies or better job. Though migration has its own advantages, it has got consequences too which at time become a threat to the sacrament of marriage.

The migrants face many challenges pertaining to culture, customs and religious believes. Many of the adults find it difficult to integrate and to respect the socio-cultural conventions of the new places. Cultural identity crisis is a challenge faced by the second generation of the migrants.⁴⁴ The children of the migrating family find one culture at home, another at school, another in the outside world, still another at the Church. These differences trouble the children and have a negative impact on their future.

While the youth are away from the family for higher studies or job, they are influenced by various cultures, languages and religion. The migrant friendship group is constituted of members of various religions and cultures. Their association with the people of other cultures and faiths becomes an asset in their life. At the same time, this social interaction sometimes leads them to opt for inter-religious or inter-cultural marriage. In this way migration becomes a threat to the traditional celebration of the sacrament of marriage.

Live-in relationships and pre-marital sex are found more among the migrants and the youth who are away from their parents for their studies or job. The migrant youth have poor communication with their parents and they cultivate relationships with the virtual world. Besides, when they are bored, they tend to connect themselves with the digital world, which gradually leads them to a new relationship called "online affair."⁴⁵ Unlimited access to social networking without adequate guidance leads the youth to believe that the number of virtual friends defines their worth. Often they become addicted to the cyberspace and social media that lead them to live-in relationships, pre-marital sex, alcohol and drug addiction, etc. Migrants who are subjected to verbal, physical and sexual abuse often experience loneliness, distress, disappointment and marginalization.⁴⁶ They fail to practice their faith for the lack of time to go Church.

⁴⁴Kuduppil, "Marriage and Family in the Context of Migration," 206.

⁴⁵Pradeep, "Psychological Challenges of Marital Life in India: A Christian Perspective," 268.

⁴⁶Charles Irudayam, "Migration and Poverty: Issues and Responses of the Church," *Asian Horizons* 8, 4 (2014): 789–809, 792.

7. Conclusion

The traditional family in India across regional, linguistic and religious communities has undergone drastic changes, giving way to new forms of marriage and family since independence. There has been a gradual shift during the decades leading to the present cyber mediated communities. The Western culture has very much influenced and still influencing the young generation of the Indian Church. These developments also influence a drastic change in the social and relational experience, including the family and its members.

On the one hand, we see more development in the field of communication media, educational system, social structures, etc. On the other hand, there is a decline in the values and personal life of the people. In the traditional family system, there was solidarity, a feeling of belongingness, security, mutual respect, loyalty, psychological and emotional nurturing, prayerful atmosphere, etc. But with the changing patterns, the traditional family and its psycho-social-economic influence on personal development are on the decline. Pre-marital sex, cohabitation, trial marriage, dating, drug addiction, domestic violence, dowry, migration, etc., are on the rise in Indian cities and they badly affect the life of the young people in the Church and their choice of marriage. The print, electronic and the cyber media reflect and legitimize family diversity and present some of the new forms as the ideal.

Today, each family must be aware of the negative and destabilizing influence of the world on the individual and the society. None of the members of the Church can run away from this world and remain unaffected by the developments in the society. They need to exercise proper discernment and use their freedom with responsibility. This is the challenge of the Catholic families in India today. However, families do not have to be at the mercy of the changing circumstances but need to make deliberate attempts to strengthen the positive elements in the age-old practices, refining them in the light of the modern lessons that life teaches in order to build up healthy families where individuals can be born, brought up and live with integrity.

CHALLENGES OF CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES

In the Year of Youth and in the Context of *Chavarul*

Benny Joseph Mukalel CMI

Abstract: The challenges of children, youth and families, seen in the context of the Year of Youth and in the light of *Chavarul*, a holy legacy that Chavara has left for his people, which presents a vision of the family, which surpasses its historical context, are great. Drawing inspiration from the procedural methodology of the Synod on the Family, the challenges made by the *Chavarul* are seen in the light of *Amoris Laetitia*; oneself and the society are judged in the light of the Word and religious institutions act in the path of mercy in order to become centres of family ministry.

Keywords: Religious, spirituality, family, youth, children, ministry, *Chavarul*, Chavara, liberation theology, divorce, pornography, consumerism, poverty, alcoholism, drug, addiction, gender discrimination, violence, patriarchal society, youth, unity, co-existence, justice, children, conscience, altruism, egotism, social networks, cyber world, sexual promiscuity, homosexuality, procreation, homosexuals, digital world, digital continent, vocation, fidelity, parenting, counsellors, value education, religious education, sex education.

1. Introduction

Yuval Noah Harari is a historian-author with two recently published, much discussed books titled *Sapiens: A Brief History of Human Kind* and *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*. In the first book, he speaks about three revolutions through which man evolved into the present stage. (1) The Cognitive Revolution (evolution of imagination starting from 70000 BC), (2) The Agricultural Revolution (development of agriculture starting from 10000 BC), and (3) Scientific Revolution (emergence of objective science from 1500 AD). The first two, humans have already been through, while the third one is on. In the first stage,

human beings were close cousins of others in the animal kingdom. Humans became markedly superior to them when distinctive cognitive capacity developed in them. This capacity helped them to believe in things existing purely in imagination. Today we live in a phase of our evolution where the imagined realities like nations, corporations, etc. are more real than the objective realities like rivers, trees and lions.

In his second book, *Homo Deus* Harari predicts that the rapid progress in information technology will usher in the next phase of human evolution, namely, the advent of Homo Deus. Collection and networking of information data will decide the values and power in this stage. In the first three stages Homo Sapiens conquered and controlled the world but in Homo Deus, Homo Sapiens will lose control through the advancement of technology. Technology will perform in far more superior fashion all the functions that humans perform now. For example, super computers will also be super doctors who can scan not only our body but also our mind. With this, new threshold of developments will be crossed, and goals like immortality will be achieved. Harari predicts that once technology is able to re-engineer human minds, it will become a monster and we will have created a world where we will have no place. It is like Dan Brown's super intelligence called Winston in his new novel *Origin*, which dictates and controls human intelligence and by 2050 there will be no more humans but a superior creature, which will take hold of the world.

We will have to wait and see what turn our technological progress will take in the years to come. However, it is deeply worrying to see that there are very dangerous possibilities open. We are in a world where technology is taking dominance in all walks of life, all aspects of life. This can happen to the religious life too; or it has already started to show its symptoms. It happens when our priorities are shifted. If the shifting of priorities has happened, it can very well override the original priorities for which the Congregation came into existence. It is in this world and against the background of our failure that we try to make our existence as religious and our spirituality relevant to meet and respond to the challenges faced by family, youth and children.

Family is the basic unit of the society and the Church. The Church considers family as the 'domestic church.' Hence the vocation and mission of the family, and ministry to the family, children and youth are important concerns of the Church.

The Church and society as a whole are becoming more profoundly aware of the challenges faced by the families, children and youth. The Church has been responding to these challenges, especially in the last few decades. The Synods of 2014 and 2015 on Family and the subsequent Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, and the synod of 2018 on "Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment," are the latest examples. This also demands us to make a critical evaluation of our response as religious communities to the challenges faced by families, children and youth, and to make a renewed commitment in our ministry.

One of the four thrusts identified by the 37th CMI General Synaxis is: *Renewal of Families after the Model of St. Chavara*. This is because St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara was a champion of families and his last testament to his parish community is a great treatise for effective family life. The CMI Prior General in his promulgation letter of GS 37 encourages the members to 'enhance our pastoral acumen' to address the 'genuine concerns of the families' (Promulgation Letter Acts of 37th CMI General Synaxis, p. 10). In the vision statement of GS 37 we find an invitation to reorient our pastoral programs to strengthen the youth and children (GS 37, Vision Statement, no. 64).

Chavarul, though written 150 years ago, presents a vision of the family, which surpasses its historical context. It is a source of inspiration for ministry today. Moreover, as it is a 'Testament' of a loving father, it demands a special concern and commitment from us in the care of families, youth and children. It contains 40 guidelines for the family and the last 16 of them especially pertain to the formation of children and youth. It is a holy legacy that Chavara has left for his people. He instructed his people: "This script will not perish even when I am dead and gone... Let this be a mark of the fact that you are my successors... On the first Saturday of every month, all of you shall come together and read it; this shall be a commemoration of my death anniversary; there is nothing else you need to do to remember me." These words of our St. Chavara show how vitally he considered this testament. He knew that the content of this testament would surpass any age, any circumstance and any situation. It will become an elixir of life.

Showing its importance to modern families, Subhash Chandra, the literary critic says: "I am not sure whether among the miracles that were reported to Rome in the process of making Blessed Chavara a Saint this little document was there or not. Most probably not as all the other miracles were mainly medical in character. However, it is

Chavarul like innumerable surprises that distinguish St. Chavara different from other saints.

2. Methodology

During the Synod on the Family, the procedural methodology followed was, “see-judge-act.” It was the same methodology that was adopted by the liberation theologians earlier. This is also very much Pope Francis’ methodology found in most of his teachings. In *seeing*, one understands the reality, the challenges, or ‘reads the signs of the times.’ To understand what is happening around us, information from social sciences, different reports, survey results, statistical analysis, etc. are helpful. The act of seeing leads us to the act of *judging*. What is seen need not become the norm. We have to evaluate them in light of the Word; or, we have to judge ‘looking to Jesus’. *Action* is our response to the seen and judged reality today. The action can be different from the past, since the reality or the context has changed. Although we keep the ideal in our sight, we have to also realize that the ideal may not be realized in its fullness in the given context. This does not mean that we have to compromise the ideal, but that we accept human limitation with mercy.

3. Seeing the Challenges in the light of *Amoris Laetitia* and *Chavarul*

The current challenges faced by families, children and youth according to Synodal document *Amoris Laetitia*¹ are individualism with distorted notions of freedom, dwindling of faith seen in separation and divorce in marriage, pornography especially seen in the misuse of the internet, addiction to social network which impedes affective immaturity, consumerism versus poverty. alcoholism, drug addiction, gender discrimination, violence on women which is seen in the commercialization of the female body, decline in the number of children, sexual exploitation of children (‘a scandalous and perverse reality of today’) and families with disabled/differently abled children, where also the elderly are lonely and abandoned.

The Vision Statement of GS 37, no. 64 notes: “The rising atrocities against women, gang rapes, trafficking of women and children, marital breakups and domestic violence, increasing number of divorces, etc., are symptoms of erosion of values in Christian families and in the larger society.” Similarly, many studies and reports indicate that in recent decades, especially from mid-1990s, there is a radical

¹Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, §§31-57.

change in the attitude, lifestyle and value perception regarding family and sexuality. The preparatory document for the upcoming Synod identifies the following challenges faced by the youth today, such as unemployment, economic inequality, gender inequality, vocational discernment and digital world.

We are invited to read the *Chavarul* in the context of the various challenges that the families, youth and children are facing today. In order to see the reality of our world today in the light of *Chavarul*, first we need to read it in the light of the socio-cultural background in which it was written. *Chavarul* was written in a society which had the following socio-cultural and political features:

- Patriarchal society dominated and supported by conventions and traditions
- A period that ushered in a lot of renewal and restorations in many socio-cultural and political areas.
- Anxiety and uncertainty prevailed in moral and religious beliefs and practices.
- When *Chavarul* speaks about the need of love, humanity, peaceful co-existence, hard work, helping others, readiness to forgive and ask for forgiveness, fight for justice, fear of God, reading good books and spiritual books, we come to know what were the ills and evils that were present in the society.
- *Chavarul* depicts a society where though people are related by blood, there were deficiencies of love; though people lived as members in the family, there were shortage of understanding between people. These created split leading to in-fights, court cases, etc.
- *Chavarul* points to the prevalence of a tendency towards pompous, extravagant, idle and luxurious life and lack of openness and unjust behaviour.
- *Chavarul* shows tendency towards profanity and lack of religiosity among the youth.

It is in this background that St. Chavara designs this testament to bring back love, unity, peaceful co-existence and justice. It asks in that era to respect the freedom of youth and their freedom to choose any walk of life. He advises the parents to be careful about the tendency among children and youth to tell lies. 'Beware and be alert' are the three watchwords with which *Chavarul* admonishes the parents about training their children.

We need to read *Chavarul* with today's society in mind.

- We live in a society where families are broken and children are not adequately cared for.
- Today the society is guided by special philosophies encouraged by globalization, individualism, dangerous egoism and consumerism. These things have greatly influenced and damaged our children and youth.
- Generally, one's words do correlate with one's actions; only it seems to do so. The general expectation is that one should look good and no reference is to be made to one's conscience.
- Today, cleverness consists in taking advantage from the labour of others. Today's real estate business techniques, marketing techniques and other instant profit yielding business techniques teach our children and youth a life style that encourages this cleverness.
- Love today is an opium that kills your will to struggle against the odds. Hatred is encouraged as it brings out the best from you to thrive at any cost.
- The leading principle today is 'me and myself'. Do not be too close to anybody; not even to your parents and if at all you are close to anybody that should be to your advantage; make a relationship only if it profits you.
- Love, mercy and sympathy are taken as illusions. These values make you look weak. Love has degenerated to lust. Altruism has given way to egotism.
- Things are more important than persons. Persons are important if they satisfy your needs.
- Owner's pride is neighbour's envy. Shut yourself from others so that the other will not disturb your free world. In a selfie culture, we do not want others and we easily disown others and others' needs.
- Your strength lies in fighting and not in giving in. The society is guided by greed and gluttony.
- Extravagance and pompous life is to be lived at any cost, even with money taken on a loan. *A Family Meditates on the Railway Track* by U. K. Kumaran beautifully portrays today's attitude very well.² It is

²The story is of a family sitting on a railway track to commit suicide. Several trains pass by but they do not get into the track. The youngest one in the group asks his father: "Are we not here to commit suicide? Then why don't we do it when the trains come?" The father replies: "The trains that have

what poet Sylvia Plath means when she says 'Dying is an art and I do it exceptionally well.'

- Today's society is marked by anxiety and uncertainty. There is wide spread uncertainty and exploitation in job. The refugees and migrants are on the rise.
- Education today does not make people open, humble and human oriented. Albert Einstein's formula is re-written today. $E=MC^2$ is Education = money, career and chair. Education encourages cut throat competition and this has led children and youth to adopt a lot of illegal means to thrive in examinations. Malpractices in schools, colleges and university exams are very rampant and are on the rise. Education leads children into the battle fields of school and colleges and the motto is 'win at any cost'.
- Educational institutions encourage competence and excellence and they have replaced human values. Excellence has replaced love and co-existence. Live and let live now is live and let not the other live.
- Social networks like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, etc., have created an intoxicating world for our youth and children.
- Cyber world has become the world of the youth. This has brought in a lot of diseases especially related to sexual promiscuity.
- A survey conducted on Sex in Marriage by *India Today* in 2007 made the following findings: Those who watch porn with their spouse are 39%, 79% use contraceptives, 18% have had extra-marital affair, 23% of working women have affairs with their colleagues.³
- According to a report, 11,667 cases of divorce were filed in Mumbai in 2014.
- The honourable Supreme Court has legalized homosexuality.
- According to National Crime Records Bureau, 338,954 crimes were committed against women in one year.
- Maharashtra topped the list in crimes against children with 27500 pending cases under POCSO Act in 2015. Around 17300 cases were registered under POCSO from 2017 to February 2018.⁴

4. Judging in the Light of the Word

In the *Chavarul*, Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara presents a beautiful vision of family based on the biblical vision. "A good Christian Family

gone so far are passenger trains and goods trains. We are waiting for the 'Rajdhani Express' to come. If we are dying, die imperially, like an emperor."

³*India Today*, 30 October - 5 November 2007, 52-98.

⁴*Times of India*, 14 February 2018.

is the image of heaven, where members live together by the bond of blood and affection, duly respecting and obeying the parents, walking peacefully before God and people, seeking eternal salvation according to each one's proper state of life." According to Pope Francis, "The triune God is a communion of love, and the family is its living reflection" (*Amoris Laetitia* 11).

It is amazing that almost a century before the Second Vatican Council, which marks a paradigm shift in the theology of marriage, St. Chavara presented family as an image of heaven, a place of salvation. Love is the uniting factor and basis of the life together in the family. Hence, the concluding statement of GS 37 underscores: "Concern for and commitment to the renewal of family that is clearly visible in the life and mission of Blessed Chavara and articulated in his *Chavarul* inspire us to meaningfully invest CMI resources - personnel and institutions - for the renewal of modern families... The CMI special thrust for family renewal after the model of "*trittoa kudumbam*" and "*thiru kudumbam*" (Trinitarian Family and Holy Family) idealized by St. Chavara, should offer various means for their support and uplift through effective programmes ... develop these families into strongly united covenantal families (*udampadi kudumbam*)."

Based on the biblical vision, the Christian tradition teaches that marriage is a sacrament, symbolic of the relationship between Christ and the Church. Marriage is a life of love. Real love in marriage should be mutual, reciprocal and faithful. It demands respect for the partner and recognizes the equality of the partner. This presupposes a relationship based on justice. This is the quality of love expected both from the husband and wife. Procreation should not be seen in terms of a biological reproduction alone, but has to be understood in the context of the relationship, as integral to the relational meaning of marriage. It is the relationship of the couple that gives procreation a human significance. The child is the fruit of the relationship rooted in love of the couple. Catholic sexual and family ethics have been criticised as having a negative approach towards the goodness of sexuality. Sexual pleasure has to be seen in the context of the relationship between the couple. It is their relationship that leads them to sexual fulfilment, and in return their relationship is strengthened by the experience of pleasure. What Pope Francis says about the erotic dimension of sexuality, sexual desire and conjugal sexual pleasure is noteworthy: "In no way, then, can we consider the erotic dimension of love simply as a permissible evil or a burden to be tolerated for the

good of the family. Rather, it must be seen as gift from God that enriches the relationship of the spouses."⁵

Although the Catholic Church still considers only heterosexual marriage as valid, we cannot ignore any more the arguments which support homosexual unions. Pope Francis' much discussed question, "Who am I to judge?" may be remembered in this context. Many countries have legalized gay marriages. The honourable Supreme Court of India has decriminalized homosexual unions. When homosexuality was decriminalized, initially by the Delhi High Court, the Catholic Church in India opposed it vehemently. However, a couple of years later, Oswald Cardinal Gracias made it clear that though the Catholic Church is opposed to the legalization of gay marriage, it does not consider homosexuals as criminals.⁶ The Church recently came up with its explanation:

That homosexuality is now not a crime in civil law does not mean that homosexual acts or behaviour are morally acceptable or justified. What is legal is not equal to moral acceptability. The Catholic Church holds that homosexual behaviour is morally unacceptable because it violates the purpose of human sexuality which is procreation and union of love fulfilled in the loving union of man and woman in marriage. This is the moral stand of the Catholic Church. At the same time Church also makes a distinction between homosexuality as an orientation for which one cannot be blamed because of early psychogenetic origin or birth and homosexuality acquired by deliberate choice and practice. While the Church makes it clear that homosexual acts are objectively wrong and morally unacceptable, homosexuality as an orientation is not a sign of perversion but as the expression of a condition, an inversion in a psychological sense. It is considered more a medical or pathological consonant with modern studies. The church respects the dignity and human right of the homosexuals. They must be treated with understanding and mercy.⁷

⁵Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, §152. Already from Pius XII's "Address to Midwives" (29 October 1951) onward, we find a more positive approach to sexual pleasure in the official documents of the Church.

⁶"Cardinal Gracias Says: 'Gay People Are Not Criminals,'" *Vatican Insider World News*, 11/12/2013, <http://www.lastampa.it/2013/12/11/Vatican-insider/eng/world-news/cardinal-gracias-says-gay-people-are-not-criminals-1M73KjWDvMi9BljfN0P3hL/pagina.html>

⁷Stephen Fernandes, Secretary CBCI.

Similarly, pre-marital sex and cohabitation are receiving wider acceptance in the society. There was a 2010 Supreme Court ruling that pre-marital sex and cohabitation are not offences.⁸ Although no definite teaching is given, *Amoris Laetitia* takes a different stand from the traditional position of the Church regarding cohabitation. A categorical rejection and condemnation of cohabitation cannot be found; instead, the document points out that all situations of cohabitation cannot be judged in the same way, that there are various reasons for cohabitation including 'cultural and contingent situations.' It also calls for the application of the 'Law of Gradualness' in such cases.

The Preparatory document for the Synod on Young People affirms the Church's trust in the youth, and the need of guiding them in their vocational discernment. In the changed cultural context of the world, they are facing many challenges and uncertainties. They need reference points not only among adults, but also among themselves. They also need opportunities to develop their skills and work together. The youth needs guidance in making vocational discernment, or fundamental choices in their life. The document points out: "In pastoral activity, young people are not objects but agents." The changed context demands more creative ways of working with the youth. One of such new areas is the digital world.

5. Acting in the Path of Mercy

In order to act in a Christian way, we need to choose a path of mercy. The Church has made a significant investment in the youth. The CMI Congregation spends about 68% of its energy and health for youth and children in its schools, colleges and facilities of formation. However, it is very surprising and sad to note that in our apostolate and secretariat system this has not gained the importance it needs to get. In 1995, we instituted a youth commission but it died out in 1996 due to lack of nutrition. When the church at large is spending time for family, youth and children, we need to re-orient ourselves to the ministry of children and youth. We need to walk with them and understand their language, talk to them as Jesus and St. Chavara talked to them through stories, change their life style and turn them around creatively. We need to train them to be sensitive and responsible citizens.

⁸"Live-in Relationship, Pre-Marital Sex Not an Offence: SC," *The Times of India*, 23 March 2010, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Live-in-relationship-pre-marital-sex-not-an-offence-SC/articleshow/5716545.cms>

Today, the youth prefers to be partners and not just a force who can be forced into discipline. We need to think of youth training camps in this direction. The Synod of 2018 has this one aspect of the youth clearly specified: "To *accompany* young people on their way of life towards maturity so that, through a process of discernment, they can *discover* their life project and realize it with joy, opening the encounter with God and with man, and actively *participating* in the building up of the Church and society." The Synod of 2018 clearly highlights the importance of (i) *accompaniment* (which means understanding their language and world, (ii) Helping to *discover* their project of life (which means to allow them to follow what they want to achieve in life and help them to realize it) and (iii) actively *encouraging* them to participate in Church and society building (which means they need to be involved in the decision making process).

We need to think of a pedagogy which encourages nurturing human values like openness to others, love and justice rather than cut throat competition, bring back the youth who are caught in the 8th continent - digital continent - by thickening the line that separates morality from immorality. Our youth and children will not be given a spirituality that fosters fanaticism and a religion based on rubrics. Let us give them a spirituality of relationship - relationship with God and people.

In order to act in the case of sexual perversity and broken marriages, we have to update ourselves with the developments in the Catholic vision of the family, marriage and sexuality, the challenges and problems today and the response of the Church to those challenges and problems. Careful study of the Church documents is a must.

Personal involvement in the family ministry is important. However, what we can do will be much limited if we try to do everything by ourselves. We need to involve others, collaborate with others, providing our vision and support. We need to do much in this regard. Other religious congregations, organizations, lay people, experts in counselling, youth ministry, etc., are be involved in our ministry to the family. The role of women religious and lay women is very important since they have better access to families.

Pope Francis considers mercy to be central to the Church's ministry to the family. On the one hand, it is an invitation to the Christian families to value the gift of marriage, love, generosity and fidelity. On the other hand, it demands the Church to be near to families which lack peace and joy, strengthen the families by helping them appreciate

their vocation, their mutual love and fidelity, have a pastoral programme to help families in crisis.

6. Institutions as Centres of Family Ministry

As a practical step, we start opening our facilities like our schools and institutions for family counselling so that families around our institutions and schools can approach us for help and guidance. Seminars and talks on family, challenges to family, parenting, etc., can be arranged in our institutions. Talks for parents can be arranged in our schools. Besides, the service of Family Counsellors can be made available in our schools for parents who would like to make use of such facilities. The focus can be parenting skills and the challenges that parents face, but it can also include counselling for couples.

We have to ensure that Redress Committees are formed in schools and institutions, so that the rights of the employees and students are protected. Qualified persons should be part of such committees. Value Education and Religious Education classes in our schools have to be given by teachers who have specialization in these fields.

A well-integrated Sex Education Programme is an urgent need. Biological and social sciences should have their role in sex education, but they cannot be considered as the most important sources for interpreting the meaning/value, because our sexuality is not merely physical, but is profoundly psychological, social and deeply spiritual. Sex education that focuses only on “don’ts” will be rejected and will lead to antagonistic attitudes to Church’s teaching. Besides addressing the various issues that teenagers and the youth face, evaluation of the media presentation of sexuality should be an integral part of sex education. It should present a balanced view of sexuality, especially in the midst of the ideologies that lead to disintegration. Moreover, vocational discernment, Christian vision of family, celibacy, healthy man-woman relationship, etc. should be included in the Sex Education Programme. Healthy use of social networking should be taught to the children and youth.

7. Conclusion

Family is the basic unit of the Church and society. It should never become an isolated entity. Due to the increase in the number of nuclear families, urbanization and tendencies of individualism in the culture, it is possible that the families become closed in themselves. However, the *Chavarul* vision of the family stipulates that family has to be rooted in charity, justice, etc., and has to be integrally connected to the parish

community. There are successful family networks like *Couples for Christ*, *Equip Notre Dame*, *Worldwide Marriage Encounter*, *Christian Family Movement*, etc., with which we can collaborate and further, initiate some similar movement.

The youth are not merely objects or recipients of pastoral activity, but they are agents. Many of them want active involvement in the ministry of the Church. They can contribute a lot in educating children and teenagers. Besides, many young people are taking initiatives in forming small groups and bigger organizations. We need to collaborate with them, support and encourage them, and thus accompany them.

Finally, what St. Chavara has said to the parents through the Chavarul is applicable to every CMI who is entrusted with the care and training of children, youth and families: "Children are sacred treasures entrusted to you by God Almighty... If anyone of the children were to be lost in hell due to the fault of the parents, what a serious hindrance will it be for their salvation."

THE CHAVARUL OF CHAVARA **A Prophetic Voice for Christian Family**

Cinderella Sequeira

Abstract: *Chavarul* is a prophetic voice for Christian family in the modern world. He stands as an outstanding apostle to a land plagued with various evils to which he brought the message of faith and social order. He believed that family was the source of all morality and spirituality and his own spirituality was rooted in his experience of the Holy Family at home. The need of the hour is to resort to the plan of God for families because a family is a community of a few people joined together in blood relation and bound together by a bond of love, which makes it the fertile ground for individuals to realize their full potential for the glory of God and the good of the neighbours. *Chavarul* instructs the families on devotion to the Lord, unity in the family and peace with neighbours, which include formation of faith, conscience, intellect and discipline.

Keywords: Chavara, caste system, slavery, illiteracy, female degradation, spirituality, Holy Family, formation, faith, conscience, *Chavarul*, discipline, parents, abortion, Trinity, heaven, salvation, peace, order, mission, worship, hospitality, justice, spiritual instructions, devotion, modesty, chastity, social instructions, psychological instructions, litigations, wealth, material instructions, personal property, apostolate, faith, confession, conscience, truth, justice, vanity, intellectual formation, Christian morality.

1. Introduction

On the occasion of the release of a commemorative postal stamp in honour of Kuriakose Elias Chavara by R. Venkataraman, the then President of India, P. Ramachandran, the then Governor of Kerala, observed: "If the test of true faith is the extent to which it transforms the individual and the social order, we must say that Father Chavara

and the generations of the dedicated band of missionaries he animated have stood this test with eminent success."¹

Today, Father K. E. Chavara stands as an outstanding apostle of Jesus in India, which has embraced Christianity and heard the radical message of Christ. To a land plagued with the caste system, slavery, illiteracy, female degradation, Chavara brought the message of true faith and social order.

2. Chavara, a Prophetic Voice

"Realizing that his life was getting shorter, Chavara prepared an instruction manual for families in 1868, in the form of an epistle to the families of his own parish, as a 'Testament of an Ideal Parent.'² Chavara believed that family was the source of all morality and spirituality and was personally devoted to the Holy Family. "From the childhood experience in his own home and from his impeccable devotion towards the Holy Family he visualized the family as an image of heaven, an abode of affection, peace, charity and order on earth."³

Chavara's spirituality was rooted in his experience of the Holy Family within his home. Today, the sanctity of the family has become a thing of the past. Pope John Paul II, in the apostolic exhortation *On the Role of the Family in the Modern World (Familiaris Consortio)*, observes:

At a moment of history in which the family is the object of numerous forces that seek to destroy it or in some way to deform it, and aware that the well-being of society and her own good are intimately tied to the good of the family, the Church perceives in a more urgent and compelling way her mission of proclaiming to all people the plan of God for marriage and the family, ensuring their full vitality and human and Christian development, and thus contributing to the renewal of society and of the People of God.⁴

¹P. Ramachandran, "Blessed Chavara: A Man of Deep Vision," *Herald of the East* 1, 2 (October 1991), 45-46, 45.

²Panthaplackal, "The Ecclesial Dimension," 10 [online], 2014. See, http://www.chavarasecretariat.info/image.php?id=4&action=view&table=articles_photo&id_name=id; access 24/07/2016.

³Panthaplackal, "The Ecclesial Dimension," 9 [online].

⁴Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, # 20: *Apostolic Exhortation*, 1981. See, also http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio_en.html; access 24/07/2016.

The Church recognizes the fact that the very foundation of Christian ethics is being endangered in toppling the Christian family. The wreckage of the traditional family which consisted of both the parents and children is now radicalized and re-defined to include single-parent family, gay/lesbian family, divorced and separated families, families that abandon aged parents, families that resort to abortion, honour killing and dowry that destroy the sanctity of the concept of family and family life.

2.1. The Church and the Testament

The need of the hour is to resort to 'the plan of God' for a family. The plan of God for a family is completely actualized in the birth of an individual into a family. This divine ordination leads us to participate in our Christian vocation of being in love with our family. The plan of God for a family therefore, as explained by Father Chavara, is "to be bound in love"⁵ in order to realize their full vitality. The plan of God for a Christian family is to love, live and walk in the light of Christ. In this way a Christian is oriented to become Christ in the world. According to Pope John Paul II, a family directs a society to the extent that the family environment is a fertile ground for individuals to nurture their creative energies and realize their full potential for the glorification of God and the good of their neighbours.

The Church therefore, immerses herself into the prophetic process of *aggiornamento*, the updating of the Church, which was initiated way back in time by Chavara who with insight and foresight defined an ideal family in his work *A Testament of a Good Father*. The work "is a well-meditated practical theology on family with spiritual, moral, psychological and sociological characteristics, very valid even for today."⁶ Chavara describes the essence of the family in the following words:

A family is a community of a few people joined together in blood relation and bound together by a bond of love, where the members exhibit mutual respect and practice obedience to parents and walk in peace before the Lord and the people, and each one, according to his proper state of life seeks to attain eternal salvation and lives peacefully.⁷

⁵Chavara, *A Testament of a Good Father*, 102.

⁶Panthaplackal, "The Ecclesial Dimension," 10 [online].

⁷Chavara, *A Testament of a Good Father*, 102.

Recognizing the divinely ordained nature of the family, Chavara explains the “blood relation” as its life-giving element. It involves not merely living together under the same roof, rather bringing down the walls of inflexibilities between family members and establishing the bond of love. He clearly states that the concept of family involves “mutual respect and practice of obedience to parents” and that these define a family. The Church realizes the present society’s orientation of believing that it is almost impossible to live with a single individual for one’s entire life. In the world today, the lack of model families has made a Holy Family almost incomprehensible. Respect is a favour and obedience is an obstacle for many in the new generation. In the face of such bleak observations, one must be directed by Chavara towards the cause of these challenging demands, i.e., “to walk in peace before the Lord and the people.”

Peace as the family environment is unique to Chavara’s concept of family. Peace today, is often a monomania. People seek peace for its own sake. Chavara exhorts us to be in the peace of the Lord. The need is to seek peace within the family and not outside it. Each individual needs to seek one’s own peace in relationship with God and with the members of one’s family. That peace would lead one to eternal peace and eternal salvation. As John Paul II explains, “every family is called by the God of peace to have the joyous and renewing experience of “reconciliation,” that is, communion re-established, unity restored.”⁸

2.2. Christian Family as God’s Family

Chavara’s definition of family leads us to the ultimate plan of God, i.e., eternal peace. A beautiful way of looking at Chavara’s perspective on family is participation of human families in the family of God, which is the Trinity bound together in love in heaven.⁹ And as in the Trinity of persons, they (the members of the family) fulfil their mission by living together and respecting each other and ensuring their salvation. It is in this sense that a Christian family is an image of heaven, which is the family of God on earth.¹⁰ Making each family as God’s family on earth is the task of the Church, which invites us to renew our commitment to Christian faith. This dream of the Church was Chavara’s foundational teaching. The Christian family as an image of heaven is a call to each family to attain the Lord’s peace which makes a community peaceful.

⁸Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, §20.

⁹Panthaplackal, “The Ecclesial Dimension,” 10.

¹⁰Panthaplackal, “The Ecclesial Dimension,” 10.

When a society finds peace, then a nation is at peace and so is the world.

It would be a limitation on Chavara's definition of family to circumscribe it to the circle of a biological family. He points to the vocation of a Christian family to care for those who are not born into a family. A family is not limited to one's blood relations but extended to those bound together in the Lord sharing the same image and likeness of God. As a society, we need to follow Chavara's definition of a family, i.e., living in mutual respect and practicing obedience to the law for the sake of peace and order in society. In *A Testament of a Good Father*, Chavara points to the role of a family for a Christian way of life and chalks out necessary guidelines relevant for daily living in order to establish peace and order.

3. Understanding the Testament

The Testament covers all aspects of family life from birth to death. Chavara also warns about the possible dangers when affection, peace, justice, charity and order are not maintained in the family.¹¹ It would not be an exaggeration to say that the following excerpt from The Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* 19) is in fact a summary of Chavara's *A Testament of a Good Father*:

The mission of being the primary vital cell of society has been given to the family by God himself. The mission will be accomplished if the family, by mutual affection of its members and by family prayer, presents itself as domestic sanctuary of the Church; if the whole family takes part in the Church's liturgical worship; if, finally, it offers active hospitality, and practices justice and other good works for the benefit of all its brothers suffering from want.¹²

3.1. Instructions to the Families

The Testament of Chavara, which contains the rules set by him, can be divided into two sections. The first section consists of twenty four guidelines for an ideal family life and the second section consists of

¹¹Panthaplackal, "The Ecclesial Dimension," 10.

¹²Pope John Paul II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, §11. See English translation "The Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People" in Vatican II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents, trans. J. Rodgers and ed. A. Flannery, 676-714. Mumbai: St. Pauls, 1975.

sixteen rules on parent-child relationship.¹³ The twenty-four guidelines in the first set of rules can be divided into the following four important groups based on the subject matter that is being dealt with:

3.1.1. Spiritual Instructions: Devotion to the Lord

- To observe Sunday as the Lord's day.
- The greatest good, piety and fear of God.
- Practice modesty and chastity.
- The days of your life that do not see some noble action done, may be counted as deleted from your life.
- In all suffering surrender yourself completely to God.
- Promote the reading of spiritual and philosophical books.
- Be regular in the observance of time allotted for family prayer and do not compromise with your spiritual duties.

3.1.2. Social Instructions: Unity in the Family and Peace with Neighbours

- Be charitable, forgiving and self-sacrificing.
- Love the God-fearing.

3.1.3. Psychological Instructions: Conscious Distancing from Evil

- Avoid court litigations.
- Avoid borrowing money except in dire circumstances.
- Hypocrisy of display of wealth.
- Do not befriend others for the sake of their riches; rather seek genuine friendship.
- Do not seek to interfere in concerns of other people.
- Avoid gossip.
- Profligacy and stinginess are evil.
- Do not wish to make many friends. Out of the thousands choose just one.

3.1.4. Material Instructions: Management of Personal Property

- Do not spend for festivities beyond one's capacity.

¹³"The Family Vision of Bl. Chavara" [online], 2014. See also <http://www.darsanawardha.org/Site%20Full/Useful%20Materials/Articles/On%20family%20vision%20of%20chavara.pdf>; access 24/07/2016.

- Endeavour to repair old things rather than buy new ones. A home is rich not because of its numerous possessions, but in the excellence of the few things owned.
- Do manual work as far as is permitted by your social status and do not be idle. Idleness leads to the habit of drinking.
- Engage in trade with great care and justice and do not seek to amass wealth through unjust means.
- Do not house stolen property and do not seek riches through evil means.
- Do not withhold just wages and do not insult the poor.
- One's employees should be few in number and God-fearing.

These four aspects unite the dimensions of human personality. Chavara had a comprehensive understanding of human life. He was able to envision an ideal family and through these means explore various strategies to attain God's plan of eternal peace. He delineates the duties of parents in the upbringing of their children. It is important to take note of the fact that the duties listed by Chavara is in fact an elaboration of the duties of families as stated in The Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*) which is as follows:

To give clear proof in their own lives of the indissolubility and the holiness of the marriage bond; to assert with vigour the right and duty of parents and guardians to give their children a Christian upbringing; to defend the dignity and legitimate autonomy of the family; this has always been the duty of married persons; today, however it has become the most important aspect of their apostolate.

3.2. Instructions on Ideal Upbringing of Children

The sixteen rules stated by Chavara for the ideal upbringing of children can be understood by dividing them into the following four groups:

3.2.1. Planting the Seeds of Faith

- Teach children to devoutly recite the name of Jesus as soon as they begin to talk.
- Teach children to pray, worship God and venerate the sacred images.
- At the age of eight they should be taught all about confession and parents should facilitate their first confession.

- They should be taught especially to be devout to our Mother (Blessed Virgin Mary).

3.2.2. Formation of Conscience

- If parents do not love and respect each other, the children cannot be expected to love and respect them.
- Do not teach the children to tell lies and to use cunning means under the excuse that this is the way of the world.
- Induce children to love truth and justice.
- Do not promote vanity.
- Give importance to good character and conduct.

3.2.3. Intellectual Formation

- As soon as the children come of age of reason they must be sent to school.
- When children are old enough they should be permitted to follow their own vocation according to their interests.

3.2.4. Discipline of Children

- Children should always be clothed.
- Children should not sleep in the same room with their parents and boys and girls should sleep in separate rooms.
- Children should play within the sight of their parents and should not be left alone even with relatives.
- Parents should be neither too lax nor scrupulous in disciplining children.
- Let sons live in separate establishments to avoid quarrels.

4. Conclusion

The unique contribution of Chavara to harness the faith of the Christian faithful of his time is remarkable. With Christ as the foundation of Christian morality, Chavara endeavoured to create a society in which each individual is trained to listen to the voice of God and obey it. His teachings help us to lead a life free from the plague of subjectivism and relativism and not to make compromises on Christian faith.

LEADERSHIP AND COLLABORATIVE MINISTRY

Mathew Maniampra CMI

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.

PASTORAL MIND OF CHAVARA In the Light of the Apostolic Fathers

Sophy Rose CMC

Abstract: Sophy Rose attempts in this study to get closer to Chavara and see how his pastoral mind works as he makes various contributions to the Church. The author is making this study in the light of the contributions made by the Apostolic Fathers. Going through the writings of Chavara, she explores the pastoral and eschatological character of his literature, his discussions on the doctrine of baptism and efficacy of good works for salvation. She makes a detailed study of the Christology of Chavara to see how a picture of Christ is drawn as both divine and human, the titles of Christ and how he is seen both as father and mother. Finally, she reflects on how, like the Apologetic Fathers, Chavara defended and protected the unity of the Church.

Keywords: Church, Fathers of the Church, Doctors of the Church, antiquity, sanctity, orthodoxy, theologians, bishop, Mystical Body, *Magisterium*, poor, Syro-Malabar Church, doctrines, patrology, theology, dogma, Holy Father, *Chavarul*, Vicar General, Roccas, excommunication, schism, eschatology, parousia, *Qurbana*, baptism, Clement of Rome, salvation, *charity*, sick, aged, parishioners, Christology, Scripture, Trinity, experience, Rite, Spirit, Baccinelli, missionaries, liturgy, tradition, administration, death, Malabar, Coonan Cross, *Propaganda Fide*, *Padroado*, Chaldean, Bagdad, Pius IX, jurisdiction.

1. Introduction

In the Catholic Church, there are officially recognized and declared "Fathers of the Church" and "Doctors of the Church." To belong to any one of these categories, a person should fulfil certain criteria. The Fathers of the Church fulfil the requirements of antiquity, sanctity, orthodoxy and ecclesiastical approval, whereas, the Doctors of the Church fulfil the conditions of sanctity, orthodoxy, intellectual contributions to the understanding of faith and ecclesiastical approval. Among these distinctive characteristics, sanctity and orthodoxy are the

most important features. In the Catholic Church, there are many canonically declared saints; but all of them are not known for their teachings as theologians. There were many renowned theologians; but all of them are not declared saints. Usually, it is a saint who complements the sanctity with eminent theology that is eligible to be considered as a doctor of the Church.

The Doctors of the Church manifest their faith in the Lord who is the fullness of God's revelation not only through their heroic and virtuous life but also through their erudite and orthodox teaching and writing on the revealed and incarnated Word and the Church, his Mystical Body. Moreover, their teachings should be authentic, edifying and enriching to the faithful of all times and places as well as supportive to the *Magisterium*. In brief, they must be faithful and outstanding witnesses to the sources of faith – the Holy Scripture and the Holy Tradition – through their life, writing and teaching. It is in this light that we ask if Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara of the Syro-Malabar Church could be considered such a theologian.¹ This study is a preliminary attempt to answer this question.

In order to understand the relevance of the writings of Chavara in the light of the doctrines inherent in them, in the following pages, we make a survey of these writings in the backdrop of the writings of the Early Fathers of the Church. In this study, we focus is the teachings of the Apostolic Fathers who lived immediately after the time of the apostles, i.e., the first and second centuries AD.

According to J. Quasten, an expert in Patrology, the Apostolic Fathers do not aim at a scientific exposition of the Christian faith; their writings contain occasional utterances rather than doctrinal definitions. This is all the more true with regard to Chavara's writings. He didn't write systematic and scientific treatises in view of teaching theology and imparting doctrines. But his writings have theology; just as in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, we see certain authentic theological insights and doctrines in his writings.

¹See Benny Thettayil, "St. Chavara, a Father of the Eastern Church: Biblical and Theological Perspectives," *Herald of the East* 12, 1 (2016): 3-24, who analyses the life and teachings of Chavara to see how far he could be considered a Father of the Eastern Church. However, the consideration in the present study is to see how far Chavara could be considered a Doctor of the Church.

2. Pastoral Character

According to Quasten, typical characteristic feature of all the writings of the Apostolic Fathers is their *pastoral character*.² With regard to the content and style, they are closely related to the writings of the New Testament, especially to the Epistles of the Apostles.³

Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara (1805-1871), the first canonical indigenous religious priest and founder of two religious Congregations for men and women and the Vicar General of the Syro-Malabar Church, was basically a pastor. Just as the Epistles of St. Paul and early Fathers, most of his writings were also contextual. These *Letters* are addressed to the Holy Father, Prefect of the *Propaganda Fide*, to the co-religious, spiritual sons and daughters and the faithful. He wrote as per the need of his time: To the Holy Father and to the Prefect of the *Propaganda Fide* he wrote in order to clarify the doubts in order to tackle the problems faced by the Church. To the co-religious, spiritual sons and daughters he wrote to give advice and instructions. To the faithful he wrote in order to admonish them to be firm in their faith and to be obedient to their legitimate authority.

He wrote two letters to his parishioners. (1) Testament of a Loving Father, a letter addressed to the Families, titled *Chavarul*. (2) A letter instructing the people to open a house of charity and to constitute a Confraternity of St. Joseph for Happy Death. These two long letters are personal and are addressed to the parishioners of Kainakary, which might be considered a local Church. The letters contain admonitions, instructions, practical means, etc., which have biblical, spiritual, pastoral, moral and social insights. For example, the second letter written in 1869 is a call to the people to collect alms from the people and to open the house of charity attached to their chapel, in a modest way where they can give free hospice to the poor and the destitute and to take care of all their material and spiritual needs.

In this letter, he mentions certain revealed truths as well as some traditional beliefs very vividly. He writes:

The grace of a happy death is necessary for all men... God the Father sent His only Son to the world. He lived here for thirty-three years and in the end offered his life and save mankind. The gates of heaven will be opened only to those who die in the state of grace. However holy a person be, if he loves a single sin and dies in that state, merits eternal death. However great a sinner may be, if he

²J. Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. I, Westminster: Maryland, Christian Classics, 1993, 40.

³Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. I, 40.

repents over his sins at the moment of death, like the good thief who was hanged on the right hand side of the Lord, the gates of heaven will automatically be opened to him. This is the greatest happiness a man can have. *Of all the helps given to a man, the greatest is that given to him at the moment of death. This is again the greatest act of mercy. This is also the supreme act of charity.*⁴

This letter is a very rich admonition to serve both body and soul in view of eternal life. It is saturated with pastoral insights; ultimately his concern is towards the souls and his eagerness is to save them.

When he writes a circular to the people as Vicar General in the context of Roccas schism he exhorts: "I tell you all this my dear brethren, *being desirous of your eternal salvation* and lest you fall in to the schism and incur the excommunication of the Pope and suffer the loss of your soul."⁵ It is very clear that as the pastor, his primary concern was the salvation of the souls.

3. Eschatological Character of his Writings

Another important character typical of the writings of the Apostolic Fathers is their eschatological. The second coming of Christ was considered imminent by them. Consequently, the writings of the Apostolic Fathers reveal *a deep longing for Christ*, the departed and expected Saviour, a longing which very often takes a mystical expression.

Although we do not find an idea of immediate Parousia in the writings of St. Chavara, often we come across the doctrine regarding the four destinies of human beings such as death, judgment, heaven and hell. Moreover, we find rich insights and doctrines concerning purgatory, the necessity of praying and doing charitable acts for the souls in purgatory and the insistence to practice virtue in one's life to face the last judgment peacefully. These ideas are found mainly in *Maranaveettil Padunnathinulla Pana (Dirge)* his poetic composition.

In his *letter to the parishioners* instructing them to open a charity home, he wrote very clearly the necessity of preparing for death:

There are only two things that are important: in the first place see that you don't forget at any time that you will die at the most unexpected moment, that death will creep on you like a thief and so you must remember the words of our Lord: 'watch and pray for

⁴*Complete Works of Bl. Chavara* (hereafter CWC), vol. IV, Mannanam: 1990; Letters, IX/7.

⁵CWC vol. IV, Letters IX/4.

you know not when the moment will come' and secondly, keep away from mortal sin that will engender fear of death and when you realize that you have sinned mortally, at once, through confession or perfect act of contrition seek pardon of sin. Only then should you go to sleep.⁶

Although death is a definite fact, the time is indefinite. So we must be vigilant and always be ready to encounter death. Vigilance and preparation are the two requirements that every person should cultivate in order to face death peacefully and joyfully. Here, in this letter also the thrust is the four destinies of human being: death, judgment and the reward either heaven or hell. The exhortation to pray for the departed and to offer Holy *Qurbana* for them, to give alms as reparation for their sins, etc., indicate how far the author has imbibed all the traditional belief of the Church and his pastoral mind and concern that made him convey these ideas for the good of the people.

As mentioned above, we do not find the idea of an immediate parousia in Chavara's writings as in the case of Apostolic Fathers. Nevertheless, his writings, especially, the poetic literature reveal a very deep longing for the vision of God, an unquenchable thirst, as we see in the psalmist as well as in St. Thomas the Apostle. According to Pedro Lopez Quintana, former Apostolic Nuncio of India:

It was a unique initiative of saint Chavara who had a prophetic insight to realize that the Church in India needed a confluence of her Christian patrimony with the rich and age-old heritage of the Indian spiritual traditions. The spiritual power of the Syro-Malabar Church, which can be traced to the deeply personal Jesus experience of St. Thomas, had to be blended with the spiritual classics of India with their long tradition of craving and longing for God realization. This indeed is what Chavara attempted to do.⁷

The observation of the Nuncio seems to be very relevant and is endorsed by Chavara in his *Atmanuthapam*, in which, 168 lines of Cantos 3 and its Appendix together beautifully describe mostly the incident related to the life of Christ. He is contemplating the incarnate word, the babe, through the eyes of Mary, the mother. The beauty of it is that every other line ends with the words: "I long to see."

The Lord of Mercy, the Son of God

⁶CWC IV; *Letters*, 119.

⁷Pedro Lopez Quintana (Apostolic Nuncio of India), "Blessed Chavara and the Confluence of Christian Patrimony in India," *Herald of the East* 1, 1 (2006): 2.

His glorious splendour, *I long to see*

The fountain of mercy, God incarnate
 Who, the form of man assumed
 To uproot him from the slush of sin
 The redeemer of human kind, *I long to see*

How he stayed for nine months
 In the womb of His mother *I long to see*
 Born in her womb, to Bethlehem he came
 To obey mighty Ceaser, *I long to see*

God becoming one with man
 "Emmanuel", *I long to see*
 His parents denied a resting place
 Though painful, *I long to see ...*

The good shepherd seeking his flock
 That has gone astray, *I long to see*
 The Lord of goodness, proclaiming himself
 As our loving friend, *I long to see*.⁸

What we see in this Canto III is the description of the longing of the poet to see the joyful movements of the infant Jesus and the way his pretty mother nurses him. In the first reading, it may not give us any eschatological ideas. Nevertheless, the inner craving of the poet, to see and to experience God who came to us in order to be with us, shows his eagerness to see God and to be with Him. This is corroborated by his words in other contexts. For example, in his letter to the sisters he writes: "Oh Lord, do not be separate from us until we are one with you."⁹

4. Doctrine of Baptism

Another important theological concept that is predominant in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers is the importance they have given to baptism. According to St. Clement of Rome, "Baptism is called the *seal* as St. Paul says in 2 Cor 1:21-22 and this seal must be kept inviolate; for of those who have not kept the seal he says: "Their worm shall not die, and their fire shall not be quenched and he shall not be a spectacle for

⁸*Atmanuthapam*, Cantos III, 1-100.

⁹CWC vol. IV; *Letter VII/6*.

all flesh', 'This therefore is what he says: Keep flesh pure and seal without spot, they may receive eternal life.'"¹⁰

Chavara was a man who acknowledged baptism as a gift of God and by that he became a spotless and fair son of God and to see and enjoy the heavenly joy. In *Atmanuthapam*, he writes frequently regarding his reception of baptism and the graces that bestowed upon him as the son of God. See what he writes:

O Fount of Mercy, in your crystal streams of grace
Was my soul once cleansed and made spotless fair
Beauteous, bright, bedecked in gems of virtue
Through my Baptism, a boon, a day of days

What shall I render you, *my Lord and my God*
For all your wondrous gifts of mercy and love
For cleansing my soul, so holy, spotless and fair
At the very start of my journey of life

Through Baptism's grace, you made me your cherished son,
And showed me heaven's joys to tend me grow¹¹
Then Your saving gaze fell upon me
And cleansing waters of Baptism I received

The dawn of grace led to growth in virtue
Sumptuous goodness swelled my soul, as
In sacred waters, I was lavishly laved
And cleansed from guilt to *divine sonship restored*.

The fountain of grace, flushed forth from my soul
On that grace-filled day, Heaven rejoiced
As my name was writ on Eternity's page
Never so blessed a day, has seen my life.¹²

Chavara spells out the important graces that God has showered upon Christians through baptism. It has cleansed the soul and made it spotless, holy and bright, made the person His cherished son/daughter; showed him/her heaven's joy; led him/her to grow in virtue; and has written his/her name in Eternity's page. He lived the baptismal purity in its fullness until his death and received the eternal life. This he acknowledged when he was on the death bed: "By the

¹⁰Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. I, 56.

¹¹CWC vol. II, *Atmanuthapam*, Cantos I, 32-42.

¹²Cantos II, 105-114.

grace of God, I dare say that with their (the Holy Family's) help, I had no occasion to lose the grace I received in baptism."¹³

5. Efficacy of Good Works for Salvation

According to the Fathers, especially St. Clement, almsgiving is the principal means by which sins are remitted. It is better than fasting and prayer but almsgiving is better than both. In Clement's Sermon, we read: "Almsgiving is therefore good even as penance for sin. Fasting is better than prayer but almsgiving is better than both. Love covers a multitude of sins, but prayer from a good conscience delivers from death. Blessed is every man that is found full of these things, for alms giving removes the burden of sin."¹⁴

Chavara was conscious about these realities. He was a great soul who adorned his life with selfless deeds and great zeal towards the salvation of souls. In the *Chavarul* he writes: "the days of your life that do not see some noble action done may be counted as deleted from your life... Do not allow beggars to leave your house empty handed."¹⁵

The letter of instruction for the establishment of the *Upavisala* (*home of charity*) is a classical text that speaks very clearly on the necessity and benefit of good works and acts of charity especially the love and care one should show to the beggars, sick and those who are terminally ill. For the projects of helping the poor, Chavara used to approach the rich people and they used to contribute generously to his just demands. Through his life, Chavara enkindled concern for the poor and the sick. By starting the *Confraternity of St. Joseph* for a Happy Death, Chavara initiated a new apostolate of helping and caring for the sick. The members of this Confraternity were exhorted to attend to the needs of the sick and the suffering, and to adopt a poor family in the neighbourhood and provide it with food and clothes on the feast of St. Joseph. After launching the *Confraternity* among the parishioners of Kainakary in 1869, Chavara instructed them to establish in the parish a Home of Charity to take care of the poor and the aged. He asked his people not to abandon the aged, the sick, the orphans and the poor. In the Testament, he gave clear guidelines about the importance of giving

¹³Positio, 548.

¹⁴Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. I, 57.

¹⁵Chavara, *Chavarul*, 14.

concern to the poor people, which would make their own lives sublime.¹⁶

The key idea behind his 'home of charity' and the 'Confraternity for Happy Death' is "... of all the benefits we can render to a man the greatest is what we render to him at the time of his departure from this world... This is a gain, the greatest act of mercy. This is also the supreme act of charity. One cannot measure the greatness of such a deed."¹⁷ The means to actualize this project according to him is the alms that they receive from the parishioners. Thus he showed the means to attain eternal life not only to the poor and the needy but also to those who have money and wealth by inspiring them to give alms for the wellbeing of the poor.

6. Christology

In general, the Apostolic Fathers do not present a uniform Christological doctrine since they lived before the time of definitions made by the Ecumenical Councils. Their Christology is primarily Scripture based. Christ is, to them, the Son of God, who is pre-existent and who collaborated in the creation of the world.¹⁸ This is typically an articulation based on the Gospel of John especially the Prologue.

The Christology of Ignatius of Antioch is exceedingly clear in his teachings both, on the divinity and on the humanity of Christ. "There is only one physician, both for carnal and spiritual, born and unborn, God became man, true life in death, sprung both from Mary and from God first subject to suffering and then incapable of it - Jesus Christ Our Lord."¹⁹ Similarly, he would write to the Smyrneans: "He is really of the line of David according to the flesh and the Son of God by the will and power of God; was really born of a virgin, and baptized by John in order to comply with every ordinance."²⁰ Here the author presents both the divinity and humanity of the incarnated Word Jesus Christ in one Person. The same doctrine is found in the writings of Chavara.

¹⁶J. Pathrapankal, "The Prophetic Personality of Blessed Chavara," *Herald of the East* 1, 1 (2006): 27.

¹⁷CWC vol. IV; *Letters* IX/7.

¹⁸Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. I, 41.

¹⁹Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to Ephesians* 7,2.

²⁰Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to Smyrneans* I, 1.

6.1. Christ, Divine and Human

In his writings, especially, in the *Atmanuthapam*, we find a profound Christology of Chavara. According to it, the second person of the Trinity, the Son, assumed human form. As the fulfilment of the promise made by God, the Son of God incarnated in the purest womb of Mother Mary. He is True God and True man. He was born as the first born of all creation and became our eldest brother. We read in *Atmanuthapam* as follows:

Of God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit
The Son Incarnate in Mary's purest womb.²¹

Your promise to fulfil, came your Son
Assumed human form, on the earth
True man and true God you came from above
And on earth sojourned our Elder brother.²²

The Almighty, the fountain of all goodness
The King of kings, Omniscient Lord of All
The second person of the Holy Trinity
The Lord borne by the Queen of the world.²³

Again, the one who was born on earth as man is the Eternal Son of God. However, except sin. He identified with the humanity.

Though born on earth as man
Though from Eternity the Father's Son
Though as man he took upon Him
The full human nature, all
Except the original stain of sin
A grace to match it, there was none.²⁴

In *Atmanuthapam*, we have a very beautiful presentation of the incarnation of the second person of the Trinity as *Emmanuel* with minute details, which the poet longs to see. Canto III of the poem consists of 100 lines that describe the details of the birth of the Son. A very rich theology of incarnation can be found here.

The fountain mercy, God incarnate
Who ugly form of man assumed.²⁵

²¹Cantos I, 71-72.

²²Cantos II, 169-172.

²³Cantos IV, 29-32.

²⁴Cantos XI, 187-192.

²⁵Cantos III, 3-4.

He concealed in his form
 The effulgence that dims the stars
 The nativity of God the highest
 From Mercy, the virgin, *I long to see.*²⁶

God became one with man
 "Emmanuel" *I long to see.*²⁷

In the Appendix of Canto III, lines 1-68, the poet narrates the very purpose of incarnation, God become *Emmanuel*, as to save the humanity from the stain of sin and to elevate them to the right hand of God. *Emmanuel* is the Saviour of the world.

To redeem mankind born low, Him
 O that I may see!
 Sinful me, to enrich with grace
 To sorrow you bent
 How you became the son of man
 To save me I would see.²⁸

To elevate us to the Right hand of God
 You the perfect, became man.²⁹

The sweet smile you show your parents
 Beloved Babe, I long to see
 O God Emmanuel, I, a sinner
 With love, adore.³⁰

The basis of Christian faith is the mystery of the Triune God who is the communion of three divine persons, Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. It is the Father who sent the Son to the world in order to redeem the world from sin and sent the Spirit to be with us always. Nevertheless, it is through the Son we reach God and approach the divine mysteries; since no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him (Mt 11:27). Jesus said: "No one comes to the Father except through me" (Jn 14:6) and "he who has seen me, has seen the Father, he who has heard me, has heard the Father and he who has received me, receives Father who has sent me" (Jn 14:9). Imbibing the spirit of these words of Jesus, Chavara

²⁶Cantos III, 7-10.

²⁷Cantos III, 15-16.

²⁸Cantos III, Appendix, 13-18.

²⁹Cantos III, Appendix, 47-48.

³⁰Cantos III, Appendix, 61-64

turned to Jesus who is both perfect man and God, to see, hear and experience the Father.

6.2. Titles of Christ and Christological Themes

In the writings of Chavara, almost all the Christological confessions and titles pronounced by the early Church and the writings of the Fathers are found. He clearly presents the basic Christological dogma, the divinity and humanity of Jesus in one person. He imbibed the faith confession of St. Thomas the Apostle, his Father in faith: *My Lord My God*.³¹

The Christological titles found in his writings are: Son of God (III, 1, 27), Redeemer of human kind, Cantos (III, 6), My Lord (II, 75, 87), Son Incarnate in Mary's purest womb (I, 72), True man and true God (II, 171), Our Elder brother (II, 172), God-man (II, 241; VI, 162), Son of Man (III, Appendix 17), Son of Almighty God (III, Appendix 1), Saviour of man (V, 141), Emmanuel (III, 16), Christ (I, 60), King of Kings (I, 60; IV, 30; V, 76, 141; VI, 41), Son of Royal David (IV, 170), Baby Son as great as the Father (V, 131), My Lord the Blessed babe Emmanuel (IV, 189), Lord of Mercy (II, 1; III, 1; VI, 261), God of Mercy (II, 43), Almighty God supreme (II, 62), Good Shepherd (III, 97), Goodness infinite (II, 92), Lord of All (III, Appendix, 57; IV, 183; V, 25, 142; VI, 7; VII, 53, 265), O Lord of the Gospel (III, 95), Lord of Goodness (III, 99) Redeemer (IV, 206; VI, 288), my Treasure (IV, 206), God-born man (V, 5), Saviour of all (V, 28), my father (V, 147), my maker (V, 147), Shepherd Gracious (V, 173), Son of God (VI, 7; VII, 8), Lord of Lords (VI, 7), Son of the Most High (VI, 41), only begotten Son of God the Father (VI, 45), Son of the Mighty God (VI, 71), Lord of Justice (VI, 155; VII, 552), Lord and Master (VI, 286), Lord of the world (VI, 304), World's redeemer (VI, 307), My Lord (VI, 309, 327, 333, 351; VII, 85, 141, 231), My Master (VI, 333), Saviour (VI, 333), My Hope (VI, 333), Redeemer (VII, 9), New Star (VII, 14, 20), king of the Jews (VII, 29; VII, 594), Lord God of the universe (VII, 51), my master (VII, 51), author of all (VII, 55), creator supreme (VII, 93), Light of the World (VII, 111), Son of the mighty (VII, 124), O Lord my God (VII, 214), eternal Son of God (VII, 258), Co-existent with the Lord of all (VII, 259), Sovereign of mankind (VII, 260), royal Son of David (VII, 260), My Father Beloved (VII, 280), God of All (VII, 280), I'm your Father benevolent (VII, 286), I am He (VII, 306), I'm the Creator (VII, 315), I'm your Father, I your loving God (VII, 332), my Father, my Creator, my Lord (VII, 334) My

³¹Cantos I, 37; Cantos XII, 170.

loving Father I'm your son (VII, 416), My God, my Love, my Master (VIII, 1), O Loving God (VIII, 6), my Father Beloved (VIII, 1), my loving Father God eternal (VIII, 35), the Saviour (VIII, 50), O my God (VIII, 55), My blessed Father (VIII, 61), My beloved Lord, my Father (VIII, 66) Lord of the triple world (IX, 71), Christ our Lord (XII, 62), My Son, beloved my Lord my God (XII, 170).

6.2.1. Christ as *Appan*, the Father

The basic God consciousness of Jesus was this: God is his Father and He was the Father's Son. *Atmanuthapam* brings to the fore a similar experience of Chavara as he writes:

While being nurtured in body and mind
Was I beloved too of God, *my Father*.³²

His experience and articulation that God is his Father and he is His son is the most sublime aspect of his God experience and awareness. This he attained through Jesus.

At the zenith of his God experience, Chavara addresses Christ, the second person of the Holy Trinity also as Father. It is particularly when he meditates on the agony of Jesus that he calls Him 'Father' most affectionately. The following lines of *Atmanuthapam* which describe the agony of Jesus standing before Pilot express this fact:

Many a query the villain made to you
O God most pure, your blessed voice to hear
But he, a sinner deserved not the grace
*"My Loving Father", I'm your son.*³³

He assumes the same feeling when he narrates the scenes at the foot of the Cross:

His words divine he recalled to his mind
*"I'm your Father, I'm your loving God
Yet, you thrust this cruel spear in my heart"*
Alas, my Father, my creator, my Lord.³⁴

Eight times, Jesus is called Father in the seventh Canto of *Atmanuthapam* and twice in the eighth Canto.³⁵

In *Dhyanasallapangal*, when he meditates on the passion of Jesus he calls Him '*Appa*' meaning *Father*: "*Oh merciful Father, I am unable to*

³²Cantos I, 85-86

³³Cantos VII, 413-416

³⁴Cantos VII, 331-33

³⁵Cantos VII, 223, 286, 343, 345, 416, 419, 532, 548. See also in VIII 61, 63, etc.

raise my eyes and look at your face. Lord, looking at your holy head, I feel frightened to think how it came to be pierced with thorns... O *my Father (ente appa)*, how graceful is your face! The rapturous Song of David in praise of the beauty of your face rings in my ears... But, *my Father*, my heart now gets heavy to look at your face... Alas! I myself disfigured *my Father's* face, the beauty of which David the prophet sang plentifully...³⁶ The extraordinary style of addressing Jesus as the Father expresses his union with the divine persons. It is also an indication of his mystical union with the second person of the Trinity who himself says: "I and my Father are one" (Jn 10:30). It is noteworthy that when Chavara contemplated on the passion of Christ that he addressed Jesus as Father. Possibly, it is when he meditated on the passion of Christ that he experienced the intensity of God's undefinable love in its depth and perceived the manifestation of that love in the self-oblation of Jesus on the cross. The overwhelming love led him to a mystical realm that was beyond the categories of human mind and intellect. This may be the reason for him to ignore the distinction between Father and Son.

6.2.2. Christ as the Mother

Christ for Chavara is not only his Father, but also his mother. This is a very unique way of expressing Christ experience. See what he writes in *Atmanuthapam*:

You like a *father* patiently followed my trail
 Whispered unto my heart, "you are my love
 Mark ye, my son, a good *Father* am I
 And a *mother* both" - you filled my mind.³⁷

We do not come across spiritual works in which Christ is described or addressed as mother. But there are clear references in the Scripture presenting God as a loving mother. For example, Prophet Isaiah says: "Can a mother forget her sucking child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even if she forgets, I shall not forget you" (Is 49:15-16). Again, Jesus laments: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem... How often I would have gathered your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not" (Mt 23:37). In these texts, the Scripture highlights the maternal character of *God's* love. Here, Chavara recalls the caring, forgiving, self-giving, tender and merciful and maternal love of *Christ*, who searched for him,

³⁶CWC vol. III, 6.

³⁷Cantos VII, 343-346.

carried his sins, healed his sickness and sacrificed His life for him. It is this heartfelt, sweet experience of the maternal love of Christ that made his life beautiful like a green pasture, fruitful like a vineyard, sheltering like a tree and dynamic like a running stream.

7. Defender of Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction

In the history of Dogma, the Epistles of St. Clement of Rome, especially the *Epistle to the Corinthians* are very significant. It may be well called the *manifesto* of ecclesiastical jurisdiction. The context of the Letter is the outbreak of disputes within the Church of Corinth during the reign of Domitian. The disputes impelled the author to intervene. Some arrogant and impudent individuals had rebelled against ecclesiastical authority and driven the incumbents from office. Only a very small minority of community remained loyal to the deposed presbyters. Writing the letter, Clement's intention was to settle the difference and to repair the scandal given to the pagans.³⁸ Here, in Clement, for the first time, we find a clear and explicit declaration of the doctrine of apostolic succession.

The letter of Clement stressed that the presbyters cannot be deposed by the members of the community on their own, because the authority is not bestowed by them. The right to rule derives from the Apostles, who exercised their power in obedience to Christ, who in turn was sent by God.³⁹ He writes:

The apostles preached to us the Gospel received from Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ was God's Ambassador. Christ, in other words, comes with a message from God and the Apostles with a message from Christ. Both of these orderly arrangements therefore, originate from the will of God... From land to land they preached and from their earliest converts appointed men whom they had tested by the Spirit to act as bishops and deacons for the future believers. And this was no innovation, for a long time before the Scripture had spoken about bishops and deacons; for somewhere it says: 'I will establish their overseers in observance of the law and their ministers in fidelity'... Consequently, we deem it injustice to eject from the sacred ministry the person who was appointed either by them or later with the consent of the whole Church, by other men in high repute.⁴⁰

³⁸Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. I, 43.

³⁹Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. I, 46.

⁴⁰Quoted from Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. I, 46.

A similar occasion arose in the Syro-Malabar Church during in the times of Chavara. In the 19th century, the apostolic Church of St. Thomas was under the jurisdiction of the Propaganda Fide. As per the decision of the Holy See, the Church was ruled by Msgr Bernardine Baccinelli, the Latin bishop of Verapoly. Although he was a Latin prelate, he was the legitimate authority of the St. Thomas Christians. The dissatisfaction of the Malabar Christians with the leadership of the Latin prelates from 16th century onwards had caused a longing in them for bishops of their own from the Chaldean Rite. Indeed, until 16th century, it was the Chaldean bishops from Bagdad who had given spiritual leadership to the Christians of Malabar and they were satisfied with their presence and shepherding. But the arrival of the Portuguese missionaries in the sixteenth century, and their interference in their ancient liturgy, tradition and administration created a rivalry between the Syrians and the Latin authority. The native Syrian Catholics could not bear the changes that they made to their liturgy, which was part of their apostolic heritage, received from St. Thomas, their father in faith, nourished and transmitted to the subsequent generations. It caused dissatisfaction among the Syrian Christians and finally it led to a protest from the part of the Syrian Catholics of Malabar, and the oath at the Coonan Cross in 1653.

Although, the *Propaganda Fide* took care of the Church after the rupture of relationship between the *Padroado* and the St. Thomas Christians, they were not much satisfied with the Propaganda's rule either, since, in reality, they were also Latin bishops alien to the Syrian community. In order to bring a solution to the problem, the Syrian community desired to bring back the Chaldean bishops of their own Rite and apostolic patrimony from Bagdad. Some St. Thomas Christians made serious efforts to have their own bishops and they succeeded in their effort. The arrival of bishop Thomas Roccas in 1861 from Bagdad is to be evaluated in this context. But the effort to bring back the Chaldean bishop as their pastor was not according to the will and consent of the Holy See. The arrival as well as the acceptance of Bp. Roccas was not legitimate.

Though the arrival of Thomas Roccas was illegitimate, when the bishop arrived, a majority of the Syrian Catholics went after him. Since the bishop got a very solemn reception from the Syrian Catholics and he was a validly ordained bishop of Chaldean Rite, he began to exercise the Episcopal duties in the Malabar Church. Many people followed Roccas and rejected Msgr. Bernardine Baccinelli of the Vicariate of Verapoly. This created a chaos in the Church. Naturally,

bishop Baccinelli became helpless and could not control the faithful from going after the new bishop and a schism emerged in the Church. It is in this context Baccinelli appointed Kuriakose Chavara, the Prior of the Monasteries, as the Vicar General of the Syrian Christians.

Chavara, a man of prudence and obedience, understood the error of his people. He tried his level best to bring back the people to be in communion with the legitimate bishop. He fought against the unlawful intervention and rule of Roccas. Meanwhile, he wrote letters to the Holy Father enquiring the legitimacy of Roccas to exercise Episcopal power among the Syrian Catholics of Kerala. His intention was to know the truth about the standpoint of the Holy See regarding Roccas and thereby to convey to the people the actual status of Roccas. Having been informed by the Holy See, Chavara wrote letters to the Syrian community about the rightful authority of bishop Baccinelli who was lawfully appointed by the Holy See and the duty and responsibility of the people to be obedient to him. Hence, the community of the faithful did not have the right and permission to substitute Roccas in the place of Baccinelli. In this way, he defended the ecclesiastical jurisdiction among the Syrian Catholics of Kerala like St. Clement of Rome.

The following letters of Chavara to and from the Holy Father provide a clear picture of the situation in the Church and what was his contribution in bringing about a solution to the situation. In his letter to the Holy Father Pius IX, he wrote:

On May 9, 1861, a bishop Thomas Roccas by name came to us under the orders of Joseph Audo, the Patriarch of Babylon... This bishop preaches to the entire body of the faithful, that he has been sent by the patriarch with instruction to govern the Chaldean Christians of Malabar with the permission and orders of your Holiness. But Archbishop Bernardine, our Vicar Apostolic has clearly stated in his personal letter as follows: 'The patriarch has sent the above mentioned bishop on his own wish, contrary to your wish and Order. So, anyone who receives holy Orders or authority at his hands and the one who confers such authority will automatically stand expelled from the Church.'

Yet the priests and the faithful approve all his actions and continue flocking to him daily. They are following his footsteps. We fear that even before we receive a reply to this letter, all our parishes will have arrayed behind him, in obedience. All the parishes except those few that are managed by the Carmelite priests, will be his followers... Hence, in all humility, with tear-filled eyes we entreat your holiness to let us know the true state of affairs. The reply must be in our Chaldean Syriac language. It

*should specify clearly the request of the patriarch and your reply to him and direct us of the dual authorities we should obey. In this conflict-ridden atmosphere beset with problem, you who are adorned with all good will should point out to us the right path. We find such guidance absolutely necessary to give assurance to those brethren who are still in doubt.*⁴¹

In response to this letter, the Holy Father Pope Pius IX wrote a letter to him appreciating his earnestness in seeking his holiness' advice on how to deal with the 'unlawful' Bishop Roccas. Pope wrote as follows:

We are immensely pleased that you have consulted the Apostolic See, the Mother and Teacher of all the faithful, the great Church of Rome to remove the serious dispute among you on this vital issue. Now, my dear sons, you must know that as we on the 20th November 1860 had given a definite directive in writing to this patriarch that on no account he should interfere with the affairs of the churches of Malabar. Bishop Roccas has come there on the order of the Patriarch acting only on his own volition.

Hence, my dear children please understand that bishop Roccas has no ecclesiastical authority, that he was unlawfully appointed and that he has fallen under several ecclesiastical censures. And it is our brother, Bishop Mar Bernardine, the Archbishop of Persella and the representative of the Holy Apostolic See, who is the ordinary for the Churches of Malabar; and it is lawful for you to submit to him...

From the Church of St. Peter in Rome on the 5th of September 1861, in the 16th year of our Pontificate,

(sd)

*Pope Pius IX.*⁴²

The ecclesial vision of Chavara will be clearer if we go through the following official circular he wrote and sent to the parish churches in the context of the visit of Roccas:

He who is not with me is against me. He who does not stand with me scatters" (Lk 11:23), said the Lord. He who enters the sheepfold and exercises authority not having received it from the Pope, the successor of St. Peter does not gather but scatters the sheep. He who does not stand with the pope, the Vicar of Christ, is the enemy of Christ. Such a shepherd and all those who join hands with him will perish in the eternal fire intended for the enemies of Christ. There is no doubt about it. The shepherd who has now started from Bagdad has neither the mandate of the Pope nor his authorization. He is planning to enter the sheepfold of Christ,

⁴¹CWC IV; Letters I/1.

⁴²CSC IV; Letters I/2.

which is in Malabar as a wolf to scatter the sheep and drive them to the eternal fire of hell. I am fully convinced of this fact.

Hence, my beloved brethren, remember the words of our Lord that he who enters the sheepfold not through the right door is not the true shepherd, but the false one; is a wolf in sheep's clothing; if such shepherds come to you without the decree of the pope, be cautious not to give ear to their false teachings, nor take sides with them and be prepared even to suffer martyrdom at their hands for being faithful to the true vicar of the Pope, the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly. If you happen to suffer martyrdom at their hands, remember that it will be the greatest grace of God you would receive.

Besides, I want you to know that if any one comes with the permission and the decrees of the Pope, it is necessary that in testimony thereof, he should show it to one of our Vicars Apostolic, that is, either to the Archbishop of Verapoly or to the bishop of Quilon and only with the knowledge and permission of one of them, he can enter our churches and administer the sacraments or perform any other sacred ministry in the Church. I tell you all this, my dear brethren, being desirous of your eternal salvation and lest you fall in to the schism and incur the excommunication of the Pope and suffer the loss of your soul.⁴³

Chavara stands like a warrior who dutifully fights for the Kingdom of God to which he belongs. He expresses his readiness even to die for this noble cause. His concern is always the salvation of the souls. All these show his firm faith in the fact that Jesus instituted the Church upon Peter the Rock. The authority entrusted to Peter and his successors is divine and nobody can demolish that by any means. The apostolic succession and ecclesiastical jurisdiction are therefore not manmade but intended by God. He is the replica of Clement of Rome for the Church of St. Thomas, defender of the revealed truth – the apostolic succession and ecclesiastical jurisdiction.

8. Conclusion

A glance at the teachings of Chavara in comparison with the apostolic fathers made clear that, the writings of Chavara are loaded with theological ideas and insights. In the Church of Kerala, we do not come across anyone ahead of him coming up as a systematic theologian in the strict sense of the word to imitate or to follow. But by the divine grace, he articulated theological visions and insights so deeply and didactically through his writings. A closer and critical

⁴³CWC IV; Letters, IX/3.

study of his literature in the light of the writings of the Fathers and contemporary theology elucidates the fact that his literature contains revealed truth and multifaceted insights both theological and ecclesial. He is a pioneer in this realm and paved a legacy ahead of times.

KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA

An Indian Spiritual Vision

Jose Eroorickal CMI

Abstract: Jose Eroorickal makes an Indian reading of the spiritual vision of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara. The spirituality of Chavara was a combination of Indian, Eastern and Carmelite features of mysticism. Rooted in these age old traditions, Chavara and his companions took to a life of contemplation that led them to intense apostolate. Initially, the writer explores the basic characteristic features of the mystics such as self-purification, ecstasy, visions and mystical union and goes on to survey the general features of Indian spirituality dwelling on *satya*, *darsan*, *the various margas*, *tapas*, *ashrama* and *sannyasa*. In this background, he reflects on the mystical experiences of Chavara, which are expressed in his *darsanam*, *vasam*, and *sallapam* by means of which, he practised the Christian spiritual values in the Indian society, which was very unique for his times.

Keywords: spirituality, Hinduism, religions, culture, Chavara, *karmayogi*, experience, *tapas*, *karma*, Carmelite, mystic, ecstasy, truth, mysticism, *ashrama*, *sannyasa*, *beth rauma*.

1. Introduction

India is a multi-religious nation where almost all religions are practiced. We are living in a world of multiple religions, cultures, and value systems. In this pluralistic context we find that all these religions have their own spiritual ideals, which differ from one another. This peculiar diversity prevents us from distinguishing a pure Indian spirituality. All believe in the ultimate Reality and the aim of man's life here on earth is destined to reach that Reality through a spiritual transformation.¹ Hinduism, the major religion among them, is practiced by more than 75 per cent of Indians and dates back to more than 3,000 years. Indian civilization is one of the most ancient civilizations and Hinduism is regarded as the major contributor to India's culture and reality.

¹See J. M. Koller, *The Indian Way*, London: Taylor and Francis, 1982, 62.

Every corner of India is dotted with temples, mosques, churches and gurudwaras, which are visited daily by thousands of pilgrims and devotees for prayer and worship. Every home, every road, every rickshaw bears a spiritual symbol. Every few days there is a festival to celebrate. Life and religion are inseparable in India. Different religions live together in such a way that they give and take from each other in matters of faith enriching each other through exchanges of views and philosophical discussions. Religious plurality is a wealth of Indian culture.

Chavara, an Indian Christian saint, is a unique mystic. He is remembered for his challenging pioneering initiatives and contributions in different spiritual, social and literary fields. He is known as the founder of religious congregation for men and women, champion of education, defender of the harmony of the church, spiritual reformer, social reformer, and man of several other welfare activities. Hence, he is known to the Kerala society as a great *Karmayogi*. But these external activities were one part of his life as he was also a mystic who was endowed with God-experience.

The spirituality of Chavara was a combination of Indian, Oriental/Eastern and Carmelite features of spirituality. Our focus in this paper will be on how he was able to live the ideal of consecrated life abiding in the spirituality of India. Participation in the ultimate Reality through spiritual transformation of human existence has guided most Indian philosophy and religious thoughts, giving shape to the Indian way. This participation and spiritual transformation is only possible with a *darsan* or profound vision according to the Indian mind, and the attainment of this *darsana* is through *tapas* and *nishkama karma*. Rooted in these age old traditions, Chavara and his companions took to a life of contemplation leading to intense apostolate. Several writers have reflected on the unique Indian way Chavara. In this paper, we shall discuss only certain important concepts, and texts to show how Indian spirituality influenced Chavara. Following is a short analysis on the basic characteristic features of an Indian Christian and Carmelite mystic.

2. Basic Characteristics of Mystics

2.1. Self-Purification in Tears

The initial spiritual experience of the mystics leads them to know themselves. The divine glory and blessings awake in them a sense of unworthiness before God. They feel that even a shortcoming is an

obstacle on their way to sanctity. So they will cry out as Prophet Elijah: "I am a sinner Lord" and like Peter they cry out saying: "Lord I am a sinner, do not come near me."

We see the depth of Chavara's mystical teachings from two of his works: *Atmanutapam* and *Dhyanasallapangal*. The progress of Chavara's mysticism can be seen in his poetic works like the *Spiritual Canticle* (*Atmageetangal*) and spiritual colloquies (*Atmasallapangal*), which are his daily meditations in prose. From what he has written sharing his experiences mostly in poems, we see that the culmination of his experience in his spiritual union. But to reach there, he had to pass through various stages of God experience.

Mystics, who are in union with God, experience the gift of tears. On the one hand, these tears are attributed to their feeling of unworthiness before God on account of their draw backs. On the other, these tears are symbols of their deep sense of the love of God and his closeness.

2.2. Ecstasy and Visions

Ecstasy is part of a process in which the soul establishes union with God and experiences joy in an unlimited manner. It happens not only during their personal prayer, but also when they experience the providence of God in their personal life and in the wonders of the nature. The visions occur on account of the ecstasy. There are three kinds of visions that the mystics usually receive: sensuous, imagery and intellectual. As they are identified with the life and personality of Jesus, they have also certain experiences of the sufferings and the events related to the life of Jesus in visions. Chavara experienced long ecstasies before the Eucharistic Lord. He found happiness in spending time with the Lord. In certain moments, Chavara experienced his elevation to the chamber of heavenly abode. He writes:

Perfect One, it was your Holy Will impeccable
that let me be born on earth
A human being, me, impoverished you raised
To the highest skies, Your Abode.

2.3. Mystical Union

The life of many Christian mystics shows that Mystical union, which is also called Spiritual marriage one of their mystical experiences. The mystics are drawn up to an intimate and personal relationship with God. As a bride is united to the bridegroom the soul of the mystic is

lost in the Divine. The relationship between God and mankind is given a mystical symbolism in the Book of the Song of Songs. It is a rich source for those who compare mystical experiences to the spiritual marriage in the unitive stage of perfection. The mystics like Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, Francis of Assisi and Catherine of Siena are best examples before us in this regard.

Chavara had similar divine spousal experiences that he referred to Jesus as the beloved bridegroom: "I must come to my saviour Jesus Christ, my beloved Bridegroom, to beg pardon for my sins."² *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father* includes various mystical expressions of Chavara, which are directed to Jesus. Mostly, these expressions burst out in different ways, on account of his intimate relationship with Jesus as his 'groom'. The unique contribution of Chavara to the spirituality of the mystical espousal is found in his contemplation of the Calvary episode.³ Chavara describes the way of the cross as the solemn royal procession of the Divine bridegroom towards Calvary, which is the wedding hall.⁴

3. Some General Features of Indian Spirituality

Although spiritual life is defined and described in different ways in different contexts and traditions, generally, it is man's sharing in the life of God. The question that arises in this regard is how can man share in the life of God. From a scriptural point of view, Paul describes spirituality as a "life according to the Spirit (see Rom 8; Gal 5:25). A spiritual person is one whose whole being and life is led or influenced by the Spirit of God, wherever the person is.

The following virtues related to Indian spirituality are important ways to understand how Chavara practised them in his spiritual life and subsequently assisted him in his welfare activities for the Church and society.

3.1. Satya: Truth

The concept of *satya* or truth (Absolute, God) has a fundamental role to play in the Indian spiritual thought. According to absolutistic principle, there is only one reality or truth. The question of religiosity of Indians is explicable with the quest for the Absolute. This is presumed to be the fundamental principle and the objective of human

²*Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 3.

³See *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 21-23.

⁴See *Compunction of the Soul*, 70-105, lines 13-24.

life as India understands. Concepts like Being, Reality, or Self designate to Absolute (God) in Indian philosophical tradition; a quest for union of being (human soul) with Being (God) or unreal with Real or self with Self. The achievement of this goal of the human soul is a spiritual realization, which is fulfilled when one attains the truth. A Christian *bhakta* is in search of truth by following his master Jesus who is his absolute truth. A perfect seeker of this kind is restless until he finds its end through appropriate means. In the life of Chavara, a constant search for truth is seen and the Indian spiritual elements like *darsan* (vision), *tapas* (austerity), various *margas* (ways) have come to his help and have influenced his spirituality and apostolate.

3.2. *Darsan*: Divine Vision

The word *darsan* denotes a profound divine vision. In India it is generally accomplished through temple worship, pilgrimage, festival celebrations and the honouring of saints and *sadhus* (sages). It not only means that the gods keep their eyes open to a devotee but the devotee also must do the same in order to reap divine blessings, and to know the divine secrets. Generally, for Christians, Jews and Muslims, hearing the Word of God and responding to it is all important. But in Hinduism, the emphasis is more on the vision aspect – a gaze at the divine image.

A spiritual transformation is possible through a profound divine vision in Indian spiritual tradition. For an ordinary believer, the *darsan* of a sage has greater importance because he considers the sage a holy man who experiences God face to face in his day to day life. This God experience is the result of one's intense ascetical practices (*tapas*). He live a life of discipline (*yoga*)⁵ and genuinely follow subsequent paths (*margas*). Rooted in these spiritual traditions of India, Chavara used the word *darsan* in his reflections on mysticism.⁶

⁵Yoga is one of the most important features of Indian spiritual traditions. It aims at the mystical union of the self with the Supreme Being in a state of complete awareness and tranquillity through certain physical and mental exercises. It promotes physical and spiritual wellbeing. The word yoga is derived from 'yuj', which mean to join, to attach, to yoke, etc. See B. Walker, *Hindu World: An Encyclopedic Survey of Hinduism*, vol. 2, New Delhi: Routledge, 1995, 616-618.

⁶See *Compunction of the Soul*, Canto III, 17.

3.3. *Margas*: Ways

The *margas* are four possible ways to liberation or salvation described in the *Bhagavad Gita*.⁷ Liberation is ultimately union with the divine reality. The *margas*⁸ are *Jnanamarga*, *Bhaktimarga* and *Karmamarga* and *Rajamarga*.

However, the first three *margas* are considered the most important. *Jnanamarga* is the path to reach the ultimate reality through knowledge. *Bhaktimarga* is the path of devotion to one's chosen manifestation of the divine (*ishtadeva*),⁹ more precisely, devotion in love and adoration of *Brahma* (God). *Bhakti* means attachment, or fervent devotion to and love for *Brahma*. The term stems from the root *bhaj*, meaning to partake of.¹⁰ It is a love response to God's gracious love. The object of *bhakti* is *Bhagavan* (God). The word *karma* literally means deed or action, but it implies the entire cycle of cause and effects. According to the law of karma, every human action – in thought, word or deed – inevitably leads to results, good or bad, depending upon the moral quality of the action. The *Gita* attempted to give it a spiritual interpretation shifting the objective of karma. Thus, *niskamakarma* is an action done, but with no detachment to the fruit of the action.¹¹ This means not to be desirous of or attached to its fruits; the action is performed not based on the desired effect for yourself, but on the general welfare. *Rajamarga*¹² is the royal path discussed in *Yogasutra*, a methodical system for attaining perfection. It is essentially the path of meditation, that is, of being able to remove

⁷It is regarded as one of the holy scriptures of Hinduism. It is also known as a classical work and an episode in India's Great epic *Mahabharata*. The main story of *Mahabharata* is the war between the *Kaurava* and *Pandava* families. In this episode there was a dialogue between Sri Krishna and warrior Arjun of the *Pandava* family. Seeing own relatives on the other side (opposition), Arjun planned to withdraw from the war. But Sri Krishna – inspirer of good – advised him not to withdraw and inspired him to fight. The dialogue between these two is depicted as the symbol of fighting evil by performing one's duty as a warrior. See R. C. Zaehner, *The Bhagavad-Gita*, London: Oxford University Press, 1979, 5-8.

⁸Some authors speak of these as *yogas* instead of *margas*, but both concepts refer to the three ways of human life of which Hinduism speaks.

⁹See "Bhakti," J. Bowker, ed. *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, New York: Oxford, 1997, 141. *Brahma* is the word used for God in Hinduism.

¹⁰See Walker, *Hindu World: An Encyclopaedic Survey of Hinduism*, 138.

¹¹Zaehner, *Bhagavad Gita*, 2: 47.

¹²See Walker, *Hindu World*, 617.

one's consciousness from its awareness of this world of illusions and to focus only on the ultimate reality.

3.4. Tapas, Ashrama and Sannyasa

Tapas, *ashrama* and *sannyasa* point to a life of renunciation. The powerful austerities of the ascetics were known as *tapas*.¹³ Although the English terms like asceticism or austerity are employed to translate *tapas*, it has a wider connotation. *Tapa* is the creative energy within God.¹⁴ On this Manu writes: "Whatever is hard to be attained, whatever is hard to be reached, whatever is hard to be performed, all (this) may be accomplished by austerities; for austerity (possesses a power) which it is difficult to surpass."¹⁵ Moreover, it is one of the best means to attain supreme bliss.¹⁶

Chavara and his companions envisage a *beth rauma* (house on high) where they could be closer to God. In India, these are *ashrams*, which as a space, are abodes of ascetical practices. The word *ashram* derives from the Sanskrit word *shrama* which means, 'to exert', to achieve a goal.¹⁷ Literally *ashram* means 'halting or resting place'. The word therefore, signifies a stoppage or stage in the journey of life wherein one rests, in order to prepare for the further journey to attain the final life or goal that is the Divine.¹⁸ The term *ashram*, in its strict sense, is applied to the four stages of life in Hinduism.¹⁹ *Vanaprastashram* (retreat to the forest), the third stage of life, is equal

¹³The term 'tapas' has its origin from the Sanskrit root 'tap', which means, to heat, to shine, to do penance, etc.

¹⁴See *Taittiriya Upanishad*, I: 1, 8-9.

¹⁵See *Manusmriti*, XI, 239. These are the Laws of Manu. Manu is a semi legendary Hindu lawgiver. It is one the standard books in the Hindu canon, and a basic text for all gurus to base their teachings on. This 'revealed scripture' comprises 2684 verses, divided into twelve chapters presenting the norms of domestic, social, and religious life in India (ca. 500 BC) under the Brahmin influence, and is fundamental to the understanding of ancient Indian society.

¹⁶See *Manusmriti*, XII: 104.

¹⁷See B. G. Gokhale, *Ancient India*, Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1970, 120.

¹⁸See P. Pattathu, *Ashram Spirituality*, Indore: Satprakashan, 1997, 70.

¹⁹According to Hinduism, every Hindu has to pass through four stages during his earthly life. They are known as ashrams: *Brahmacharya*, (studentship), *Grhastha* (householder), *Vanaprastha* (retreat to the forest), and *Sannyasa* (life of renunciation).

to the hermitage of a *rishi* or sage.²⁰ It also denotes a place where holy, learned and experienced men lived with disciples in order to meditate and to share their experience of God. But for some, *ashram* life is not only a withdrawal from the world, but also a means of service to society.²¹ For such people, *ashram* symbolizes a life of contemplation and service. It is for this reason that some Indian Christian religious congregations call their houses and monasteries *ashrams*.

Sannyasa is a state of life in which a person is totally detached from everything in the universe. Possessions, attachments and thoughts of a *sannyasin* are focused ultimately on *Brahman*.²² *Sannyasa* is a Sanskrit word derived from the combination of two terms, *samyak* and *nyasah*, meaning total abandonment.²³ For Hindus to embrace *sannyasa* means death to all belongings²⁴ and a *sannyasin* is also called *tapodhana*, as his wealth is *tapas*. Thus spiritual realization takes place when one achieves union with Brahma. It is in this state that one declares 'aham brahmasmi' (I am Brahma), *tat tvam asi* 'Thou art that'. This is somewhat similar to the view expressed by St. Paul when he says, 'it is no longer I, but Christ lives in me.' This is regarded as an experience of a mystical union.

Upanishads are Hindu spiritual treatises composed in Sanskrit between 800 and 400 BC in prose and verse. They contain the core of Hindu Philosophy.²⁵ They constitute not only the scriptures but also are a veritable source of mysticism. The very word *Upanishad* means

²⁰See Walker, *Hindu World: An Encyclopaedic Survey of Hinduism*, vol. I, 84.

²¹Sri Buddha even positively approved social service as a duty of monks, so they had hospitals and education centres. The famous University of Nalanda was one of these. See T. Kochumuttam, "Indian Monastic Traditions," H. C. Perumaly, ed. *Chavara Death Centenary 1871-1971*, Kottayam: Deepika, 1972, 101.

²²See M. G. Bhagat, *Ancient Indian Asceticism*, 1976, 43; see also C. Kanichai, *Sannyasa*, Always: no year, 3.

²³There are different names used in Indian terminology to denote a *sannyasin* (renounced or detached person), such as *swami* (lord), *yogin* (one who practices yoga), *muni* (one who practices internal and external silence), *rishi* (one who attains divine experience), *tapodhana* (one who possesses the treasure of meditation), etc. See M. Dhavamony, *Classical Hinduism*, Roma: Gregorian University Press, 1982, 369-73.

²⁴See Pattathu, *Ashram Spirituality*, 111.

²⁵See "Upanishad," J. Ferguson, *An Illustrated Encyclopedia of Mysticism and the Mystery Religions*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1976, 202.

to sit near. It conveys a symbolic expression of acquiring true knowledge (*jnana*); while sitting at the Master's feet the student ardently listens to him. The teacher communicates wisdom that is in him. When the *Upanishads* were composed, there were no writing materials, no printing facilities; all knowledge was handed down orally. The *gurukula* system²⁶ of Indian society was developed from this ancient tradition. The students stayed with the teacher and the teacher would speak of his experience, develop its profound truth. The disciples would hear attentively and afterwards note certain high points of the teaching.²⁷ The *Upanishads* are records of knowledge acquired from experience.

As Indian born, it is quite natural for St. Chavara to imbibe the Indian spiritual values and to be impact on his life. By following the Indian way of three *margas*, Chavara set goal to attain a profound *Darsan* of the Divine in the innermost heart.

These key concepts and thoughts of Indian spirituality greatly influenced Chavara, who lived in the culture and religiosity of Indian society. His was a life dedicated to the *darsan* of God. The ardent 'longing to see' (*darsan*) is a sign of his profound *bhakti* (devotion) reflected in his poetic writings.²⁸ *Darsanaveedu'* or *Tapasubhavanam* which designates the Indian way of hermitage is a symbol of God's presence. Though the original vision of a *darsanaveedu* or *tapasubhavanam* was shared by the other two CMI co-founders, Chavara carried forward its spiritual values and inspired others.

Let us look at Chavara's experience of the *Darsanaveedu* in his meditative hymns:

You are my father you are my fortune
There is no other treasure for me, but in you
You are my love, all my good fortune
If not with you, how could I live my life
My very breath, my food, my drink

²⁶It was an ancient educational system where a group of students stayed with the *guru* or teacher for a particular period to acquire knowledge. According to this system, it was not merely elementary education, but an integral knowledge that helped them to learn everything for their life. It is also called *brahmacharya ashram* - the primary stage of life, according to the Hindu ashram system, before entering the *grahastashram* - married life.

²⁷A similar system of education was followed for the priestly training in Kerala in ancient times. Father Thomas Palackal, the co-founder of CMI congregation, at Pallipuram during the time of Chavara.

²⁸See *Compunction of the Soul*, Canto III, 17-22.

What can I find solace but in you.²⁹

Here his personality is reflected as standing alone in the presence of God in a face to face embracing vision, *darsanam*. A person like Chavara, gifted with mystical insights, can have such profound intuition. On the glorious and mighty presence of Christ in the tabernacle, Chavara considers the one who is enthroned there to be none other than his own Loving Father (*snehamulla appan*): My Lord is enthroned near me in the tabernacle of this chapel. He is inviting me to Him in order to render me grace for my salvation, to forgive me, to listen to my petitions, to satisfy my needs. He is telling that he will bestow on me profusely whatever favours I am in need of. He promises to listen to me whenever I approach him with supplications. 'Colloquies with the Heavenly Father' (*Dhyanasallapangal*) presenting a typical exposition of the Indian disciple 'sitting near the teacher and listening' is an Upanishadic inspiration.

4. Mystical Experiences of Chavara

One of the key features of the spirituality of Chavara is mysticism. Mysticism is a vast concept one can perceive it only by looking at it from different perspectives. Christian mysticism is one of the classic means in spirituality by which one communes with the Divine. This could happen through a simple prayer or intense meditation. By these means, one achieves great spiritual heights as we see in the lives of saints like Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross and numerous unknown believers who had mystical experiences. Considering mysticism in various religions, Parrinder notes: "... the religious experience of the ordinary believer is in the same class as that of the mystic; the difference is one of degree but not of kind."³⁰ Not all contemplating people are mystics, but contemplation with deep divine experiences elevates one to the state of mysticism.

The two works of Chavara³¹ provide us ample instances of his mystical experiences through simple method of meditation and he himself formulated it saying, "Meditation is a free and friendly colloquy with God... For, if it is a conversation with God, it presupposes a friendship with God. When friends sit close to each other, they find enough topics to talk about without cessation. If there

²⁹See CWC, *Atmanutapam*, 10.

³⁰G. Parrinder, *Mysticism in the World Religion*, New York: Ebsco, 1976, 23.

³¹See *Compuntion of the Soul* and *The Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*.

is love, conversation goes unlimited.” Chavara’s definition highlights three important elements: friendship, conversation, and love between God and the devotee. He uses different words to show how a true devotee is close to God, namely *chernnu* (joined), *onnichu* (together), *onnichirunnu* (seated together), to express intimacy or unity with God. This unity comes from deeper friendship, conversation and love. By this usage, he emphasizes the genuine and stable relationship of God and man.

In his *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, Chavara presents to us three progressive stages of God-experience that he experienced: seeing (*darsan*), abiding or staying (*vasikkal*) and loving conversation (*sallapikal*). This moment of experience is often compared to the transfiguration experience of the disciples described in the gospel.

4.1. Seeing: *Darsanam*

For Chavara, *seeing* is the intense perception of the presence of God the Father. Sometimes, this perception is the result of his active and intense gaze at the tabernacle. He describes the appearance of God the Father and the gaze of a soul with the image of the prodigal son (Lk 15:1ff): “Behold! my bounteous Father seated on His throne before the tabernacle in the chapel.”³² In the light of the intense awareness of the presence of the Lord and his own unworthiness, he laments his shortcomings in the following way:

Oh, it is long time since I saw the beautiful face of my Father.
 Oh my soul! See the numerous hired servants in Your Father’s
 place...
 Seeing them why should you be troubled in heart?...
 Have a look at the Father’s palace and the mansions therein
 with their graceful high walls.
 Don’t you see a movement at the door!

In the subsequent expressions of his feelings, he also speaks of beholding the face of the crucified Christ. Each of the wounds of Jesus, he felt, telling him stories of love and sacrifice.

4.2. Staying: *Vasam*

In the intensity of his experience, Chavara has a similar feeling of Peter at the transfiguration of Jesus; he speaks of abiding (*vasam*) with Jesus.

³²*Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 3.

Peter said: "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah" (see Mt 17:4; Mk 9:5; Lk 9:33). To the question posed by the Psalmist 'who shall enter into the house and stay', Chavara's response is significant: God will not stay in the heart of a sinner because God is holy. The One who comes to stay must be given a dwelling worthy of him. Similarly, if you want to stay in love you must sit in love. You must sit facing the other. This abiding is similar to the posture of Mary at the feet of Jesus, listening to his words of life (see Lk 10:39). She is immersed in the presence of Jesus and has forgotten everything else. With utmost concentration, the devotee sits at the feet of her Master and picks up every word that her master says and copies them down in her heart. It is at the feet of the Master that one finds silence and concentration, the characteristic features of a true *bhakta* in India.

4.3. Speaking: *Sallapam*

Sallapam (speaking, talking) in the spiritual literature of Chavara refers to the genuine talk between friends. *The Colloquies* of Chavara is a collection of his *sallapam* with Jesus, his friend. He bases his reflections on various episodes from the Gospel, like the thief who was crucified at the right hand side of Jesus, the man without a wedding garment at the banquet, the prodigal son, etc. Seeing Jesus on the cross, the thief made a genuine acknowledgement of his mistakes in the following words: "for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong" (Lk 23:41b). With great humility, Chavara looks at himself in the place of the thief and makes this prayer: "Speak, O Lord, to my soul also that I shall be with you in the paradise of Your grace. Sustain me in your grace and forgive me my sins."³³ Chavara reaffirms several times the necessity of the great virtue of humility in our prayers. For instance, he pointed out that the lack of humility to ask for a garment, denied the man a place in banquet hall (see Mt 22:11-12). Through the parable of the prodigal son, God is presented as our *appan* (see Rom 8:15)³⁴ loving Father and as children we are free to ask Him what we need.

³³*Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 8.

³⁴*Appan* is a vernacular word similar to the word 'abba'.

5. Conclusion

We have tried to have a comprehensive picture of Chavara's mystical life in the Indian perspective of spirituality. In this respect of all described aspects above what we have come across regarding the life of St. Chavara we find a unique Indian mystical saint. His literary works, namely the poetical and spiritual works stand as great sources of his own God-experiences. These works stand not only as literary works but also as means of transforming a literary world to a spiritual world. In short, from all that has been said we can legitimately affirm that St. Chavara was a mystic born and brought up in the Indian spiritual context. His life was a means and source of translating the Christian spiritual values in accordance to the Indian society. For that his life and personality is very unique even today.

BOOK REVIEW

Thomas Mampra, *Chavara Retreat*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2018, Pages 91, Price Rs. 100.

Thomas Mampra, the author of the book *Chavara Retreat*, has designed it as a five day personal or group retreat programme. He has used for it mainly the selected parts of the life and charism of St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara, the CMI-CMC founder. Although the general theme of the retreat is "Passion for Christ, Passion for Humanity" (Introduction), the focus of each of the five days is differently placed as (1) self-awareness, (2) prophetic role, (3) commitment, (4) conversion and reconciliation, and (5) priest of God and servant of His people respectively (Foreword).

The book follows the format of three talks a day for five days, with a rather long introductory talk and a short conclusion. Besides, the format includes biblical readings for each day's Eucharistic celebration as well as a few points for group discussion (*satsang*) as part of the retreat.

In his Introduction, the author mentions three main contexts that have contributed to the specific nature and themes of the retreat: (1) declaration of the year 2014 as the year of consecrated life to celebrate the golden jubilee of the promulgation of *Perfectae Caritatis*, the decree on the Renewal of Religious Life by Vatican II, (2) the canonization of the Founder of the CMI-CMC on 23 November 2014 and (3) the call of the CMI General Synaxis 37 (2014) with its focus on the renewal of prophetic and communitarian life and global mission.

Chavara Retreat seems to be a climax of Thomas Mampra's own personal journey, striving to be an excellent religious leader of the CMI community at different levels such as the Rector of the Major Seminary of the Congregation, as Provincial Superior and as the Prior General of the Congregation. In a lively and personal style, with stories, examples and anecdotes here and there, he leads the readers to the life and spirituality of St. Chavara. He explains that the central point of this spirituality is the 'divine sonship of man'.

According to the author, St. Chavara believed that this New Testament theme of divine sonship/daughtership was not properly understood and appreciated by the Malabar Christians for various reasons. Apart from this basic dimension of Christian life in Chavara's

spirituality, which urged him always to serve all people without reserve and discrimination, there are also other salient features of his spirituality, which emerge from his life and work on the one hand, and from his spiritual and literary compositions on the other. The author has identified them as (1) Eucharistic devotion, (2) devotion to the Holy Family, (3) deep sense of justice, kindness and forgiveness, and (4) ardent love for the church and its unity (pages 68-73).

I am delighted to warmly recommend this volume to anyone, especially to those devotees of St. Chavara who have a genuine interest in spiritual renewal and wish him/her a refreshing 'Chavara spiritual experience'.

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