

HERALD **OF THE EAST**

Dharmaram Journal of Chavara Studies

Volume 15, Issue 2, July-December 2023

SAINT KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA
A CATECHETICAL SCION

Published by

Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram (DVK)

P.O. Dharmaram College

Bengaluru 560029, India

Telephone: +91 80 41 116333; Fax: +91 80 41 116000

Email: dharmaramjournals@gmail.com

www.dharmaramjournals.in; www.dvk.in

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Editorial:	
Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara, a Catechetical Scion	109
<i>Naiju Jose Kalambukattu CMI</i>	
Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara, the Catechist of the 19 th Century	115
<i>Jacob Marangattu CMI</i>	
Saint Kuriakose Elias Chāvāra, an Exemplary Liturgical Catechist	145
<i>Maryann Madhavathu CMC</i>	
Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara, the Catechetist	161
<i>Anto Amarnad CMI</i>	
Family Catechesis in the <i>Chavarul</i>	175
<i>Ann Mary Madavanakkad CMC</i>	
Kuriakose Elias Chavara of the Holy Family: A Pastor with the Sense of Mystery and the Experience of the Divine	197
<i>Paulachan Kochappilly CMI</i>	
Kuriakose Elias Chavara: A True Son of the Church, Part II	217
<i>Jossy Maria CMC</i>	
Writings of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara	241
Book Reviews	243

Editorial

**SAINT KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA
A CATECHETICAL SCION**

Naiju Jose Kalambukattu CMI
Editor-in-Chief

Catechesis is one of the most significant pastoral activities and responsibilities of the Church, for it is intrinsically and integrally related to all the aspects of the life of the Church. Catechesis is basically a ministry of the Word of God and therefore Sacred Scripture is its soul, source, and inspiration. Sacred Tradition, Sacred Liturgy, and the Magisterium also are the principal sources of catechesis. It has rich resource from the martyrs, blessed and saints who were catechists, the life of the faith formator or the catechist lived in accordance with the Gospel, and the whole creation that manifests God's glory. Catechesis is a gift and a task to build up the Church.

In the early Church, catechesis meant the instruction given to the catechumens who were preparing themselves to receive the sacraments of initiation. In the second and third centuries, the word catechesis became identified with the preparation of the adult candidate for baptism and eucharist and with the post-baptismal instruction of the neophyte in the mysteries of faith. The greatest catechetical homilies and treatises of the prominent Fathers of the Church like Cyril of Jerusalem, Theodore of Mopsuestia, John Chrysostom, Ambrose of Milan and St Augustine are brilliant illustrations of mystagogical reflection on the sacramental experience; and they guided the neophytes to the mystery of Christ and led them to transformation in and through the participation in the Sacred Liturgy, for Liturgy initiates the participants into a living faith and lead them to the maturity of faith through full and actual participation. Experience as its keynote, mystagogy led the newcomer into the experience of the mystery of Christ, especially to the paschal mystery. With the decline of the catechumenate in the fourth and fifth centuries,

the catechetical situation shifted from adult initiation to the baptism of infants, from pre-baptismal to post-baptismal instruction, and from a catechesis out of a biblical and liturgical context to a formation derived primarily from a Christian environment.

Pope Pius X initiated the Modern Catechetical Movement, and he restored catechesis to an important position in the pastoral life of the Church. The Second Vatican Council defined catechesis as a ministry of the Word.¹ Catechesis is understood as instruction in the way of the Lord or oral instruction to hand on the deposit of faith. Pope Paul VI stated that the purpose of catechesis is to develop in believers a living, explicit and active faith enlightened by instruction.² Church's pastoral concern for catechesis has been expressed time and again. There has been catechetical renewal since Vatican II, and they are General Catechetical Directory to systematize the teachings of Vatican II for catechesis (1971), *Catechesi Tradendae* (1979), the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992), General Directory for Catechesis (1997), Directory for Catechesis in response to the New Evangelization, disaffiliation, globalization, digital culture (2020), and the publication of other national, regional and diocesan catechisms.

Pope John Paul II indicates the primary object of catechesis as the 'mystery of Christ' and exhorts all catechists to transmit the teaching and life of Jesus by their instructions, not as a body of abstract truths but the "communication of the living mystery of God."³ The basic objective of catechesis according to *Catechesi Tradendae* (CT) is to initiate the hearers to the fullness of Christian life, and therefore catechesis is life oriented than mere understanding oriented (CT 21). The catechesis must lead the faithful to the fullness of Christian life or must be life-oriented, concerned with the process of growth in faith. Therefore, the catechists must be enchanted by Christ and their mission is to present Christ to others by faith-filled life-witness, for the

¹ *Dei Verbum*, 24. https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html; accessed on 19.09.2023.

² Paul VI, *Christus Dominus*, 14. https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651028_christus-dominus_en.html; accessed on 20.09.2023.

³ John Paul II *Catechesi Tradendae*, 7. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_16101979_catechesi-tradendae.html; accessed on 19.09.2023.

conformity of their lives completely to Christ is their authenticity and authority to transmit the faith.⁴ As Pope Francis affirms, "Every catechist must be a witness to the faith, a teacher and mystagogue, a companion and pedagogue, who teaches for the Church."⁵ The vocation to catechesis springs from the sacrament of Baptism and hence every baptized one is a catechist and has to employ his or her God given gifts to edify the Church, and the task is to proclaim the message of faith, to inspire and to lead to worship and prayer, and to foster community.

As an authentic and responsible catechist, Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara dedicated his entire life as a continuous sacrifice to inspire, motivate and assist the faithful in every way possible to know, love and serve God. He always maintained a childlike relationship with God addressing him *appan*. Chavara kept the memory of God alive in him and was able to revive and revamp it in the people of God. He cherished a burning desire to form Christ (Gal 4:19) in the people of God in general and in the new Christians in particular. His zeal for the Lord enabled him to be passionate to strive better in multifaced ministry and never to give up regardless of how hopeless a situation appeared to be. Chavara as a catechetical scion made sure that the catechesis was based on the Sacred Scripture, Tradition, Liturgy and the Magisterium or the teaching authority and life of the Church. His fidelity to the past and responsibility for the present prompted him to carry out the ministry of catechesis as a mission of the Church in the world. As a genuine catechist, by his creative hard work, Chavara made outstanding and indispensable contribution to the spread of the faith and of the Church in the 19th century.

The present issue of the *Herald of the East* examines the various dimensions of Catechesis and Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara as a Catechetical Scion. The volume has six articles and five of them are directly related to the theme.

Jacob Marangatt in his article observes that the world of catechesis has undergone much change in the understanding of its content and

⁴ Merlin R. Ambrose, "Lay Ministry of Catechist in Light of the Apostolic Letter *Antiquum Ministerium*," *VJTR* 87, 6 (June 2023), 448.

⁵ Francis, *Antiquum Ministerium*, 6. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20210510_antiquum-ministerium.html; accessed on 19.09.2023.

method. Delineating various catechetical methods, he affirms the aim of catechesis as to reach the people to the maturity of faith. Presenting Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara as a catechist who lived ahead of his time, Marangatt remarks that at the time of Chavara, the World Catechetical Movement had not taken birth, but we see Chavara adopting catechetical methods which will be endorsed much later by the World Catechetical Movement. It shows his prophetic vision and catechetical wisdom. The article attempts to highlight how Chavara proposed a catechetical pedagogy that comprises all the essential elements of Catechetics.

Maryann Madhavathu in her article underscores catechesis as one of the primary tasks of the Church and liturgical catechesis as mystagogy. The article unfolds Chavara's efforts to make the faithful involve in the living mystery of Christ. Liturgical catechesis strives to lead the people of God to maturity of faith through full and active participation in the liturgy. Catechists not only teach but also share their faith and guide the students to live their faith. Chavara was a great catechist who taught the Church in Kerala the essence of faith, the paschal mystery of Christ through his life and ministry. Maryann discusses Chavara's life in the paschal rhythm of dying and rising, the way he spread the divine wisdom he had obtained from the mystery of Christ, how he prepared the faithful for mystagogical catechesis and how he became an exemplary catechist.

Anto Amarnad presents Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara as a catechetist, an expert in Catechetics. Saint Chavara's inspiring personality, various ministries, writings, and the virtues and values he practiced introduce him as an eminent catechetist. He played a key role in transmitting the faith that transforms the persons and community. Saint Chavara introduced family prayer, forty-hour adoration, annual retreat for the lay people, and propagated popular devotions and pious practices to nourish the faith of the people of God and wrote volumes for their catechetical formation. According to Amarnad, his fidelity and devotion to the Church enabled him to be committed to God and His people, and to read the signs of the times and respond to them creatively and prophetically.

Ann Mary in her article delineates the Family Catechesis as a dynamic and transformative approach to religious education that places the family at the centre of faith formation. As the family is the cradle of the formation of children and the best catechesis is done in

the family ambience, Family Catechesis recognizes the vital role the parents and guardians play as the primary educators of their children in matters of faith. According to Ann Mary, the *Chavarul* of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara is one of the significant catechetical tools, for it assists the families to lead a Theo-centric life following a love-centred ethics. The present article explores the various dimensions of the definition of family given in the *Chavarul* which embraces all the aspects required for a harmonious family life.

Paulachan Kochappilly in the article explores the sense of Mystery and the divine experience of Kuriakose Elias Chavara of the Holy Family, who treaded the path of the Fathers of the Church. As excellent catechists with a strong base of liturgical texts, the Fathers had imbibed the sense of Mystery and were imbued with the divine experience. Chavara's writings attest to his outstanding reach of the Mystery in his spiritual experience. The experience of the ineffable Mystery of the Eucharist shaped the vision and mission of Chavara. Devotion to the Eucharistic Lord springing from the celebration of the Holy Eucharist was unparalleled in his life. According to Kochappilly, Chavara's writing, *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, is flecked with the incredible experience of the Mystery and his unworthiness to approach the Eucharistic Lord. In the present article, he discusses the sense of Mystery and the divine experience of Chavara under three headings mutually interrelated: Sense of Mystery and Sense of Ministry; Experience of the Divine and Empowering of the Human, and Sense of Mercy and the Pastoral Ministry.

Jossy Maria in the present article, which is the second part of the same, depicts Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara as a true son of the mother Church, for his love and ministries revealed his genuine love to the Church that he had cherished in his heart. She discusses the role of St Chavara as a social reformer of Kerala and his various contributions for the transformation of the society, especially in the field of education. In the nineteenth century, Kerala society had undergone major transformations by various socio-religious reforms. According to Jossy Maria, Chavara by his initiatives could create an awareness among the faithful that the Church is a servant of the humankind, irrespective of caste, creed, color, or nationality; and his instructions had contributed much to the families to become well-knit units of the society.

In the footsteps of the Fathers of the Church who were excellent catechists, Saint Chavara, a versatile genius and catechist of great merit, made remarkable contribution in the field of catechesis to build up the Church and to proclaim and transmit the faith keeping it inviolate. Now that Saint Chavara invites and inspires us to continue the work, it entails a profound personal experience of Christ, attentiveness to the voice of the Spirit and growth in faith-relation to God to share the experience to others, which in turn demands the incessant nurturing of the aptitude and ability to communicate the Gospel in the most effective way by credible life witness.

SAINT KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA THE CATECHIST OF THE 19th CENTURY*

Jacob Marangattu CMI[♦]

Abstract: The world of catechesis has undergone much change from the time of the Catechism of the Council of Trent, which formulated the doctrinal approach to Catechesis. Subsequently, different catechetical approaches were proposed and practiced each in its own way contributing to something new and radical to the catechetical praxis. At the time of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara, the world catechetical movement had not taken birth. To our astonishment, we see Chavara adopting catechetical methods which will be endorsed much later by the world catechetical movement. It shows his prophetic vision and catechetical wisdom. The present article attempts to highlight how Chavara proposed a catechetical pedagogy that comprises all the essential elements of Catechetics.

Keywords: Catechist, Catechesis, Montessori method, Munich method, Kerygmatic approach, salvation of the soul, salvation history, Magisterium, caste system, *Malpanate*, Roccas schism, reunion

* This is a slightly edited version of the article published in Abraham M. Antony & Jose Varickasseril, ed., *All Things to All People*, Shillong: Vendrame Institute Publications, 2020.

♦ **Jacob Marangattu CMI** belongs to the Saint Chavara Vice Province, Bhavnagar, Gujarat. He has his Licentiate and Doctoral Degree in Theology with specialization in Catechetics and Youth Pastoral from the Salesian Pontifical University, Rome. He has served the Province as Regional Superior when it was a Region and later as its Vicar Provincial. He has served the Diocese of Rajkot as its Vicar General and Chancellor. He was parish priest in different places, including, the Cathedral parish of Rajkot and the Syro-Malabar Parish in Rome, Italy. He has served as Director of Chavara Institute for Indian and Interreligious Studies (CIIS), Rome for three years. He was the chief Organizer of two National Seminars held at Rajkot in 2010 and 2022. Currently, he is Spiritual Director at Samanvaya Theology College, Bhopal, and continues to be the chief Editor of *Third Millennium: Indian Journal of Evangelization*. Email: jmarcmi@gmail.com

movement, Catholic communion, Catechetical Pedagogy, *pidiyari* and *kettuthengu*

1. Introduction

Catechesis is a ministry in the Church which can be defined as education in faith. The two poles of this process are education and faith. Therefore, the process of catechesis depends upon what we understand by education and faith. We know that historically both of these concepts and their praxis have undergone much evolution. Accordingly, the process of catechesis, too, has undergone evolution in the understanding of its content and method.

Earlier, education was understood as a one-way process of transmitting knowledge from a teacher to students. It was mainly explanation or narration by the teacher to the students, in which students passively listened to everything the teacher did and everything the teacher said. Students didn't need to be active in the class except listen to what the teacher taught. Later, from the 19th century, the methodology of teaching was improved by incorporating psychological principles of growth of children. A three-step process was introduced into the process of education, such as presentation, explanation and application, so as to make the learning process attractive and more effective. Also space was allowed for the children to learn by 'doing'. The Montessori method in education is one of the fruits of such a development. Still later, the method of teaching underwent drastic change by the adoption of the inductive method in place of the deductive method. Education became more experiential with teachers making use of stories or anecdotes to introduce the lesson as well as interactions with students. This allowed a kind of freedom from the strict class room settings. It was felt that classes could be taken in particular contexts as necessitated by the nature of the themes under consideration. And in these last decades there has occurred a paradigm shift in the area of education due to the entry of electronic communication media in its process.

In the same way, the concept of faith, too, underwent much evolution and development in history. Earlier, faith was understood as believing in and accepting the divinely revealed truths necessary for the salvation of the soul. These truths were the statements uttered by God or the commands he gave us for our salvation. At a later stage, the Church held that God communicates himself to humanity not only through his words but also his deeds. It meant that faith consisted not only in believing in revealed truths, but also personalizing the signs that God worked in

history, or conforming one's life to God's pedagogy in history. At all these levels, the understanding of faith had nothing to do with human experience. Whether one's neighbour was poor, or oppressed, or marginalized didn't matter in the faith practice of the Catholics. Subsequent developments in biblical studies and theology brought in the importance of human experience in the considerations of faith. The task of faith vis-à-vis the dehumanizing situations, such as, poverty, oppression and marginalization was hotly discussed by re-reading the biblical message and revisiting the Church teachings. The liberational interventions of God in history as well as prophets' denunciation of oppressive structures were brought to the focus of faith and Church's ministries were reinterpreted through the angle of liberation. Faith could not be divorced from its task to serve for the integral development of people.

Thus, incorporating the developments that took place in the understanding of education and faith, catechesis, too, underwent historical evolution. In the first centuries of the Christian era, catechesis consisted in orally transmitting prayers, knowledge of sacraments and commandments. At a later stage, catechesis began to be considered the transmission of God's revelation. Learning and keeping to memory these truths, or doctrines, were considered essential for salvation. Catechism books were prepared in order to assure uniformity, clarity and precision of the contents. But still, it was a one-way process of teaching of doctrines to the students. Later, methodological improvements were brought into catechesis as we saw above, by incorporating the psychological principle of learning and getting pupils to be creative using their hands and thus to learn by doing, which in catechetical circles is known as the Munich method.

Still, the content of catechesis remained the same, that is, the doctrines to be believed and memorized for the sake of salvation of souls. It was felt that this kind of learning took away the joy of Christian living from the life of children. Instead, the proclamation and explanation of salvation history as contained in the Bible was found to be ideal for catechesis. Such proclamation of biblical events would not only retain the interest of the children, but also give the entire message God addressed to humanity in history. This new approach that surfaced in the catechetical circles in 1930s in the German speaking areas came to be known as the Kerygmatic approach. Thus catechesis became the

proclamation and teaching of the Bible. In all these stages catechesis was making use of the deductive method.

Now, a new problematic situation was hit upon. The proclamation of the salvation history was blind to the actual life situations of the addressees of catechesis, their hunger, or poverty or marginalised situations. Can catechesis be blind to the sufferings of our fellow brethren? Such reflections brought in the human-centred approach in catechesis, which is also known as the experiential or anthropological approach. It gave way for the inductive method in catechetical teaching that is to say, catechetical considerations should begin from the actual human situations and lead to universal and general applications. This new approach came forcefully in the catechetical circles from 1950s¹.

Today, catechesis is understood as the sum total of all that these approaches, prevalent in different stages in history, wanted to convey. Catechesis is the process that transmits authentic faith to the baptized people. Faith becomes authentic when it touches the entire human person, his/her body and soul, heart and mind, and the living conditions. Thus the aim of catechesis is to reach the people to maturity of faith life, the stage where faith animates a person's intellectual life, attitudes, relationships and his/her activities. In other words, faith becomes authentic and mature only when it becomes the guiding principle of a person's cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions. Catechesis is considered to be the tool to bring in this development in the life of a person as well as the Christian community.

The article explains the catechetical pedagogy Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara (1805-1871) employed in the 19th century for the faith education of the Christian community of Kerala and how his mission sowed the seeds of a renaissance in the Kerala society that was lying deep down in the evils of illiteracy, underdevelopment, and mutual exclusion due to the widespread caste practice.

¹ To learn more about the development of catechetical approaches in history, see, Cyril de Souza, *Catechesis for India Today: An Appraisal of the Catechetical Proposal of D.S. Amalorpavadass*, Bangalore: Khristu Jyoti Publications, 1994, 15-20; Louis Erdozain, "The Evolution of Catechetics: A Survey of Six International Study Weeks in Catechetics," in Michael Warren, ed., *Sourcebook for Modern Catechetics*, Winona, Minnesota: Christian Brothers Publications, 1983, 86-109.

2. Chavara: A Catechist who lived ahead of his Time

When we go through the life and mission of Chavara, one amazing factor strikes our minds. He lived in the 19th century when the catechetical praxis was still at the doctrinal level. The Kerygmatic and the anthropological approaches were not even in the minds of the Church Magisterium. It is here that we need to evaluate the contributions Chavara made to the field of catechesis. His focus was on the Kerygmatic as well as anthropological approaches as we shall see below. That means he anticipated the future developments that happened in the catechetical field in the Church. One should say that he was attentive to all the four phases of development of catechesis. He was keen on giving correct doctrines in a way attractive to his listeners through the profuse use of stories, anecdotes, poetry and imageries as his works reveal. In his work, *Atmanuthapam*, he narrates the whole New Testament story in poetic form. It also crosses over to the times of the Apostles and even the Assumption of our Blessed Mother. But simultaneously he heard the silent cry of his own people as well as the society that was doomed in ignorance and underdevelopment caused by the prevailing caste system as well as lack of sufficient infrastructure for development. He devised many schemes, almost all of them, of a pioneering nature to bring in the Good News of knowledge and development to the people. His zeal and compassion for the people who were then a people without shepherd led him to a series of pioneering activities that put the foundation for the renewal of the Church and the renaissance of Kerala society. It is to be noted here that the people whom history acknowledges as renaissance leaders of Kerala entered public life after the life time of Chavara and they were all treading the paths traced by him.²

3. Brief Biography

Coming from an agrarian background, Kuriakose was born in the Chavara family at Kainakary in the parish of Chennamkary in the then Travancore state, which now forms part of Kerala, India, on February 10, 1805. He was the youngest of the six siblings of the couple Kuriakose and Mariam. Those years there were no public schools in Kerala. The first Government school (elementary) was started in Travancore in 1817.³ The

² M.G.S. Narayanan, "Precursor of Reformist Movements," in John Mannarathara, ed., *The Life and Legacy of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, New Delhi, Bengaluru: Viva Books, 2015, 41.

³ A. Mathias Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Second Edition, Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2020, 43.

only source to receive basic education for the children was what was known as *Kalari*, the village school, where the *Asan* (teacher) taught the children, solo, how to read and write Malayalam, a little of Arithmetic, a little of Sanskrit, Tamil, Astrology, and local medicine, etc., meaning to say, the essentials an individual needed to learn to lead societal life in those days.⁴ The full duration of *Kalari* education was for five years.⁵ When he was five years old, Kuriakose went to *Kalari* and had the basic education for five years.

Simultaneously with his *Kalari* education, he also began to assist at the Eucharistic celebration in his home parish. When he was ten years old, he had a sense of divine call for priesthood. He entered the Pallipuram *Malpanate* under Fr. Thomas Palackal in 1818 when he was 13 years old.⁶

While in the seminary, his parents and the only brother died in an attack of small pox pandemic. Well-meaning relatives and well-wishers advised seminarian Kuriakose to return home and look after the family to continue the family lineage. But young Kuriakose firmly decided to continue the lineage of the priests of the Lord rather than the Chavara family of Kainakary. In 1829, he was ordained priest. As a newly ordained priest, he joined Fr Thomas Palackal (1780-1841), his seminary Rector and Fr Thomas Porukara (1800-1846) in their effort to establish the new religious congregation CMI. Thereafter, the Kerala society and the Western missionaries in India saw in him as the Prior of the new congregation, an extra ordinarily zealous priest, combining the spirits of Prophet Elijah and Activist Moses leading his people from progress to progress in the spiritual as well as societal life. He remained on the forefront of practical action to form Christian families in faith and morals and to be the vanguard of social transformation through universal education for people of all communities and other developmental schemes. In short, his life was a struggle to bring in the light of holiness, learning and knowledge to all as the portal of spiritual, social and economic development. In 1871 this holy soul left this world for his

⁴ P. Govindappilla, *Charitrathenayicha oral*, in *SukruthamSmara* (Malayalam), A Beth Rauma Publication, 2012, 51

⁵ A. Mathias Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 43.

⁶ Malpanates were officially suppressed in 1854 by Vicar Apostolic Bernardine Becinelli and seminaries were established in course of time at Vazhakulam, Pulinkunnu, Elthuruthu and Mannanam. Cf A. Mathias Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 51.

eternal reward. In 1986 he was beatified as the first blessed from India. In 2014 he was canonized a saint in the universal Church.

4. Profile of a Catechist

A catechist has, primarily, to be a person who is fully evangelized by undergoing a life of formation in Gospel values in one's own self. We may enumerate a few essential features of a catechist and how these are seen reflected in the life of Chavara.

4.1. Love of the Church

The Church was at the heart of Chavara's thoughts. In a circular letter he wrote in 1843, he says, "Man the crown of creation, and is created by God of infinite goodness. The moment he is born, death too is born. To cross over this sea of death, the voyage is really difficult and perilous. In order to cross over the sea, we need a sailor who is really an expert, familiar with the route and who, at the same time, is capable of withstanding every obstacle along the route. We need also a heavy anchor, which would resist every tempest in the sea and protect the ship from being caught amidst the billows. We need also a strong vessel, strong enough to resist the tempests in the sea which gives guarantee of safety and protection to passengers. The Church is this vessel."⁷

Fr. Leopold, Chavara's spiritual father all through his life, testifies to his love of the Mother Church. The former says that an ardent love of the Church and true devotion to the Holy Father were the most outstanding virtues found in Chavara. Fr. Leopold acknowledges, "He had an ardent desire to spread the light of the Holy Catholic Church in all directions; he was grieved to the point of shedding tears when he heard the trials and persecution of the Church and eagerly longed to see the days of her triumph. Whenever he happened to hear the news about the Pope he was always moved to tears, either of sorrow or of joy."⁸

The love of the Church was the motivating factor that pushed Chavara into the pool of activities when he saw the sorry state of the Christian community of his time. Such a miserable condition was caused largely by ecclesial turmoil of the 19th century. Chavara cherished in his heart a very comprehensive plan for the overall reform and development of this Church. He knew that the Church alone cannot be pushed forward without largely bringing in reform in the secular society. So he wanted to give birth to a spiritually mature Church to counter the

⁷ A. Mathias Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 377.

⁸ A. Mathias Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 450.

problems of herself and the society in an intelligent way. To this effect he devised a multi-pronged approach of the renewal of the Church.

Love of the Church was a leading ideal in his life. Even in trying times, he abided by the decisions of his ecclesiastical superiors. Even as the canonical recognition of the newly founded religious congregation was prolonging indefinitely,⁹ he didn't show unrest or displeasure nor did he pressurise the authorities, but took everything as the will of God coming through the Mother Church.¹⁰ Finally, when the canonical recognition was granted, it was not as the members expected, instead, they were affiliated to the Carmelite Family, by providing them Carmelite rules and constitutions. Chavara saw it as Providence and he fully abided by the decision of the Church.

The unity of the Church was a cause dear to him. His efforts for the reunion of the breakaway Jacobite faction as well as his fight against the Roccas schism are two shining landmarks that loudly speak of his love of the Mother Church. The reunion movement was to bring back the Jacobite faction into the Catholic communion under the Pope. These efforts largely spearheaded by Chavara and later his disciples were partially fructified in 1930 when Bishop Mar Ivanios of the Orthodox faction embraced Catholicism together with a good number of his followers which resulted in the creation of the Syro-Malankara Rite.¹¹ The Roccas schism was a major threat to the Catholic Church in Kerala caused by Bishop Roccas, who illegally entered Kerala from Chaldea at the invitation of some of the eastern looking clergy of Kerala and began to bring the parishes in Kerala under his jurisdiction. Failing in all the efforts to put a halt to the march of Roccas and his supporters, the Vicar Apostolic wrote to Rome to appoint Chavara as the Vicar General of the Malabar Christians in order to contain the grave danger of a possible schism in the Church. Chavara, through his holy and diplomatic tactics, got Roccas out of India without in any way causing damage to his popularity or personal dignity. He showed extreme kindness to the

⁹ Though the CMI Congregation was founded in the year 1831, canonical recognition for the congregation was obtained only in 1955.

¹⁰ Lukose Vithuvattickal, ed., *Letters of Chavara*, VI/4, *Chavara's Testament to the members of the Congregation*, Mannanam 1982, 98-103.

¹¹ There are three *sui juris* Churches in India: The Latin Church, the Syro-Malabar Church and the Syro-Malankara Church. The Syro-Malankara Rite was created in 1930 so that those who reunited with Catholicism from the Orthodox Church could continue their Antiochean traditions.

intruder Prelate as well as his supporters. Chavara persuaded Rome to revoke the excommunication invoked upon him.

Yet, though Chavara fought to finish the Roccas schism and got Bishop Roccas out of India, he (Chavara), too, was of the firm opinion that the Churches in Kerala, that is, not only Syrians but also Latins, needed native Bishops to lead them. To this effect he wrote a letter to the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of Faith (Propaganda Fide) in 1869 explaining the truth of the sincere and just desire of the people and requesting the Sacred Congregation to appoint two bishops, one for Syrians and one for Latins. Chavara wrote that such a move would diffuse the possibility of future troubles as well as enthrone the Jacobite faction to come back to Catholicism.¹²

Chavara's love of the Church and the outstanding virtues shining in him were recorded in a letter Vicar Apostolic Bernardino of St. Therese wrote to the Prefect of the Propaganda Fide informing him of the appointment of Chavara as the Vicar General.¹³ The Vicar Apostolic described Chavara in the letter as "a man truly Christian, virtuous, very prudent, very well-versed in Sacred Scriptures, most proficient in Syriac language, who in this circumstance with his deeds proved himself to be very faithful to the Catholic Religion and to the Holy See..."¹⁴ In the same letter the Vicar Apostolic had also made another suggestion to the Prefect and the Holy See to consecrate Chavara as a Co-adjutor Bishop "even if this highly commented and proposed person lacks the necessary knowledge for this position, nor can he have, being from this country, the chest (courage) that is required in a bishop in such particular circumstances, but supported by the Vicar Apostolic as the vine leans on the elm, and by the missionaries he will certainly bear better fruits than those of the Chaldean Patriarch ... because he is good, prudent and obedient and also fascinating in preaching."¹⁵ Chavara's humble ways are projected, again, in the next observation made by the Vicar Apostolic in the letter. "... he would not accept such (episcopal) character and

¹² Lukose Vithuvattickal, ed., *Letters of Chavara*, II/5, p. 33-35.

¹³ Letter of Vicar Apostolic Bernardino to the Prefect of Propaganda Fide informing him of the Appointment of Chavara as Vicar General, in Paul Pallath, *Vicariate Apostolic and the St. Thomas Christians in 1867: Kuriakose Elias Chavara Unworthy of Episcopate?*, Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2018, 18-21.

¹⁴ Paul Pallath, *Vicariate Apostolic and the St. Thomas Christians in 1867*, 20.

¹⁵ Paul Pallath, *Vicariate Apostolic and the St. Thomas Christians in 1867*, 20.

dignity without (having given) a precept, as I had to give him, in order to make him accept the office of the vicar general."¹⁶

4.2. Sense of Conversion

The beginning of holiness is the sense of conversion. The seeds of divinity can grow only in a soul that longs for God. In his most voluminous work, *Atmanuthapam*, we find Chavara in a poetic way articulating a sense of repentance over some of the events and situations of his childhood life. We need not take them as real sins committed, but these are the perspectives of a holy soul which counts even minor cases as sinful. He narrated that at the *Kalari* the children were from different religious communities and there were occasions and contexts which were not akin to his upbringing. He said that he might have imitated the actions of those children, who were mostly non-Christians. When he remembered those days he felt so much of compunction and he stated that till he joined the *Kalari* he moved only as fitting to the holy eyes of Jesus. Moving with those children, he might have become ungrateful to God. He says that what he saw in the *Kalari* were causes for sin, such as, playing without modesty, walking naked, words and actions not becoming for a child of Jesus.¹⁷

In most of his works he expressed the compunction of his soul. In his chronicles, he often lamented his faults and shortcomings. He asked pardon to his co-religious. He asked pardon also to the nuns at Koonammavu.¹⁸ At the beginning of *Dhyanasallapangal*, the saint after recollecting the advice his mother had given him, that is, to keep away from pride and self-complacency, humbled himself saying that he was

¹⁶ Paul Pallath, *Vicariate Apostolic and the St. Thomas Christians in 1867*, 20. However, Chavara was not made a bishop because some objections were raised from the missionaries. Paul Pallath, after analysing the letters written by the missionaries citing reasons, such as, inexperience in governance, insufficient knowledge of morals, advanced age, indisposition and extreme weakness of body, against the choice of Chavara for episcopacy, concludes, "The real reason for the opposition of the missionaries to the consecration of a native bishop was their desire to preserve the episcopacy and jurisdiction over the St Thomas Christians exclusively for themselves." Cf. Paul Pallath, *Vicariate Apostolic and the St. Thomas Christians in 1867: Kuriakose Elias Chavara Unworthy of Episcopate?*, Bengaluru, Dharmaram Publications, 2018, 118 .

¹⁷ *Atmanuthapam*, slokas, 92-112, in Z.M. Muzhoor (ed), *Complete Works of Chavara, Vol II, Literary Works*, Mannanam, 1981.

¹⁸ Lukose Vithuvattickal, ed., *Letters of Chavara*, VII/2, Letter to the Sisters of Koonammavu Convent, p. 106-107.

unworthy to reach high degrees of prayer and sanctity, because he was a great sinner with a heart impure and opaque without the virtues of cleanliness and modesty.¹⁹

A repentant person is a humble person. Chavara's humility can be measured from the questions he asked himself, "For is it because of my power and skill that I did things whatsoever? How is it that you came hither? Who called me from home? How did I become a priest? How could I join the community and become a member of the congregation? Why should anyone address me as prior? Do I deserve any one of these favours? The answer is: "Not at all to be sure".²⁰ His extreme humility made him identify himself with the prodigal son of the parable. In *Dhyanasallapangal*, he made a long meditation on the parable posing himself as the prodigal.

4.3. Depth of Faith

Chavara was a person, we may say, who walked not by the eyesight but by faith. He had such a strong faith in the Providence of God. There were numerous incidents in his life, where he initiated activities without resources in hand.²¹ His firm belief was God would provide it. And God did provide them. He also taught his people to have such a strong faith in God. When he instructed the people to collect funds for the future establishment of a Confraternity of Happy Death, he instructed the people to collect as much as they could and "God would provide the rest."²²

Chavara had a very childlike relationship with God. God the Father as well as Jesus, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity were for him *Appan*. He used the term *Appan* 31 times in *Dhyanasallapangal*. *Appan* is the word that shows the most intimate relationship between children and the father in a family. In *Dhyanasallapangal*, he stated that he couldnot call God by any other name.²³ He also compared God's unparalleled love to the love of a mother. Just as a mother awakens the

¹⁹ Z.M. Muzhoor, ed, *Complete Works of Chavara, Vol II, Literary Works*, Mannanam, 1981, 13.

²⁰ Z.M. Muzhoor, ed., *Complete Works of Chavara, Vol II, Literary Works*, Mannanam, 1981, 13

²¹ A. Mathias Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 429.

²² Lukose Vithuvattickal, ed., *Complete Works of Chavara, Vol IV, Letters*, Mannanam, 1986, 160.

²³ Z.M. Muzhoor, ed., *Complete Works of Chavara, Vol III, Spiritual Works*, Cochin, 1981, 17.

sleeping child and gives it breast milk, our loving *Appan* will fulfil all our needs even before asking for them. He moved and did everything trusting in the Providence of God, the logic of which the rationalists cannot understand. He had such an intimate relationship with God that for him prayer was like the intimate conversation among the friends.²⁴

He had great faith in the intercessions of the saints. In *Dhyanasallapangal*, we often find the saint interceding to Saint Teresa of Avila, whom he considered his Mother in faith for graces to pray and meditate well. Similarly, he often invoked the names of Saint Joseph, the Holy Family and Saint Maria Magdalene in his daily prayers.²⁵

His life was guided by the faith in the communion of saints. Just as he prayed to the souls in heaven he reminded the people to be conscious of those in the purgatory who needed the prayers of the living. Through many anecdotes he taught the people on the need for praying the souls in purgatory.²⁶

Atmanuthapam, in its earlier verses, gives expression to his faith. He firmly believed in the total graciousness of God. So he thanked God for all the gifts, physical, intellectual and spiritual, that he possessed. He thanked God for being born with a healthy body without any deformity, for being born from believing and moderately rich parents, he thanked God for the grace of baptism; that he did not die unbaptized; for the priesthood, etc.²⁷ He always believed that whatever he undertook was not his work, but God's own.

A strong faith life was visible in the totality of his life-style. His humble submission to the will of the Superiors,²⁸ his sense of renunciation²⁹ and his forgiving mind are indicators of his sublime faith life. Though his hectic work during the turbulent Church history of the 19th century had earned him some adversaries, he kept nothing against them in his mind. Some of them towards the end of their life was given

²⁴ Z.M. Muzhoor, ed, *Complete Works of Chavara*, Vol III, *Spiritual Works*, 14.

²⁵ Z.M. Muzhoor, ed., *Complete Works of Chavara*, Vol III, *Spiritual Works*, 15, 16.

²⁶ Z.M. Muzhoor, ed., *Complete Works of Chavara*, Vol II, *Literary Works*, 129ff.

²⁷ Z.M. Muzhoor, ed., *Complete Works of Chavara*, Vol II, *Literary Works*, *Atmanuthapam*, slokas 1-44.

²⁸ A. Mathias Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 142-143.

²⁹ A. Mathias Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 424.

asylum in Chavara's monastery itself. Roccas had even threatened his life, but Chavara gave him a decent and dignified sent off!

4.4. Divine Connectedness

The book *Atmanuthapam* reveals to us the man who Chavara was. The book brings to us the inner longings of a mystic. Chavara's desire was to see Jesus and all the mysteries associated with him with his own eyes. He wanted to see the primordial brightness of the Son of Man. He wanted to see the Son of Man in his incarnated form in which he assumed the form of a lowly human being in order to remove the stains of human sin, how the brightness that dwarfs the brightness of the Sun was eclipsed in his human body.

He longed to see how the son of Man spent nine months in the womb of the Virgin. He wanted to see how he in his foetal stage came to Bethlehem as per the decree of Caesar. He longed to see how God became one among us as the word Emmanuel denotes. He wanted to see the parents of Jesus who underwent suffering when they did not find any house for Mary to deliver her son. In this way Chavara narrated the entire mystery of God in poetry and the focus was that he longed to see his loving Jesus with his own eyes in all these dimensions. So intense was his love of God; so strong his urge to be united with him.³⁰

His prayer moments were intense. Meditation was for him a conversation with God. "Bound by His love, just as we converse with our friends, we sit and talk to Jesus Christ, to whom we are betrothed."³¹ During the meditation times, others often saw him intensely hooked on Jesus so much so that he would forget the time to wind up the prayer as the Prior. It was reported that often someone had to nod to him to tell him that the prayer time was up. Tears would run down his cheek as he walked to the refectory at the end of the prayer. Chavara advised his religious daughters to grow in such a divine connectedness. He wrote to the nuns, "I lock up your hearts, in the tabernacle of Jesus, for your sake, I have locked up my heart too there. Stay there until the day of resurrection."³²

³⁰ Z.M. Muzhoor, ed., *Complete Works of Chavara, Vol II, Literary Works, Atmanuthapam*, III, slokas 1- 68.

³¹ Z.M. Muzhoor, ed., *Complete Works of Chavara, Vol III, Spiritual Works*, 14.

³² A. Mathias Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 453.

Having familiarised with the qualities that would make Chavara an effective instrument of catechesis, let us now have a look at the catechetical pedagogy he adopted for the faith formation of the people.

5. Chavara's Catechetical Pedagogy

Catechetical Pedagogy involves various means through which catechesis is imparted. It considers the addresses of catechesis, formation of catechists, approaches to catechesis, its content, the locations where catechesis is imparted, the sources of catechesis, etc. We shall see how Chavara employed these aspects of the catechetical pedagogy.

5.1. Addressees of Catechesis

Who were the people to whom Chavara addressed his message? The insightful reply of the Vicar Apostolic Archbishop Aurelius Stabilini to the founding fathers of the CMI congregation, when they approached him seeking permission for going for hermitage gives an exact picture of the situation of the Catholics of that time. He told them, "If you three who are educated to some extent, go for hermitage, who will be here to teach our people?"³³ The catechetical situation of 19th century Kerala church was pathetic. There was not much training being imparted in matters of spiritual, liturgical, and ecclesial life. One of the reasons for such a state was that the Church of Kerala was left without a unifying leadership. There were different contestants for the leadership of this Apostolic Church now lying divided and mutilated due to many historical reasons. There were mainly two contestants for the leadership of the Church, the Western missionaries, and the Prelates from Persia. Chavara mentioned that just as a magnet is oriented towards the North, his people, his blood relatives in the matter of faith, were always looking to the East and it caused some kind of retardation in their spiritual growth. Therefore, so much of Christian legacy and practice of Christian holiness and values were wanting in this land. And so "this land that received the light of Faith from an Apostle himself (Apostle Thomas) remains barren (*machhi*) to this day and at the same time many lands and people who received the Gospel at a later time have produced many saints."³⁴ As George Nedungatt explains, this Church was practically in a dark age for about thousand years up to the Diamper synod. Nedungatt goes on to explain the condition obtaining in Malabar of

³³ Benoy P. Jacob, "Multifaceted Life of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara," in John Mannarathara, ed., *The Life and Legacy*, New Delhi: Viva Books, 2015, 9. See also, A. Mathias Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 70-71.

³⁴ *Complete Works of Chavara: Nalagamangal*, 1981, p. 172. Free translation.

those days: there were no Bible translations, no biblical institutes, no catechetical institutes, no original publications, no theological contributions, and no person of world class scholarship in the matter of Christian studies. The major reason Fr. Nedungatt attributes to this situation was the umbilical cord relationship this Church wanted to keep with the Chaldean Church. The problems were not with the Chaldean Church, but with the administrative system in force here. The Church was under the Chaldean Bishops, who came once in a while to Kerala. There were long periods of gap without an episcopal head. Worse, these bishops from Chaldea never took to temporal administration, but attended only to sacramental administration. The temporal administration of the Church was carried out by a native priest who was known as Archdeacon, whereas in the West the Church made great strides in all fields, such as evangelization, Church expansion, theological development, publication of books, pastoral practices, catechetical outreach, seminary training, secular education, social service, etc., under able Bishops. It was in fact the Diamper synod that brought the Church under the jurisdiction of Bishops putting a halt to the Archdeacon's administration.³⁵

On the other side, the situation of the society was quite lamentable. Caste system was the rule of life, which divided people into numerous groups of graded inequality. Each caste considered itself superior and maintained a distance from every other. Caste decided everything, one's food, occupation, ownership of land, access to education, dress, habitats, travelling space, etc. Every caste had a dialect of its own, each alien to the other.³⁶ It was an unequal, largely underdeveloped, poor and illiterate society that Chavara had to address. Even to the very few schools that began to be established from 1817 by the Government only high caste people had access. Swami Vivekananda characterised Kerala of those times as a 'mad house' pained by seeing the atrocities perpetrated by the inhuman caste-system.

In short, it was a Church with an ignorant laity and a society of poor and illiterate people that Chavara had to address with his teaching and activities of development.

³⁵ George Nedungatt, "Liberation from the Dark Ages of the Pre-Diamper Indian Christianity," *Journal of St Thomas Christians* 24, 2 (2013) 11-42.

³⁶ M. Gopinath, "Saintly Voice of Silent Prayer," in John Mannarathara, ed., *Life and Legacy of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, New Delhi: Viva Books, 2015, 42.

5.2. Formation of Catechists

Chavara was quite sure that in order to effect true and authentic catechesis what was of primary need was a band of holy, trained and well-educated priests to take up the role of catechesis. The foundation of two religious congregations by him, for men and women respectively, has to be seen through this angle, that is, to provide trained leaders for the Church. He knew that the secret of the success of the Jesuit, Carmelite as well as Protestant missionaries was that their priests or pastors were well-educated, whereas among the Syrians this was not the case. The seminary formation among Syrians followed the Malpanate system in which a single priest, called Malpan, gave the priestly training to the candidates. Govindappilla, a secular historian says that Malpanates followed something like a feudal system. That is to say, the priests, who normally came from rich families would suggest their relatives for training in Malpanate. These candidates would live with the Malpan in the parish rectories akin to a kind of *Gurukulam*, where they would learn whatever the Malpan would teach them. It was anybody's guess how much a single Malpan, who, in most cases, would be in-charge of the parish as well, could teach the candidates. To remedy this situation and to give effective formation to the candidates for priesthood, Chavara established seminaries like those of the Western and the Anglican missionaries.³⁷ Besides, he constantly updated the priests by providing them ongoing catechesis pioneering what is today known as annual retreats for priests.

The prophetic mind of Chavara realized that a religious congregation for women would be an ideal tool in giving formation to women in the matters of integral faith. So together with Fr. Leopold the Italian missionary he founded the first indigenous religious congregation for women in 1866. Its aim was to train a good number of women and make them true instruments of Jesus for disseminating the Gospel in the interior villages and especially among the women and the poor people. He wanted to uplift the society financially by devising schemes for micro financing schemes, such as, rosary making, through the able leadership of these sisters.

5.3. Liturgical Catechesis

Even before the Kerygmatic catechesis was proposed by the Austrian Jesuit Joseph A. Jungmann in 1930s, Chavara had initiated the process here in Kerala. For him liturgy was the chief medium for faith education. Preaching of the Word of God during the liturgy was not common or

³⁷ P. Govindappilla, "Charitrathenayicha oral," in *SukruthamSmara*, A Beth Rauma Publications, 2012, 55.

effective in Kerala before Chavara's time.³⁸ He propagated the practice of preaching homilies every Sunday during the Holy Qurbana. His homilies were very powerful rendering of God's actions in the human minds and many people were converted hearing his homilies. Using biblical materials as well as stories that he had heard or read from books both from his own land and abroad, he called the minds of the people for conversion and adherence to Jesus. He established seven monasteries in prominent places in Kerala which could serve the people through the sacraments and the ministry of the word.

Chavara approached the liturgy itself with a catechist's mind. During his time, liturgical celebrations and the Scriptural readings were not systematized for each day of celebration. He took keen attention in renewing the liturgy by making it more priest and people friendly. Taking sufficient time and consulting original Syriac liturgical rubrics, he prepared a liturgical calendar for the Syrian community of Kerala. His deep scholarship in Syriac, besides Latin, Portuguese, Sanskrit and Malayalam stood him in good stead.

In like manner, Chavara renewed the canonical prayers of the Church, which many priests avoided due to its unscientific composition. The number of Psalms prescribed for each day was numerous. Sundays meant still more groups of Psalms, and Feast days furthermore of them so much so that on Easter Sunday and Christmas all the 150 Psalms had to be recited during the night prayer! No wonder, the priests avoided this kind of prayers. Chavara's spiritual wisdom urged him to compile a canonical prayer book which was affordable for use for all priests on all occasions.³⁹

We can say that Chavara brought liturgy out of its mere ritualistic understanding and made it more catechetical by introducing the moment of breaking of the word during a liturgical celebration, which would years later be mandated by Pope Saint John Paul II in 1977 in his catechetical document *Catechesi Tradendae*.⁴⁰

³⁸ A. Mathias Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 218.

³⁹ Lukose Vithuvattickal, ed., *Complete Works of Chavara, Vol IV, Letters of Chavara*, Mannanam, 1982, 131.

⁴⁰ Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Catechesi Tradendae*, n. 23 in *The Catechetical Documents: A Parish Resource*, Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1986, 367-416.

5.4. Biblical Catechesis

Chavara, who was well-versed in Bible, wanted to dispense biblical knowledge with the people. First of all, his liturgical sermons were centred on the events and messages of the Bible. His wished to reach the biblical messages to as many people as possible in as many forms as possible. For this he adopted different methods. He wrote in poetical form the entire story of the New Testament. *Atmanuthapam* contains the description of the events of the New testament period and beyond. He resorted to poetical methodology in biblical catechesis for its power to impress the hearts of people as well as its evocative effect.

He also composed small dramas with biblical themes called eclogues.⁴¹ They were initially composed for his confreres and novices so that they could enact them during the Christmas holidays. Later, after the foundation of the convent for sisters, these eclogues got a wider stage.

His major historical intervention to disseminate Bible knowledge was his mega plan of establishing a printing press which at that time even his confreres considered the ambition of a man gone out of senses. For it was a project incurring huge costs. Nobody associated with him had any working knowledge of printing presses. Those days, there were only a few printing presses in India, like, the Government press at Goa, the press that belonged to the Church Mission Society at Kottayam and the one at Trivandrum that belonged to the Travancore Government, among others.

But Chavara's determination to supply people with books on biblical messages didn't dissuade him, even though his own people called him mad to conceive of such an ambitious project. He approached the Church Mission Society authorities to have a look at their press at Kottayam for which permission was not however granted.⁴² But his resolve was not to be snuffed. He made it to Trivandrum and had a look at the printing press there. Reaching back, Chavara made a form of the Press in plantain stem and engaged his carpenter to make one in wood. This wooden press became successful. Through his contacts with Spain, Chavara arranged for printing ink. He got a person experienced in printing work to set types.

⁴¹ John Paul (compiler), *Chavara Kuriakose Elias, Idayanatakangal* (Eclogues), Trichur: Kerala Sahitya Academy, 2014; T.M. Abraham, "An Ascetic's Legacy in Theatre," in John Mannarathara (ed), *The Life and Legacy of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, New Delhi: Viva Books, 2015, 159-162.

⁴² P. Govindappilla, "Charitratherayicha oral," in *SukruthamSmara*, 56.

The first books printed on this wooden press were all Malayalam translations of spiritual books in Tamil, Italian and Portuguese.

5.5. Popular Catechesis

Chavara's ingenuous spiritual wisdom was quite conversant with the local religious traditions. The Hindu spiritual masters used to give discourses for days together on temple campuses on the occasion of their religious feasts. For ordinary Hindu folks, this was the occasion to gather religious knowledge.⁴³ At the same time, Chavara had heard of the missions being carried out in the West chiefly by the Jesuit priests. Combining these, he initiated what is now known as annual retreats or parish retreats for people under the auspices of parish churches. Talks, classes, prayers and liturgy were the different components of these retreats. A very important aspect of this retreat was the family counselling given during these days. Reconciling families, divided couples and broken relationships were an essential feature of these retreats. These retreats worked for effective renewal of personal, familial as well as parish or societal life. Not long before, such annual retreats became a regular annual feature in every parish. Looking retrospectively, one can understand what a farsighted person Chavara was in developing such a useful catechetical methodology, which is now accepted as one of the best tools of renewal of life both by lay people as well as the consecrated, not to speak anything of its impact among people of other religions.

On the methodology of such parish missions, Porukara writes, "These brothers at the order of superiors, preached in different parishes having thousand or two thousand or even five thousand and more faithful, spiritual retreats and missions, taught catechism and heard confessions."⁴⁴

Because of the success of these parish missions, Vicar Apostolic Ludovico Martini officially appointed in 1849 the religious community headed by Chavara as the official preachers of spiritual exercises for the whole of the Vicariate. The Bishop wrote to Syrians and Latins in his Vicariate, "Therefore, I select and send to you Rev. Fr Kuriakose Malpan

⁴³ ThichNhatHanh describes large gatherings of Buddhist monks for annual retreats that lasted for 90 days in rainy seasons during the life time of Buddha. Cf: ThichNhatHanh, *Silence: The Power of Quiet in a World Full of Noises*, London: Rider, 2015, 177-180.

⁴⁴ A. Mathias Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 218.

Chavara and the other priests at Mannanam. When any of them come to you, the vicar of the church takes care that an eight-day retreat is conducted in a convenient church either for each parish community separately or cumulatively for a few of them... Be diligent to participate in these exercises with good will and reap abundant fruit from them. This we command on precept of charity.⁴⁵ It is said that about 30 such retreats were conducted every year.⁴⁶

5.6. Catechumenates

Catechumenate was an institution of the ancient Church that lasted up to the 7th century, where potential adult converts to Christianity were given catechetical and liturgical training. This institution had died a natural death when infant baptism became the practice in the Church. It was revived in the West during the colonial missionary period, when again, adult conversions offered great possibility. The first of sorts in Kerala was established by the missionaries at Varapuzha. Later on there were individual efforts in this regard from different priests. In 1864 Chavara started a catechumenate attached to the Mannanam Monastery. The chronicles reveal that on Sundays and Feast days many boys came to study catechism and remained on the campus till 5 o' clock in the evening. Some of them came from distant places and some others were poor. So these boys were fed at noon time. They were also given clothes and pious articles, like rosaries and scapulars.

Soon, all the monasteries followed suit and catechumenates were started attached to every monastery. Many adults and children were trained and baptized every year. During the period between 1866 and 1931 more than 20,000 souls were gained for Christ by the missionary zeal of the fathers of the CMI Congregation.⁴⁷

5.7. Family Catechesis

Chavara was deeply conscious of the importance of family in ecclesial life. He never lost a chance to reach families with his catechetical resources. During the retreats, families were one of the focus areas. Even the name he took, Kuriakose Elias of the Holy Family speaks much about his concern for families. Years before the Second Vatican Council called the family a domestic Church,⁴⁸ Chavara wrote, "A good Christian

⁴⁵ A. Mathias Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 219.

⁴⁶ A. Mathias Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 219.

⁴⁷ A. Mathias Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 218.

⁴⁸ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, n. 11.

family is the image of heaven."⁴⁹ Everyone is a product of one's family upbringing. Chavara projected the Holy Family as the model for all families.

Chavara wrote a rather lengthy letter in 1868, a little before his death, addressed to his parishioners, which is now published as a booklet with the title, *Chavarul*. The content of his family catechesis is summarised in this letter, which can be considered as a 'code of conduct for families' of any religious community.⁵⁰ It offers a comprehensive plan for a family to remain and grow in Christian principles. It is a collection of wise teachings on all essential elements of family catechesis. This book can be considered the first catechetical letter in the Indian Church.⁵¹ Emulating St Paul, who wrote letters to the Churches he established, here Chavara wrote to the members of his Church, his local Church. The catechist in the man comes out shining in the methodology he proposed in this book for the effective spread of its contents. He asked each family to take a copy of this letter, keeping the original in the church and to read the letter every first Saturday of the month with family members assembled together.

This booklet has 24 paragraphs for general family code and 16 paragraphs regarding upbringing of children. Who knows whether it was a coincidence that the number 40 is fulfilled in these codes? The book touches all the aspects of family life, such as, the basic virtue of love that should unite all the family members, relationship between husband and wife, upbringing of children, prayer in families, conversations in families, acceptable visitors and guests in families, children's interactions with servants, children's friendship in the neighbourhood, kind of dress permitted for children at home, children visiting relatives' houses, family financial dealings, taking and giving loans, timely partition of parental properties, duties towards servants and workers, just wages to workers, etc. The letter gives clear indication to respect the developmental stages of children while dealing with them. He illustrates all these teachings with impressive stories and anecdotes. In all these,

⁴⁹ Lukose Vithuvattickal, ed., *Letters of Chavara, Chavarul*, 133.

⁵⁰ Jancy James, "A Precious Source of Reference and Assurance," in John Mannarathara, ed., *Life and Legacy*, 134.

⁵¹ Saju Chackalackal, "Foreword, Family as the Heaven on Earth: A Theology of Family in the Chavarul of Saint Chavara," in George Kaniarakath, *Saint Kuriakose Chavara, in A Teacher of family Theology*, Theological Studies on Saint Chavara 2, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2019, 10.

Chavara articulated the Christian way of maintaining family life. There are many touching expressions in the book. For example, he said, "Children who go as angels to their own relative's house, sometimes return as devils"⁵² alluding to the possible misuse of children even by relatives. He advised the parents not to take upon themselves the minor fights that occurs among children and make a mountain out of them. He advised parents not to allow boys and girls of the same siblings to sleep in one room, because "What they do not know by nature, the Satan will teach them."⁵³

5.8. Social Catechesis

"Between evangelization and human advancement - development and liberation - there are in fact profound links," declared Pope Paul VI in his celebrated document *Evangelii Nuntiandi*.⁵⁴ Jesus ministry was not restricted to the souls of the people; he addressed to the physical needs of the people as well. The prophets of the Old Testament were keen on teaching the people that covenant life was fulfilled only when they did their duty to the poor, moving away from oppressions of all sorts and attending to the needs of the poor, the orphans, widows and the strangers.

Chavara understood that the crux of all the problems that the society faced was the closed mind, closed in all sorts of superstitions, caste considerations and its consequences, such as marginalization of the lower caste people, untouchability, unseeability, and appropriation of educational facilities to upper caste people. The general public was illiterate and dependant on the rich upper caste people for their livelihood. Only universal education, open to all sections of the people reaching to grass roots levels would solve this problem, he understood. He ventured in a large way into this mountainous mission.

5.8.1. Overcome Caste Barrier

All of humanity is but one family. Hinduism proclaims this value loudly through its message of *vasudhaiva kudumbakam'*. But the caste practice in Hinduism that puts up barriers between humans disproves this noble idea. Chavara wanted to create a society that recognized the equal dignity of all. He taught that social values, or cultural assets were not reserved to any castes or religions. To bring this point home into the

⁵² Lukose Vithuvattickal, ed., *Letters of Chavara*, 145.

⁵³ Lukose Vithuvattickal, ed., *Letters of Chavara, Chavarul*, 145

⁵⁴ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 31, in *The Catechetical Documents: A Parish Resource*, 149-200.

psyche of the people he started a Sanskrit school at Mannanam in 1846 for Dalits. This step was revolutionary on two counts: first of all, Sanskrit was considered the language of high caste people. Dalits were forbidden to learn it. Secondly, in those times only high caste people had access to education, but here in this school Dalits were the pupils. So in one stroke, he expressed his vision for the society; he wanted an egalitarian society where everyone had access to all of its resources. He made education free of cost for the poor people. He started midday meal for the poor pupils of this school raising funds from different parish churches.

5.8.2. Universal Education: Every Parish Church to run one School

True catechesis and sustained development of society presuppose a society that values education. Chavara was determined to transform the educational scenario of Kerala. It was a time when the educational mission was just picking up due to the efforts of some well-meaning kings and Protestant missionaries, though access to Government schools were restricted to caste people.

Saint Chavara's spirit was awakened in a great way. In his capacity as the Vicar General of the Syrian Catholics, he embarked upon a ground breaking idea that would in future make history for the entire Kerala society. Chavara issued a circular in 1864 asking every parish in Kerala to open a school attached to it. He hit upon this idea, again, from his contacts with the West, where parish churches ran schools attached to them. The effect was marvellous. This was the moment when the society of Kerala woke up from its long slumber to a new era of universal primary education. Many schools came up attached to the churches. And the trend never lost momentum. Soon other religious communities entered the field of education and all of them together made Kerala a hub of quality education and a place of hundred percent literacy.

Chavara was keen to enrol children from Dalit families in the schools. He sent messengers to Dalit houses asking them to send their children to the church schools. However, there were huge drop outs initially from the part of Dalits who were poor and whose parents wanted their children to go for work. Chavara asked the parishes to circumvent the sorry state by providing midday meal, books and clothes freely to those children by raising funds.

5.8.3. Social Concern: House of Charity at Kainakary

Caring for the sick is an act of mercy. Our catechesis teaches us to see Christ himself in the sick and the suffering. Chavara wanted to open a house to help the elderly and the destitute. To this effect he wrote to his

people at Kainakary on 15 October 1869 in which he pointed out how important it was to prepare themselves and others for a happy death as well as to love and care for the sick and the dying. In preparation for opening a house for the destitute people, he started a Confraternity for Happy death and made arrangements for the collection of funds. He asked the people to keep a charity box labelled, "Happy Death Charity Box" and without being ashamed of it, beg of others and raise funds and build a modest charity home near their small chapel. He asked them to place such charity boxes in the markets of Changanachery and Alapuzha, two major townships teeming with trade. He asked them to carry such charity boxes at the time of harvest around the fields. He encouraged them to begin taking care of at least one or two sick people. In this way he hoped to spread this ministry of compassion in the entire region of Malabar.

So far we have seen the elaborate catechetical pedagogy that Chavara adopted to spread the Good News and educate his children in the tasks that the Good News of Jesus enjoins upon us. Now let's have a look at some of the concrete methods that he used to realize his catechetical pedagogy.

6. Methodological Aspects of Chavara's Catechesis

Chavara's catechetical approaches made use of a variety of methodological aspects, such as, writings, print media, library system, accompaniment, pastoral letters, warnings, storytelling, narration, inculturation, evocation, learning from observation, etc.

• Writings:

○ *Dramas and Plays*

The original and creative mind of Chavara devised a new method for catechesis. It was dramas or plays. He wrote 10 catechetical plays from 1856 onwards⁵⁵ with themes such as salvation of man, Christian virtues and moral values. Some of them were centred around the annunciation and birth of Jesus. These plays of catechetical content were written in the form of *eclogues*, and were meant for stage presentation by his confreres as well as novices from Christmas day to the Day of Epiphany. This was his way of celebrating the birth of

⁵⁵ Thomas Panthaplackal, *Snehadoothintenatakasakhyam*, in John Paul (compiler), *Chavara Kuriakose, Idayanatakangal (Eclogues)*, Trichur: Kerala Sahitya Academy, 2014.

Jesus and impressing the message of Christmas in the hearts of his seminary students.

In this matter Chavara's pioneering spirit is to be recognized. He was the first to compose original plays in Kerala. The first historically recognized drama in Malayalam language is the translation of Kalidasas's *Abhijnanasakuntalam* which was published in 1882. If we consider the origin of dramas in vernacular languages again Chavara's eclogues come first. As of now, "*Nil Darpan (The Mirror of indigo)* written by Dinabandhu Mitra in Bengali in 1860 is considered to be the first Indian vernacular drama that went on stage."⁵⁶ "The Eclogues of Chavara were written and staged well before *Nil Darpan*. They also preceded Kerala Varma ValiyaKoyithampuran's 1882 Malayalam translation of *Abhijnanasakuntalam*."⁵⁷

○ Poetry

Poetry attracts people and engages their heart. Poetry is illuminating whereas prose can be boring. What is expressed through poetry lingers in the heart for a longer time than what is conveyed through prose. So, Chavara took the medium of poetry to describe the entire New Testament history to the people. In like manner, he dealt with different spiritual themes, such as, the role of virtues, the theme of death, the need for praying for the souls in purgatory, courage to witness to faith, etc.,⁵⁸ through the medium of poetry. He wrote poems to reveal to people in a language familiar to them the greatness of their faith.

○ Books and Library System

Chavara knew that his people had no sources to receive spiritual ideas and insights apart from the homilies and the retreats. Spiritual books were not available to the people. So as we noted above he established a printing press at Mannanam and published many spiritual books. *Jnanapiusham*, a Malayalam translation of a Tamil spiritual book was the first one to be printed. And later on Chavara published many spiritual books translated from Portuguese, Latin and Italian.

⁵⁶ T.M. Abraham, "An Ascetic's Legacy in Theatre," 161.

⁵⁷ T.M. Abraham, "An Ascetic's Legacy in Theatre," 161.

⁵⁸ Z.M. Muzhoor, ed., *Complete Works of Chavara, Vol II, Literary Works*, 129ff.

The method he employed to reach these books to people was very ingenuous. He started in those days what later developed into the public library system in India. He opened the libraries of the monasteries he established for the people of the locality so that the latter could read the books there or even take them home, read, and return. In this way Chavara made sure that people had occasion for reading and growing in Christian and spiritual knowledge.

• Pastoral Letters and Circulars

Chavara's close contacts and familiarity with the Western missionaries and their customs, were, perhaps, behind his profuse use of letter writing as a means of educating his confreres and people. He wrote in all 86 letters in languages such as, Malayalam, Syriac, Latin, Italian, and Tamil.⁵⁹ He used this medium to educate people in faith, inspire them to undertake pastoral initiatives, correct his confreres and request Holy Father's mediation in many of the Church concerns. His letters are an authentic source of information on the situation of the Church and the society of his times.

- **Storytelling:** Chavara was a very effective story teller. In all his writings as well as sermons, he has made use of this method to substantiate his arguments.
- **Narration:** Narration was another means employed by Chavara. He used to narrate different situations with all its possible nuances.
- **Evocation:** His poetic works such as, *Atmanuthapam*, *Martyrdom of Anastasia and Dirge* are capable of raising the hearts and minds of the readers in sublime spiritual thoughts as they constantly evoke a sense of awe and love and intimacy to the *Appan* of all of us.
- **Inculturation:** Chavara was keen to take good elements from the Indian culture to enhance the quality of spiritual life and liturgical life of the people. First of all, he encouraged the study of Sanskrit for its content of spiritual and devotional writings and hymns. It was in imitation of the twilight singing of bhajans in Hindu homes that he composed some of his poems and songs based on the life of Jesus. Ending the practice of keeping artificial flowers made of paper and cloth in churches, influenced by the European practice, he insisted on keeping fresh flowers, which was the practice in temples. In like

⁵⁹M. Gopinath, "In Pauline Lineage," in John Mannarathara, ed., *The Life and Legacy*, 124.

manner, as was mentioned above the retreats he initiated were all original practices in the Indian tradition.⁶⁰

- **Warning:** Just as Paul enjoined Timothy to "warn them before God against quarrelling about words" (2 Timothy 2:14), Chavara used to warn his confreres as well as his readers that whether one wills or not, God will do his will in our life.⁶¹ Many times he warned his confreres that if they didn't practice humility, obedience, love and discipline, God himself would bring an end to their religious congregation, though it was constituted by himself. Seeing the non-exemplary life of the members he once wrote, "Be sure, if we go this way, our monasteries will not last for twenty years from now. The stability of the monasteries is guaranteed not by the thickness of the walls, but by the zeal and virtuous life of their members. How many monasteries, larger than ours existed in different parts of the world! But, they have, we don't know how, now become woods and habitats of wild animals."⁶²
- **Accompanying:** The cumulative effect of all the methods mentioned above shows Chavara's intense desire to be with his people in their spiritual journey. Besides, he was a man on continual journey, as well. He established monasteries in many places so as to give access to people of those localities to spiritual and sacramental life. He masterminded their constructions without exempting him from his other tasks such as writing chronicles, poetry, and giving retreats. He even wanted to be with the sick and the suffering. Once during a Small Pox epidemic, resisting everyone's warnings and advices, he went to a small pox patient and gave him holy communion.
- **Learning through Observation:** Chavara was humble enough to accept good and useful elements from any authentic sources. Most of the prayer methods he brought to our land were imitations of the same practice in the West, such as, forty-hour adoration, thirteen-hour adoration, stations of the cross, rosary and devotions to the

⁶⁰ A. Shreedharamenon, "Ghoshikkapedathepoya Charitraparvam," in *Sukrutham Smara* (Collection of articles), A Bet Rauma Publication, Kochi, 2012, 19.

⁶¹ Z.M. Muzhoor, ed., *Complete Works of Chavara, Vol II, Literary Works*, Mannanam, 1981, 13.

⁶² Lukose Vithuvattickal, ed., *Letters of Chavara*, VI/1, The letter written to members of the Congregation by Fr. Chavara and Fr. Leopold, 94.

saints. Similarly, some of the methods he employed in raising funds to help the Vicariate as well as his own projects were imitations of the practice he found in his own confreres or other priests, such as, fixing five percent taxes on the net income of parishes, *pidiyari* and *kettuthengu*.⁶³

- Summing up, we can say that Chavara put to maximum use the time-tested as well as original methods born in his insightful mind to bring people to maturity of faith in life and action. His attention was to reach out to people of all walks of life and of different tastes with catechetical means appropriate to them.

7. Conclusion

Saint Chavara was a man who lived much ahead of his time. His ideas of faith correspond not to his century but to the twentieth century. For him catechesis could not be merely doctrinal, but had to be experiential. Catechesis had to influence all the aspects of human life, matters of soul, sacramental life, liturgical life, family life, social life, and interpersonal relationships. It had to bring people to conversion of hearts and greater communion with God and the Church and a holy and virtuous Christian life in families, on the one hand, and address the dehumanizing situations, such as poverty, underdevelopment, and marginalization, on the other. Thus, life of faith was not a matter concerned only with church going, but it was more to be concerned with what sort of a person one

⁶³ The expenses of the Vicariate were being met by the annual subsidy from France. But this was not sufficient. When Vicar Apostolic Becinelli sought from Chavara regarding means to raise funds for various activities, such as, running of seminaries, and other developmental programmes, Chavara suggested collection of 5% tax from each parish, 5% of the net income of every parish (net income means total income minus expenses). Though the Bishop was sceptical about its success, Chavara was confident considering the esteem he had among the people and because almost all of the vicars were trained in the seminaries at Mannanam and Pallipuram.

Pidiyari: This was another local method employed to augment the income of the Vicariate. *Pidiyari* means setting apart a handful of rice before cooking, especially, to donate for poor people. Though it was originally employed by another priest, Fr. Geevarghese Thoppil of his own congregation for the construction of the Pulincunnu monastery as Vicar General Chavara introduced it in the entire Vicariate.

Kettuthengu: Yet another ingenuous method, this time advised by the same Fr. Geevarghese, was the *kettuthengu* custom, that is, reserving one coconut tree of a family for church purpose.

becomes and what sort of a society one tries to create. His firm conviction was that faith should lead one to action (James 2:14-17). This led him to greater concerns for social development and transformation. He said that "A day on which you have not done a good deed would not be considered in the Book of Life."⁶⁴ His concern for the neglected working class was proverbial. In the 19th century, even before the ideas of Karl Marx in his work *Das Kapital* (1867) could echo in our land, Saint Chavara advocated just wages for workers and to give the same on time.⁶⁵ Just as Jesus' ministry involved verbal teaching of faith and signs of the power of faith, Saint Chavara envisaged a catechetical pedagogy that consisted in incessant education in faith as well as untiring work to develop the standard of human life. This he tried to achieve primarily through giving the light of knowledge and fruits of development to the people of the times.

Saint Chavara shows that one teaches primarily through lived examples. No one can be a catechist unless one has a profound experience of God. His life was characterized by a kind of filial love of God. He approached God with the innocent love of a little child calling God 'Dad'. At the same time, he spent the moments of his meditation in sweet talks with God as between friends. Saint Chavara proved himself to be a true catechist, a contemplative in action.

⁶⁴ Lukose Vithuvattickal, ed., *Letters of Chavara, Chavarul*, n. 13.

⁶⁵ Chavara made this admonition to people in his letter, *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul* (The farewell words of a good father) that he wrote to his parishioners on February 13, 1868.

SAINT KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHĀVARA AN EXEMPLARY LITURGICAL CATECHIST

Maryann Madhavathu CMC♦

Abstract: As one of the primary tasks of the Church, catechesis has in its heart the paschal mystery. Catechizing is to lead a person to go deep into this mystery with knowledge about its different dimensions. Liturgical catechesis is mystagogy in its strict sense. This study unfolds Chāvāra's efforts to make the faithful involve in the living mystery of Christ. Liturgical catechesis strives to lead communities and individuals of the Church to maturity of faith through full and active participation in the liturgy. Catechists not only teach but also share their faith and guide their students to learn how to apply and live their faith. In that logic, Kuriakose Elias Chāvāra was a great catechist who taught the Kerala Church about the essence of faith i.e., the paschal mystery of Christ through his activities as well as through his life example. Chāvāra's life in the paschal rhythm of dying and rising, the way he spread the divine wisdom he gained through his involvement in the mystery of Christ, how he prepared the faithful of Kerala Church for mystagogical catechesis and how he became an exemplary catechist for the Church of all times are discussed in this paper.

♦ **Maryann Madhavathu** is a member of the Jayamatha Province, Pala of the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel (CMC), and hails from Pala, Kerala, India. She has an M.Phil. in Physics and has been teaching Physics in Higher Secondary School for 9 years in Kerala. She obtained her STB and STL from the Catholic University of Leuven (KU Leuven), Belgium. She completed her Ph.D. (STD) in Liturgical Studies from the same university in 2016. She has published articles and book reviews in various international journals. Sr Maryann functioned as the director of the Women's Forum of the Syro-Malabar Eparchy of Great Britain in 2017. She did her post-doctoral research at KU Leuven in 2019-2020. Her latest publication is *Humble Minister of the Living Mystery: Liturgical Vision of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara* (TSSC 11). Currently, she serves the congregation as the Prefect of Studies of the theological institute, Carmel Jyothi Vidhya Bhavan, Aluva, Kerala, and is the general PRO of CMC. Email: maryanncmc@gmail.com

Keywords: Chāvāra, Liturgy, Catechesis, Mystagogy, Paschal Mystery, Salvation history, Worship, Kerala Church, participation, *lex orandi, lex credenda, lex vivendi, anamnesis*

Introduction

Pope John Paul II indubitably teaches that catechesis is one of the primary tasks of the Church. In his apostolic exhortation, he says that “at the heart of catechesis we find, in essence, a Person, the Person of Jesus of Nazareth.”¹ In addition, Pope declares that “the primary and essential object of catechesis is ‘the mystery of Christ.’” Catechizing is a way to lead a person to go deep into this mystery with knowledge about its different dimensions: “to make all people see what is the plan of the mystery....” The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but also in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ. In catechesis, Christ, the Incarnate Word and Son of God, is taught as *a communication of the living mystery of God*. The paschal mystery is the heart of all catechesis, the cornerstone of the Christian faith, and the paradigm of the Christian life. Liturgical catechesis is mystagogy in its strict sense. It should help the disciples of Christ to follow him faithfully, imitating him to grow into his likeness. This study unfolds Chāvāra’s efforts to make the faithful involved in the living mystery of Christ.

1. Chāvāra: Liturgical Catechist?

The role of a Catholic catechist is to catechize the faith of the Catholic Church, both by word and example. A catechist is someone who lets the word of God echo through their life. Catechists not only teach but also share their faith and guide their students to learn how to apply and live their faith. In that logic, Kuriakose Elias Chāvāra was a great catechist who taught the Kerala Church about the essence of faith which is the paschal mystery of Christ through his activities as well as through his life example. Thus, he could be rightly called a liturgical catechist. He made concrete efforts for the full, active, and conscious participation of the people of Kerala in the mystery that is celebrated in the liturgy and lived in reality. Orthopraxis cannot be separated from orthodoxy in Christianity. So the life and personality of Chāvāra became a medium to reveal the mystery of Christ. In his life he could undertake an endeavour

¹ *Catechesi Tradendae* (CT) §5. *Catechesi tradendae* (Catechesis in Our Time) is a post-synodal apostolic exhortation of Pope John Paul II, published October 16, 1979. Emphasis added.

to educate the faithful to live as disciples of Christ and to facilitate an in-depth discovery of the mystery of Christ in the history of salvation.

Liturgical catechesis strives to lead the communities and individuals of the Church to maturity of faith through full and active participation in the liturgy. When I call Chāvāra a liturgical catechist, it seems to be necessary to make clear the meaning of the word liturgy. The word 'liturgy,' originated from a word having very similar meaning as a public ministry for the good of society. One may understand the word 'liturgy' in such a way that it includes all those ministries of the chosen ones for the benefit of the folk under their care. It denotes Jesus' ministry and participation in it by living in union with the mystery of Christ. Subsequently, every priestly function, charitable service to the needy, exemplary service to the community, life of sacrifice, missionary endeavours, pastoral care, guidance, and protection as well as works of justice comes under the umbrella of *leitourgia* or the ministry of the mystery. Therefore, I use this broad meaning of the word 'liturgy' to call St. Chāvāra a 'liturgical catechist'. Chāvāra recognised that liturgy is powerful enough to transform both the worshipping community and the culture and society in which one lives.

If liturgy is the celebration of the paschal mystery in a common understanding, Chāvāra celebrated the mystery not only on the altar but throughout his life. Consequently, his entire life became liturgical in the broadest sense of the word. We have heard about the axiom *lex orandi, lex credendi*.² But this will be complete only by adding *lex vivendi*.³ The law of prayer is the law of belief. However, the law of one's belief is

² This prominent formula appears to have originated with Prosper of Aquitaine (d. after 455), a fifth-century Church father who engaged in a controversy on grace in a treatise formerly attributed to Pope Celestine I, *the Capitula or Praeteritorum Sedis Apostolicae episcoporum auctoritates, de gratia Dei et libero voluntatis arbitrio*: Let the rule of prayer lay down the rule of faith, *lex supplicandi statuat legem credendi*. Paul De Clerck, "Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi": The Original Sense and Historical Avatars of an Equivocal Adage," *Studia Liturgica* 24, no. 2 (1994), 181.

³ The third term *lex vivendi* was added to this relationship by Kevin Irwin in his book *Models of the Eucharist*. Kevin W. Irwin, *Models of the Eucharist* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 29-30, 294. This term points to the connection between the practices of prayer, belief, and the ethical actions of a person. This means that Christian liturgical practice is not only oriented toward Christian belief but also toward the lives of Christian persons and communities in and with the world. See also E. Byron Anderson and Bruce T. Morrill, eds., *Liturgy and the Moral Self: Humanity at Full Stretch before God: Essays in Honor of Don E. Saliers* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998), 4-5.

reflected in one's law of living or ethical life. The law of living includes both the law of being and the law of doing (*lex entis et lex agendi*) for a person. Let us examine how Chāvāra could live out the tension and rhythm inherent in the paschal mystery.

2. A Man of Pascha - Dying and Rising

Chāvāra's encounter with the saving mystery in meditation led him to intense involvement in the mystery. To be a Christian implies that one participates in the death of Christ to rise with Him into eternal life.⁴ Personal and internal death is necessary to live the paschal mystery. Chāvāra meditated on the divine mystery and lived the gospel values in the paschal rhythm of dying and rising. He could accomplish the paschal mystery in his life by practising the heroic virtues in an exemplary way.

The Church unremittently invites its members to live this mystery in their earthly lives by following the example of the saints. Chāvāra grew in divine wisdom through his contemplation of this mystery and acquired experiential wisdom of the same mystery by delving into the passion of Christ and carrying the cross with him for the Church. The contemplative and pastoral involvement of Chāvāra in the paschal mystery may be seen as two dimensions of the catechesis of the mystery. The divine wisdom attained by Chāvāra through his meditative life educates the Church. At the same time, the participatory wisdom displayed in his active life and services edifies the Church. Let us briefly examine the nature of that wisdom.

2.1. Living in Peace and Unity with Humility

To live in peace and harmony with one's fellow beings demands occasions of dying to self through forgiving and forgetting other's faults. This is the genuine participation in the paschal mystery. Forgiving Chāvāra is found in the case of Kudackachira Antony, bishop Roccas, and Mattan Manjooran.⁵ Chāvāra instructed all to forgive each other,

⁴ Alexander Schmemmann, "The Mystery of Easter" *St. Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly* 2/ 3 (1954), 17.

⁵ On several occasions, Kudackachira had created troubles for Chāvāra. Still, Chāvāra writes very carefully about him in the Chronicles so as not to affect his reputation. Kuriakose Elias Chāvāra, *Complete Works of Blessed Chāvāra (CWC), Vol. I: Chronicles*, Trans. P. J. Thomas (Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Blessed Chāvāra, 1990), 154-159. Chāvāra behaved very kindly and politely with Bishop Roccas and negotiated his return to Bagdad from Kochi. Chāvāra, *CWC vol. I: Chronicles*, 91-92. In his testament to his religious community, Chāvāra asked to help Manjoor Kalapurackal Mathan (who filed a fraud case in the court of Alapuzha

reminding them "Otherwise what is the difference between you and the Gentiles".⁶ In his Testament, he says: "Even animals retaliate against those who resent them. The ability to overlook faults in others and to forgive them is possible only for those who are strong, prudent, and honourable."⁷

Chāvāra always stood for unity and peace in his life and maintained these virtues in his personal life, by dying to his egotistic inclinations. Also, we know that only a truly humble person can acknowledge the favours they received. Chāvāra praises and gives thanks to God and his other benefactors for all the gifts he received throughout his life in his writings.⁸ Chāvāra says:

For is it because of my power and skill that I did things whatsoever? How is it that you came hither? Who called me from home? How did I become a priest? How could I join the community and become a member of the congregation? Why should anyone address me as Prior? How did I become so come by the present status? Do you think I deserve any one of these favours? Not at all, to be sure. If so, remember that it is God's will that is being accomplished.⁹

The whole Eucharist is an *anamnesis* of and *Eucharistia* for the salvation mystery. Following the Eucharistic liturgy, Chāvāra's thoughts were filled with *anamnesis* and *Eucharistia* in the real meaning of the words. He remembered and rendered gratitude for the endless mercy and providential love of God in each event during his early life. Chāvāra

against Chāvāra) if he was in financial strain. The Hindu judge, who dismissed the case, was greatly impressed by Chāvāra's noble and forgiving personality. Kuriakose Elias Chāvāra, *Complete Works of Blessed Chāvāra (CWC), vol. IV: The Letters*, Trans. Mary Leo, (Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Blessed Chāvāra, 1990), 73.

⁶ Chāvāra, *CWC vol. IV: The Letters* X/6, 104. Mt 6:14-15; Mt 5:46-47.

⁷ Kuriakose Elias Chāvāra, *Chavarul: Testament of a Loving Father*, Trans. Saju Chackalackal. 150th Year Revised and Updated Edition, (Kochi: Chāvāra Central Secretariat Chāvāra Hills, 2018), 12-13.

⁸ His gratitude for God's gift of human vocation, parents, childhood, family, protection from epidemics, and call to priesthood are seen in the first two parts of the *Ātmānutāpam*. Kuriakose Elias Chāvāra, *Complete Works of Blessed Chāvāra (CWC) Vol. II, Compunction of the Soul, Dirge, Anasthasia's Martyrdom*, Trans. Mary Leo (Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Blessed Chāvāra, 1989), 1 and 2, pages 1-16.

⁹ Kuriakose Elias Chāvāra, *Complete Works of Blessed Chāvāra (CWC) vol. III: Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 1.

had a gratitude-filled mind and was aware that all that he had belonged to God. Whatever he received from God, he offered to God so that He could use it for the service of others. Thus Chāvāra could live the paschal mystery.

2.2. With Complete Obedience and Humility

Chāvāra surrendered to the will of God without any compromise. In his opinion, “the significant mark of a true religious is a total negation of their self-will and perfect obedience as though he had no eyes or ears of his own.”¹⁰ We see this kind of obedience manifested in his life, even when the Vicar-Apostolic transferred him contrary to his cherished desires.¹¹ Chāvāra could graciously accept adverse situations as paternal corrections. Conforming one’s will to God’s will, as made known through the superiors, was very much part of his consecrated and priestly life.¹²

Chāvāra wrote: “A devotee used to say: ‘In this world, everything happens according to my wish; for, I wish only that which is willed by God.’”¹³ It is not difficult to identify this devotee as Chāvāra, who said when asked about his wish on his sickbed:

Do I have a will of my own? I do not desire either to go and stay there or to stay here. I am ready to do as I am told. I do not wish to do anything according to my own will. I am ready to do only what I am asked to do.¹⁴

He could set a good example to the other religious as he wanted to give up his will completely. This is a perfect example of the mediation of the mystery of Christ, who “humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross” (Phil 2:8). During his illness and when he lost his eyesight, he expressed exemplary patience and perseverance.¹⁵ Chāvāra had the great conviction that everything he has

¹⁰ Chāvāra, CWC vol. IV: *The Letters* (Testaments), 70.

¹¹ Chāvāra, CWC vol. I: *Chronicles*, 24.

¹² In his colloquies with the heavenly Father, Chāvāra says; “remember it is God’s will that is being accomplished” and “O my Lord, from now on, I resolve to die to my own will and submit myself always to your holy will. I seek not to follow anybody’s will except your own.” Chāvāra, CWC vol. III: *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 1 and 7.

¹³ Chāvāra, *Chavarul*, 27.

¹⁴ *Chronicles of Koonammavu Convent*, vol. II, 10.

¹⁵ The sisters wrote: “He suffered all the above mentioned diseases with great patience and resignation for three months. But one thing that surprised people was

is given or a free gift from God and this marks a sure sign of humility. Humbly, he acknowledged that every favour he received in his life was from the infinite mercy of God, who poured gifts on an ungrateful soul.¹⁶

There is a special rhythm to the paschal mystery. It is the rhythm of nature, like the setting and rising of the sun, dying and rising with Jesus Christ. One dies to one's self by forgiving, accepting faults, tolerating humiliation, and surrendering one's plan to God's will. It includes trusting God in each step of one's life, showing faith in the providing God. Like the grain of wheat (Jn 12:24), Chāvāra died to his own will and so could bear much fruit for the Church.

3. Chāvāra Spread the Divine Wisdom through Liturgy

Chāvāra was a man who integrated the paschal mystery into his life, gained deep experiential knowledge of it and became a model for the people of his Church to accomplish this salvation mystery in their own lives. Liturgy could also be seen as the ascending action of the Church with praise and thanks or an answer to the saving action of God, who descended mercifully to her. Liturgy is a meeting between God and humankind, and the meeting point is Christ. Still, it is not a face-to-face meeting with the Father, but a meeting under the veil of signs.¹⁷ The Eucharist is the sacramental re-enactment of Christ's all-sufficient atoning sacrifice. However, its perennial efficacy is independent of the dispositions of the faithful, but its full impact on the persons and its power to transform lives depends on the degree of personal involvement. That necessitates liturgical catechesis.

3.1. Liturgy as the Space for Pedagogy of faith

In Chauvet's words, liturgy is the "symbolic space" par excellence, which fulfils a powerful and indispensable role in developing "a pedagogy of the faith."¹⁸ For lively liturgies, burning faith is necessary.

this. When people lose their eye-sight normally people become irritated and very sorrowful. But this was not seen in our *Priorachan*. He was always pleasant with a smile on his face. Looking at his face, no one would understand that he was suffering much. On the other hand, he looked joyful." *Chronicles of Koonammavu Convent*, vol. II, 11.

¹⁶ Chāvāra, CWC vol. II: Ātmānutāpam, II, 60.

¹⁷ Ambrosius Verheul, *Introduction to Liturgy: Towards a Theology of Worship*, (Liturgical Press: Collegeville, 1968), 19.

¹⁸ *Louis-Marie Chauvet, Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*, trans. Patrick Madigan and Madeleine Beaumont, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995), 189.

It is the word of God that makes hearts burn with the love of God. Liturgical catechesis takes place within a celebration of the word.¹⁹ Chāvāra longed to bring renewal in the Christian life of the faithful and, soon after his ordination, started to preach homilies during liturgical celebrations.²⁰ Fr. Leopold writes,

The young priest preached sermons in many churches, at a time when preaching was very rare and performed many other pastoral services with great zeal. During his time he preached a retreat in the parish of Pulinkunnu at the request of the parishioners. Those who participated in the retreat were moved by it, and derived great spiritual benefit, as is testified by many who still retain fresh memories about it.²¹

Chāvāra's enthusiasm for the salvation of souls is clear in his conducting a retreat at Thekke Angadi, which is the filial church of Pulinkunnu.²² Chāvāra also initiated retreat preaching in parishes on an annual basis, which was later followed by the members of his congregation. Chāvāra was aware of the power of the living and dynamic word of God which animates and activates the Church as a worshipping community.²³ Preaching the word of God in the liturgy as homilies helped Chāvāra to lead the people to the truth of the gospel and it was a pioneering step in the history of the Church of Kerala. Chāvāra could proclaim the bible from the pulpit with vigour and guide the Christian life of the faithful. Being a powerful and effective preacher known as the "lion of the pulpit," he could instruct the faithful during liturgical celebrations. Slowly, the Sunday liturgical gatherings became the ideal places for religious and social instruction.

¹⁹ International Commission on English in the Liturgy, *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1988), Nos. 85–89.

²⁰ In the chronicles of Mannanam monastery we see, "In the new chapel, here at Mannanam, Mass had to be said on Sundays, and High Masses with preaching on feast days and this could not be let off." Chāvāra, *CWC vol. 1: The Chronicles*, 22.

²¹ Leopold Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chāvāra*, Original Malayalam in 1871. Trans. Lucas Vithuvattical, (Mannanam: Saint Joseph's Monastery, 2003), 6.

²² Chāvāra, *CWC vol. 1: The Chronicles*, 22.

²³ "Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb 4:12).

St. Chāvāra was a visionary who recognized the power of homilies in catechesis and introduced it in the Church of Kerala. CT 48 elucidates that the homily takes up the journey of faith put forward by catechesis, and brings it to its natural fulfilment. Pope John Paul teaches that,

The catechetical teaching finds its source and its fulfilment in the Eucharist, within the whole circle of the liturgical year. Preaching, centred upon the Bible texts, must then in its own way make it possible to familiarize the faithful with the whole of the mysteries of the faith and with the norms of Christian living.²⁴

3.2. Cultivating Holiness

Chāvāra participated in the mystery of salvation by dying to himself and to self-will and by glorifying God in his body with holiness. He paved the way for others and prepared them for this participation by setting an example through his life and heroic apostolic works. The Second Vatican Council teaches that the Church is the body of Christ (LG §7).

Liturgy is defined by Pope Pius XII as “whole public worship of the mystical Body of Jesus Christ, Head, and members.”²⁵ It is in Christ that the Church offers praise and worship to God. He is the meeting point of God and humanity. It is his incarnated and risen body that mediates temporality and eternity. The body of Christ provides the context for true and real worship. He has united all in his body.²⁶ The most acceptable sacrifice to God is the sacrifice of His only begotten Son, and the whole Church joins in this once and forever sacrifice in each liturgical celebration. Chāvāra held this wisdom about the mystery of the Church in his mind, which was later taught explicitly in the constitution of Vatican II.²⁷

St. Paul urges us to offer our bodies as a true living sacrifice, which is pure and pleasing to God (Rom 12:1-2). Elsewhere, the apostle clarifies that human bodies are the temple of God where the Holy Spirit dwells

²⁴ CT §48.

²⁵ Pope Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis Christi* (25 June 1943), § 20.

²⁶ “But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive *together with Christ* – by grace you have been saved – and raised us up *with him* and seated us *with him* in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us *in Christ Jesus*” (Eph 2:4-7) [emphasis added].

²⁷ LG §32 and §7.

(1 Cor 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16). Consequently, we may conclude that holiness in the body and mind of human beings is the most perfect worship presented to God. In this way, Chāvāra offered his own body and life as a fragrant oblation pleasing to God as he testified on his deathbed.²⁸ Chāvāra also taught families to respect our human body, which is the temple of God. He wrote: “Be exceedingly careful to be chaste and modest in all your postures, whether sitting or walking, lying or playing. Immodesty is reprehensible both before God and the world.”²⁹ He was very diligent in keeping and growing in the holiness of mind and body. He worshipped God not only in his body with holiness but also in the community of believers, which is the mystical body of Christ.

3.3. Building up the Church

Liturgical celebration is ecclesial in nature and it is the celebration of relationships: relationship to God and to one another in Christ through the Spirit. The liturgy celebrated by the Church community here on earth is a prophetic sign and image of the heavenly Church. The liturgy constitutes the Church and the Eucharist has a community-forming power.³⁰ It is the word of God that calls all people together and keeps them together in the *ecclesia*. Thus, they grow together in the unity of faith and build up the Church. In the liturgy, the Church realises the fullness of her inner being and becomes intensely conscious of her calling.

Chāvāra wanted to glorify God and build up the Church by cultivating virtuous lives. In order to remind the people of God about holiness and help them to grow in it, Chāvāra dreamt of and later established abodes of holiness for men and women in the form of religious orders. The aim of founding a women’s religious congregation was threefold – personal sanctification, the salvation of souls, which means holiness of others, and the integral growth of women and children. To offer true worship through holy lives, Chāvāra urged the

²⁸ “By the Grace of God and help of the Holy Family baptismal grace I could preserve the purity throughout my life.” Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Blessed Chāvāra*, 17; C. D. Valerian, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chāvāra* (Cochin: K.C.M. Press, 1986), 37-38.

²⁹ Chāvāra, *Chavarul*, 26. He also asked parents: “Don’t let your children move around naked even inside the house.” Chāvāra, *Chavarul*, 35.

³⁰ Pope John Paul II asserts that “the Eucharist builds the Church and the Church makes the Eucharist.” Encyclical Letter (17 April 2003) “*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*,” §26. Available at https://www.vatican.va/holy_father_special_features/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_20030417_ecclesia_eucharistia_en.html [accessed 22 June 2020].

members of the Church to attain perfection of love in their lives. He shared the pioneering inspiration of his teachers in setting up a religious community for men. He could give shape to the life and activities of a religious community, its identity, and charism.³¹ His motive behind the foundation of the religious community is clear in the following statement: "It is necessary that in this territory, there are persons who are continuously engaged in prayer and good works for the greater glory of God and the edification of the Church."³² His greatest pain was the absence of canonised saints among the Malabar Church Christians, who had been following Christ from the very first century. 1 Pet 2:5 mentions pleasing sacrifices offered to God through Christ Jesus by the holy priestly people. This is done by building up the Church as a spiritual home using the living stones, which are the members of the Church. The respect for human beings in the image and likeness of God made Chāvāra restore the dignity of the marginalised and the poor in the society of his time.

3.4. Orienting the Faithful to Heaven

Worship of God is not confined to a space or a few regulations. The Church participates in the heavenly worship, where angels and saints join the earthly beings in the worship of God, the Father, with Christ, the Son. Chāvāra had a profound belief about this dimension of the Church's worship. For example, he advised the members of the first convent about the recitation of the canonical prayers (the Liturgy of the Hours) as follows:

When you go to recite canon prayers, you have to keep in mind that all the angels and saints of heaven, all the holy souls on earth, and all the guardian angels of the sisters in the prayer room praise the Lord. You should join your voices with theirs and praise Him.³³

On the earth, we have a foretaste of the eschaton during the liturgical celebration. Chāvāra had a profound eschatological vision about life and wanted to join the wedding banquet of the lamb of God. He recalls the

³¹ Kuriakose Elias Chāvāra, a Carmelite religious priest founded the indigenous religious congregation for men, namely CMI (Carmelites of Mary Immaculate), in collaboration with Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara in 1831.

³² Mathias A Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chāvāra*, 2nd Edition, (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2020), 72.

³³ The convent mentioned here is the Koonammavu convent of TOCD Sisters (now CMC) founded by Chāvāra and Leopold Beccaro. More about its establishment is found in later chapters. *Chronicles of Koonammavu Convent*, vol. I, 77.

parable in the gospel where the king's invitee was found without a wedding garment. Chāvāra was always very vigilant in keeping the robe of holiness received in baptism very clean with him. Chāvāra says that the "gift of contemplation is the wedding cloth," which Jesus refers to in the parable of the wedding banquet of the king and it is given freely to all who ask for it.³⁴ Chāvāra kept his white robe of holiness washed in pure tears of deep contrition. He exhorted his fellow beings to protect this white robe of the holy life. Chāvāra was sure that good examples and zealous leaders could guide a large group on the right path toward the participation of the heavenly banquet. Participation in the earthly liturgy, being the foretaste of the heavenly liturgy, nurtures the hope of the faithful in life after death.

4. Preparation Towards Mystagogical Catechesis

Liturgical catechesis is mystagogical³⁵ and so it is sacramental. It aims to initiate people into the mystery of Christ "by proceeding from the visible to the invisible, from the sign to the signified, from the sacrament to the mysteries."³⁶ The salvation of humanity achieved by the paschal mystery of Christ is received through the sacraments and liturgical celebrations of the Church. This demands full, active, and conscious participation (SC §14) in the mystery of salvation.³⁷ Full, that is complete, and perfect worship happens only in the totality of the mystical body of Christ. It occurs when the body of Christ is whole. It must be dynamic with each member free enough to grow and enjoy equal status. Participation leads to mediation and it requires correct knowledge of what is happening in the liturgy. It necessitates a freedom that comes from the knowledge of the truth.

4.1. United, Complete and Inclusive

A prerequisite condition for one's participation in the salvation mystery is one's incorporation into the body of Christ. Liturgy produces the desired fruits only when the whole body worships God in Spirit and Truth. Also, there should be unity among the members of the body. It is

³⁴ Mt 22:1-14; Chāvāra, CWC vol. III: Colloquies with the Heavenly Father, 1.

³⁵ The Greek word has the meaning 'to lead through the mysteries.'

³⁶ Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Revised ed. (London: Chapman, 1999), no 1075.

³⁷ SC repeats its call for active and full participation and there are twenty instances in the document where the call for quality participation in the liturgy is explicitly mentioned. See SC §§ 11, 14, 17, 18, 19, 21, 27, 30, 41, 48, 49, 50, 59, 79, 90, 113, 114, 118, and 121.

to this unity, with Jesus as the head of the body, that all Christians are invited. To achieve the goal of perfect and real worship, Chāvāra wanted to make the Malabar Church integral, inclusive, and comprehensive in nature. To this end, he fought to eradicate the different strata that existed in his community. He endeavoured to make each member of the Church full and complete with the integration of body, mind, and soul ready for the worship of God.

The long-cherished dream of Chāvāra, who dedicated his whole life to the service of the Church, was to bring unity and prosperity to the Church of Kerala. He believed that the people of God form a single body of Christ and so everyone should join in His mystical body to offer real worship to God. Since every part of this body is significant, he respected even the least ones among his fellow beings and strived to make them recognise their own dignity as the children of God and an integral part of Christ's body. In Galatians, we read: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). This unity or communion with Jesus forms a very delightful oblation for God, the Father. With this unifying vision of humanity, as a family or one sheepfold or one body, Chāvāra toiled to uplift and emancipate the marginalised members of his Church community and secular society at large. This is clear from his efforts for the education and edification of low-caste people and women.

Chāvāra struggled to bring all his siblings home, who were still running after the pods of pig's food. He tried to remind them of the festivity and richness in the Father's house by enlightening their minds. In the Testament of Chāvāra to his parishioners, he writes about his vision of family as a miniature of heaven. He quotes Mark 3:24-25: "If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand." God calls for reconciliation (Is 1:18), and, as a sacrament of unity on earth, the Church is struggling to attain unity within and communion with God through perfect worship.

4.2. Dynamic and Living

If the members of the body are slaves of evil and live in sinful conditions, the active worship of the Church is not possible. True worship happens in the mystical body of Christ and it brings salvation to humanity. To achieve freedom in worship, liberation from Egypt, the land of slavery, is necessary. The people of Kerala were slaves to the ignorance and injustice of the caste system at the time of Chāvāra. As a new Moses for

the people of Kerala, Chāvāra led them out of slavery to the mountain of divine presence for the true worship of the real God. To ensure dynamic participation in the paschal mystery, which affects the identity of the community, Chāvāra took daring steps.

CT 54 says about popular devotions that “Underlying most of these prayers and practices in popular devotion, there are other elements which could serve very well to help people advance towards knowledge of the mystery of Christ and of His message.” St. Chāvāra promoted some special devotions in order to help the faithful grow in the knowledge and experience of the mystery of Christ. He popularised the forty hours of adoration of the Eucharist in Kerala.³⁸ Later, it quickly spread to other parishes. He promoted daily participation in the holy *Qurbana* among families and among the faithful. He advises in his testament of a good father:

As much as possible, participate daily in the holy Mass. If it is difficult, take part in the Masses on Mondays for the souls in purgatory, on Fridays in commemoration of the passion and death of the Lord, and on Saturdays in devotion to our Lady of Sorrows. If all members of a family cannot attend daily Mass together, let them take turns, ensuring that one or two attend Mass every day.³⁹

He also gave due attention to the sacrament of reconciliation. He had a contrite heart that is clear in his ‘Act of Contrition’⁴⁰, ‘Reflections on Mortal Sin’⁴¹ and ‘The Work of Two Priests’.⁴² He advised families to prepare children for confession at the age of seven⁴³ and insisted that they receive the sacrament of reconciliation at least once per month.⁴⁴

³⁸ It was Pope Clement VIII who issued a historic document named *Quarant’ Ore* (forty hours) on the forty hours continual prayer before the exposed Blessed Sacrament in 1592. For a history of this devotion, John A Hardon, *The History of Eucharistic Adoration: Development of Doctrine in the Catholic Church*, (Oak Lawn: CMJ Publishers, 1997), 10. Though introduced by Bishop Roz after the Synod of Diamper, Chāvāra popularised this devotion in the Malabar Church. John Moolan, *The Period of Annunciation-Nativity in the East Syrian Calendar: Its Background and Place in the Liturgical Year* (Kottayam: OIRSI, 1985), 4.

³⁹ Chāvāra, *Chavarul*, 25.

⁴⁰ Chāvāra, *CWC vol. III*, 18.

⁴¹ Chāvāra, *CWC vol. III*, 57.

⁴² Chāvāra, *CWC vol. III*, 60.

⁴³ Chāvāra, *Chavarul*, 25.

⁴⁴ Chāvāra, *Chavarul*, 36.

Chāvāra and the religious priests of *Koventā* were known as retreat preachers and confessors. Catechesis, which is growth in faith and the maturing of Christian life towards its fullness, was the objective of all these efforts of Chāvāra.

4.3. Freed by True Knowledge

Worship is not a mere collection of liturgical actions or ceremonies but is, at its core, perfect love from a heart directed by the Spirit and illuminated by the true knowledge of God. Worship must be properly informed, otherwise, it will be reduced to emotional exercise and superficial acts. Chāvāra realised that "the lack of monasteries and convents cause the failure of many virtues and so, there should be a house of vision at least for the ordained."⁴⁵ Fr. Leopold underscores that Chāvāra had a zealous mind "which directed all of his existence to the one thing which is essential, the salvation of souls"⁴⁶ Chāvāra's great wish was the formation of saints in the Kerala Church, and he was ready to co-operate with anyone for the good of human beings. Chāvāra was a true disciple of Jesus and one taught by the Father and Holy Spirit to perform true and real worship. No doubt, he was known as one with the signature of the Holy Spirit in his heart, as witnessed by his contemporaries.⁴⁷ He desired to impart real wisdom, which he received directly from God, to his fellow beings and to bring them to the true worship of God. Worship of God without actual knowledge will end up in sensitive experience alone and, without spirit, can result in a form of mere legalism. After gaining genuine knowledge of God, one can render true worship to Him and glorify Him through a life of worship. An in-depth understanding of truth alone can direct the emotions and hearts of humans and thus lead them to actual and worthy worship.

5. Being and Becoming the Mystery

Liturgy is experiential and liturgical catechesis opens up and brings to awareness what is known intuitively. The most prominent way of participating in the mystery of salvation is the liturgy of the Church. In liturgy, the redemption of humanity is celebrated. To experience and

⁴⁵ Chāvāra, CWC vol I: The Chronicles, 1.

⁴⁶ Lucas Vittuvattical CMI, *Perspectives of a heroic Christian life* (Mannanam: K.E.C. Publications, 1988), 28 and 18.

⁴⁷ We see this expression 'one filled by the Holy Spirit' for the first time in a comment of Mathew Kurian Madathikunnel from Muttuchira. See, in this regard, John Romeo Pattassery CMI, *Vazhthappetta Chāvārayachan Vyakthiyum Veeshanaavum* (Malayalam). vol. 1 (Alwaye: Chāvāra books and Publications, 1989), 146-147.

engage with the mysteries, a deep conviction of faith in Christ's mystery and in the mystery of the Church is essential. Unless one is aware of the mystery of Christ and the economy of salvation through Christ, it would be impossible to meet God in the liturgy. Chāvāra was a man of prayer. He lived the faith that is celebrated and explained in the liturgy of the Malabar Church. Thus he could impart the right teaching for the Church. His holy being was the end product of his liturgical life. He could live out what he believed and celebrated in the liturgy. Thus, he displayed the right living, which is *lex vivendi*, the third operational principle of the liturgy.⁴⁸ He tried to bring all his fellow beings into that fulfilment through his ministries of diverse nature. In his writings, he expressed what he experienced and believed. He lived what he experienced and believed in the liturgy. He shared his wisdom through his acts for the good of others, especially for developing their faith. All saints are lived models of the paschal mystery. The exemplary imitation of Christ by Chāvāra motivates believers to practise the virtues of this saint and live according to gospel values. Thus he could be aptly called an exemplary liturgical catechist.

⁴⁸ Kevin W. Irwin, *Context and Text: A Method for Liturgical Theology*, (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1994 & 2018), 81.

SAINT KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA THE CATECHETIST

Anto Amarnad CMI♦

Abstract: Catechetics is a science of instructing the faith and nurturing the discipleship of Jesus Christ. Catechetist is an expert in the science of catechetics, and shares the treasures of faith and involves in the ministry of faith formation in a systematic way. Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara's, inspiring personality, diverse ministries, writings, and his virtues and attitudes revealed that he was an eminent catechetist. Chavara played a key role in imparting and nourishing the faith of the people to transform them. Chavara was a herald in introducing family prayer, forty-hour Adoration, annual retreat for the people of God, and several devotions and pious practices. His priority was the catechetical formation of the Christian faithful. His child like relationship with the Lord and filial love and devotion to the Church strengthened him to dedicate himself to God and His people, and to read the signs of the times and respond to them creatively and prophetically.

Keywords: Catechetist, Catechesis, Baptism, Mystagogical catechesis, Faith formation, Core values, Intimate love with Jesus, Signs of the time, *Nalla Appante Chavarul*, Ministry, Discipleship, Roccas schism, *Pallikoodam*, *Tukasa*.

♦ **Anto Amarnad CMI** is a Professor of Catechetics and Pastoral Theology and taught several years in DVK Pontifical Athenaeum, Bangalore and Samanvaya Theology College, Bhopal, holds a MTh from DVK Pontifical Athenaeum, a Doctorate in Youth Pastoral and Catechetics from Salesian University, Rome, and a Diploma in Pastoral Counselling from EAPI, Philippines. He composed more than 750 hymns and Bhajans and authored many articles on Catechetics, Liturgy and Spirituality. At present he serves as the Novice Master at Chavara Dham CMI Novitiate, Budhni, M.P. Email: antoamarnad@gmail.com

1. Introduction

Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara dispensed a new energy and power to the humanity that it might grow in the righteousness of the Gospel of Christ. He was a catechetist, an expert in the science of catechetics, the ministry of faith formation. It is a science of instructing the faith and nurturing the discipleship of Jesus Christ. It is a branch of theology that deals with the instruction given to the Christians prior to the sacraments of initiation. It also deals with the subsequent growth in faith and acquiring Christian living with the Gospel values and virtues. Catechesis is an instruction by word of mouth, and generally 'instruction' is basic Christian religious education of children and adults, often from a catechism book. The Church community has to initiate the new member to get mature in faith through continued catechesis and pastoral care. Saint Chavara knew this truth and he provided the Christian communities different ways and means to get matured in faith. He ministered to his people in varying ways and it resulted in leading the people to reconciliation and harmony as demanded by the Gospel.¹

According to Pope Francis, "The catechist is a Christian who is mindful of God, who is guided by the memory of God in his/her entire life and who is able to awaken that memory in the hearts of others."² Saint Chavara befriended the challenges of the Church, person and society and made available the God-given talents to create a new humanity of love and justice, devotion and worship through catechesis. As the prologue of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states: "God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, in a plan of sheer goodness freely created man to make him share in his own blessed life. For this reason, at every time and in every place, God draws close to man. He calls man to seek him, to know him, to love him with all his strength."³ Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara was a glaring example of God's companion who by his life showed the ways of getting closer to the divine so that his fellow human beings would merge into the same river of infinite love. His life was an authentic catechesis, he knew the science

¹ Mathew Maniampra, "Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara: A Reformist with a Pastoral Heart," *Herald of the East* 15, 1 (January-June 2023), 175.

² <https://www.pinterest.com/stlouisreligion/catechists-share-love/>; accessed on 14.06.2023.

³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994, 7, Prologue: no. 1.

of faith formation and its breadth and width, he could elevate the people of God to the pinnacle of spiritual treasures of Christian Faith.

2. Catechesis and Saint Chavara

Pope John Paul II exhorts: "Catechesis is an education of children, young people, and adults in the faith, which includes especially the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted, generally speaking, in an organic and systematic way, with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life."⁴ Catechesis is the process of teaching the principles of Christian faith, often in preparation for the sacraments of initiation. It involves instruction in the doctrines of the faith, as well as guidance on how to live a Christian life. The word catechesis comes from the Greek word "*katēchein*" which means "to echo the teaching."

Catechetics is the science of religious instruction and its methods to transform the human minds. It seeks to achieve its aim through the religious instruction and various spiritual activities. The postmodern interpretation of catechetics is that it is a way of understanding religious instruction that is not based on a single, objective truth but rather on multiple perspectives and experiences. Postmodern catechetics emphasizes the importance of dialogue and conversation in the learning process. The Catholic Church in Kerala learned various ways and means of faith formation from Chavara's person and mission of writings, devotional practices and social uplift programmes. He had to face the underdeveloped cultural realities and painful poverty ridden contexts of the society. Though his zeal and enthusiasm to spread the Gospel values and the Kingdom of God paved the way to the development of Christian spirituality and welfare projects. Chavara took every effort to translate the religious insights to the spiritual nourishment and physical wellbeing of the people in the society.

3. Baptism - Call to be a Catechist

It was after the Baptism, Jesus became a vagabond of catechesis. He had the Good News to communicate to the whole world. The Baptism and the subsequent 'Desert Experience' totally transformed Jesus and his style of life. Thus catechesis was the result of Jesus' baptismal experience (Mk 1:9-12; Lk 4:1-21), for Baptism was the most decisive mystery in the life of Jesus. So also Baptism is the most significant mystery in the life of

⁴ John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, no. 18. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_16101979_catechesi-tradendae.html; accessed on 16.09.2023.

every Christian, as it guarantees Christian identity and spirituality. Baptism makes a person completely absorbed in the person and mission of Jesus Christ. It is similar to the experience of St Paul: "Now, it is not I who live but Jesus lives in me" (Gal 2:20). Hence, there was a prolonged period of catechumenate in the ancient times. There were two to three years of faith formation for the adults who wanted to become Christians. The Baptism at the eve of Easter was a great event in the life of the Church as well as in the lives of the neophytes who had undergone such a tough training to make Jesus their own Lord and God. But the days of preparations at the catechumenate made the would-be Christians very strong and spiritually courageous persons to live the precepts of Christ and witness their faith in the world in spite of frightening persecutions and threat of life.

Baptism remains as the most unique experience for Jesus as well as for his followers. Jesus identified himself with the sinful humans and he took upon himself all the sins, and in fact, with the entire creation he plunged himself into the water to wash and clean all the sins and evil of the cosmos. The moment of his Baptism with the entire creation was amazingly divine and unique and it made the history of salvation so conspicuous in Christ. When at the beginning God created everything, there was the purity and sanctity in the whole creation. When the humans lost this pure state, it was in Jesus' Baptism that the Son of God allowed them once again to attain the original purity. Then the doors of heaven were opened, and God's Spirit descended not only upon Jesus but through him upon the entire creation. Thus, at the moment of Jesus' Baptism at Jordan, the whole universe was baptized. Everything in the universe was reborn in Jesus Christ and the entire creation obtained new life in him.

During the Baptism at Jordan, Jesus went down to the water, denoted a new birth of entire cosmos. The presence of the Holy Spirit testified that the entire creation is anointed by the Spirit and the Father. Thus, in the Baptism of Jesus the human beings are made the heirs of Christ's divine inheritance. So too, the entire creation was soaked into the being of Jesus, and all were invited to become completely 'original beings' in new creation. Therefore, the Good News becomes the inherent content of every being. Hence, there is the law of love and justice in the conscience of human beings and commitment towards their Creator, each other and the entire creation. The divine whisper within the conscience of every human being is the result of the presence of Good News within Jesus who had dipped himself in the river Jordan as a sign

of a powerful new humanity. Jesus' Baptism is very significant for the created nature, to the extent that the whole cosmos also had to be reborn through the same *Logos* who was made flesh. Now, the economy of salvation is not only the concern of the holy Trinity, but it is also the right of the entire creation whose essence is nothing but God Himself. The creation reverberates the original design and vision of God as the result of Baptism. Thus, the Baptism becomes a pilgrimage towards our original righteousness and grace in Christ. Chavara considered baptism the most sublime event in his entire life. He said: "The grace I received during my Baptism has never been spoiled in my life and this I can say with conviction."⁵

4. Mystagogical Catechesis and Chavara's Writings

The mystagogical catechesis is a form of religious teaching that seeks to lead the individuals into a deeper understanding and experience of the mysteries of the Christian faith. This type of catechesis is not only for just imparting knowledge, but also helping the individuals to encounter, experience, and participate in the life of Christ and the Church. One of the key elements of mystagogical catechesis is the use of symbols and rituals. These symbols and rituals are not simply empty gestures, rather they are powerful means of communicating the mysteries of the faith. By participating in these symbols and rituals, individuals are able to enter deeply into the mysteries of faith and to experience the grace of Christ in a profound way. Chavara used many imageries and symbols to expound and elaborate his teachings on faith so that even the ordinary people could grasp the depth of faith and grow in spiritual perfection. Mystagogical catechesis is about helping the individuals to enter into the sacramental life of the Church. This involves not only learning about the sacraments, but also experiencing them in a profound and transformative way. Through the sacraments, individuals are able to encounter Christ in a real and tangible way, and to be transformed by his grace. Chavara introduced various devotional practices to nurture the faith of the people so that the faith they profess and the way they live might be interrelated. Chavara was a herald of introducing family prayer, forty-hour Adoration, retreat preaching for the laity, popularised devotions and pious exercises such as rosary, way of the cross and

⁵ Leopold Beccaro, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Mannanam: St Joseph's Monastery, 2003, 17; Biju Tharaniyil, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Kakkanad: Chavara Central Secretariat, 2004, 33.

eucharistic adoration.⁶ Experience of faith transports the believer into a close encounter with Christ and propels necessary transformation in the personal life, applying the pure love and charity as an expression of witnessing one's faith.

It was during the time span of 1829 to 1870, all the literary works⁷ of Chavara were written: *Chronicles and Historical Writings; Spiritual Writings; Letters; Prayers; and Writings on Liturgy*. These writings are much related to the wholistic worldview of a catechetist. In the catechetical writings of Chavara, we find two unique categories: They reflect the religious spirituality of Christianity⁸ in Kerala and they show the way of salvation to the Christian believers.

4.1. Nalagamangal - The Chronicles

The *Chronicles* written by Saint Chavara narrate the daily events not only of the monastery but also of the society. Together with various events of the CMI Congregation, the *Chronicles* depicted the events associated with the Society and the Church of the time.⁹ These writings were originally found in Malayalam, in Kuriakose Elias Chavara's own handwriting.¹⁰ There are two manuscripts under the title *Mannanam Nalagamangal*.

4.2. Atmanuthapam - The Lamentations of a Repentant Soul

Spiritual writings like *Atmanuthapam* is an autobiographical poem written in an epic style – *Mahakavyam*. The poem narrates the life of Jesus from his birth to the ascension into heaven and the life of Mother Mary from the ascension of Jesus to her assumption into heaven. As Chavara meditated these mysteries in the life of Jesus and Mary, he examined his

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kuriakose_Elias_Chavara; accessed on 14.06.2023.

⁷ For an exploration of Chavara's writings see, Sophy Rose, *A Pillar and Guiding Light: Kuriakose Elias Chavara, A Theologian of the Church*, (Theological Studies on Saint Chavara -4), Kochi: Chavara Central Secretariat & Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2020, 21-38.

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kuriakose_Elias_Chavara; accessed on 14.06.2023.

⁹ *Complete Works of Chavara* Vol. 1 published in 1990 contains five Chronicles, Mannanam.

¹⁰ K.P. Molly, *Blessed Chavara: Life and Mission: Religious Philosophy of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara – A PhD Study Thesis in the Department of Philosophy*, Calicut: University of Calicut, 2004. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kuriakose_Elias_Chavara; accessed on 15.07.2023.

own life experiences right from the childhood in the light of these mysteries. According to Dr K.M. Tharakan *Atmanuthapam* reflects Chavara's philosophy of life which in turn exemplifies a Christian religious life. Dr Tharakan states: "...Humility, which is not self-contempt, and repentance are the foundation stones of the philosophy of his life. Thus, the first step is faith in God. The second is the belief that one can reach God through Jesus Christ. The third is the conviction that without repenting and accepting Jesus, one cannot reach Christ... what a Christian obtains is the awareness of the noble qualities. These qualities are 'faith', 'hope' and 'love'. Only through these triple qualities, a Christian can attain Christ."¹¹

4.3. *Maranaveetil Cholvanulla Parvam - A Poem to be Sung in the Bereaved House*

It is a poem intended to be sung when the dead-body of a person is placed in the coffin for public homage.¹² It contains 1162 verses. The underlying message is that one should lead a virtuous and God-fearing life in order to overcome the painful experience of death. Chavara described in it the articles of faith related to the death of a man and beautifully illustrated them with stories or incidents, the poet heard or read.¹³

4.4. *Nalla Appante Chavarul - Testament of a Loving Father*

The *Testament of a Loving Father* is a magna carta written by Chavara in 1868 for the ordinary lay people but it is filled with profound Gospel values and Christian virtues. It could be one of the best catechetical texts he wrote for the Christian families and a sure guide for Christian morality. Another important aspect of mystagogical catechesis is the emphasis on community. This type of catechesis recognizes that the Christian life is not meant to be lived in isolation, but rather is meant to be lived in community. Through participation in the liturgical life of the Church, individuals are able to experience the love and support of their fellow Christians, and to grow in their understanding and experience of the mysteries of faith. *Nalla Appante Chavarul* is the counsel to the Christian families of Kainakari parish but its relevance resonates till date. Chavara wrote: "I bequeath to you this document in my own

¹¹ Z. M. Moozhoor, ed., *Chavarayachan: Vividha Veekshanangalil*, Cochin: Janatha Services Publishers, 1989, 68.

¹² "St. Kuriakose Elias Archives and Research Centre," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kuriakose_Elias_Chavara; accessed on 15.07.2023.

¹³ K.P. Molly, *Blessed Chavara: Life and Mission*.

handwriting. This script will not perish even when I am dead and gone.”¹⁴ This insightful and down-to-earth document is the first of its kind in the known history of the Church, and it offers practical direction and guidelines to the families in leading a God-fearing as well as socially commendable life.¹⁵

4.5. *Anastasiayude Rakthasakshyam - The Martyrdom of Anastacia*

It was written in 1861 and it contains 232 verses.¹⁶ This descriptive poetry is the first among the works of the same style. Anastasia was depicted as a very beautiful and pious candidate of a convent run by Mother Sophia in the third century. Propho, the minister of Emperor Valerian was very much impressed by her beauty and wanted to meet her. He asked her to denounce Christian faith and embrace the faith of the Emperor. She declined the suggestion and so she was made to undergo cruel punishment and torture. But nothing altered her faith and conviction and finally she embraced martyrdom. Courage and grace are the major themes of this poem, and they are written in beautiful lines of popular poetry with rhyming words and figures of speech.¹⁷

4.6. *Dhyana Sallapangal - Colloquies in Meditation*

It is an inspiring writing of Saint Chavara and it highlights him as a man of deep contemplation and prayer. His meditations are written in the form of a dialogue between a son and a Father, and Chavara as the son and God as the Father. It is amazing to see Chavara always addressing or invoking God as *Abba*- father. For him, meditation meant a loving conversation with God the Father, becoming one with and speaking to Him as if to an intimate friend. In the *Dhyana Sallapangal*, we come across Chavara as a true mystic.

4.7. *Eclogues - Shepherd Plays*

Eclogues were the first dramatic plays in Malayalam in the pastoral (shepherd) genre or *Eclogues* of Italy.¹⁸ They were plays written for the performance during the Christmas season. Chavara wrote them between

¹⁴ St Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Chavarul, Testament of a loving Father*, Kakkanaad: Chavara Central Secretariat, 2020, 7.

¹⁵ “Saint Chavara – Champion of Families – Light of Truth.” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kuriakose_Elias_Chavara; accessed on 15.07.2023.

¹⁶ K.P. Molly, *Blessed Chavara: Life and Mission*.

¹⁷ Biju Tharaniyil, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 26.

¹⁸ St Kuriakose Elias Chavara Chair in the Mahatma Gandhi University. www.saintchavara.org. Archived from the original on 4 August 2017, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kuriakose_Elias_Chavara; accessed on 15.07.2023.

1856–1858. He wrote 10 Eclogues or Shepherd Plays and introduced them in the novitiate at Koonammavu.¹⁹

4.8. Letters

The letters were written on different occasions to various persons or groups. There are 67 original copies of these letters. They are published in the *Complete Works of Chavara* Vol. IV. The Chronicle in Koonammavu records three letters written to them by Kuriakose Elias Chavara. Though the Chronicle states that many letters and notes were written by Chavara, only three are recorded.²⁰

4.9. Prayers

Though Chavara wrote many prayers, only six of them have been preserved. They are: i) Meditation: Method of beginning – It is an intercessory prayer to Mother Mary seeking her help to be with him during the meditation. ii) Prayer to the Blessed Virgin Mary – It is a thanksgiving prayer for the blessings received from Mother Mary. iii) Morning Prayer to the Most Holy Trinity – It is a thanksgiving prayer for the favours received. iv) Evening prayer to Most Holy Trinity – It is a thanksgiving prayer for the favours received. v) Prayer for the custody of eyes – It is a prayer to be recited by priests to remain rooted in their fidelity to Jesus Christ. vi) Prayer to be recited by priests – Prayers to be recited by priests to remain rooted in their fidelity to Jesus Christ.²¹

4.10. Writings on Liturgy

Chavara wrote a number of liturgical texts that played an important role in the renewal of the liturgy.²² They include the Divine Office for the priests, Divine Office for the dead, Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Prayers of various blessings, the Order of Holy mass – *Tukasa*, Liturgical Calendar, Forty Hours Adoration, Novenas and Prayer books for lay people.²³

¹⁹ "Chavara Portrait." www.chavaraculturalcentre.org, in https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kuriakose_Elias_Chavara, accessed on 15.07.2023.

²⁰ "Religion / Community and People / Chavara A Saintly Person / Prof: Dr Fr Thomas Kadankavil CMI". dhruwadeepti.blogspot.de. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kuriakose_Elias_Chavara; accessed on 15.07.2023.

²¹ K.P. Molly, *Blessed Chavara: Life and Mission*.

²² "Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara, Mar Thoma Sleeha Cathedral," smchicago.org. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kuriakose_Elias_Chavara; accessed on 15.07.2023.

²³ Francis Thonippara, "Criteria for Declaring a Saint 'Father of the Syro-Malabar Church *Sui Iuris*' and 'Doctor of the Universal Church' and Their

4.11. Writings on Administration

In this category, 16 writings have been preserved. Some of them were written on palm leaves and others on paper. They dealt with administrative matters pertaining to the time of Chavara.²⁴ All these writings were filled with catechetical formation of Christian faithful. Chavara lived for Christ and for the cause of Christian faith. His enthusiasm for the propagation of faith could be seen very well in all his writings.

5. Catechesis and Practice of Faith

Faith is lifeless when it is not translated into actions. Life witness is essential for the authenticity of faith. Chavara had proved the authenticity of his faith with life witness. As a renowned social reformer Chavara initiated public education and thus opened opportunities for decent employment and spiritual growth. He was an innovator of many socio-pastoral, cultural, educational, and social reforms for the well-being of everyone and attempted to establish equality and justice in the society. He was a champion for the cause of women, the downtrodden, the sick, the poor and the dalits. Chavara initiated Jesus' style catechesis that reached out to all the essential aspects of the humanity. His spirituality found its expression in preaching the Word of God, renewal programme for priests and laity, press apostolate, catechumenates, home for the destitute, strengthening the liturgical life, preventing schism, fostering loyalty to the Catholic Church, establishing religious Congregations for men and women, etc.²⁵

As a spiritual leader Chavara had a great vision concerning the progress of the people and strived hard for the uplift of the whole society. He loved the humanity and firmly believed in the providential love of the Father and in the strength of the fraternity of his fellow human beings. He took a keen interest in uplifting the underprivileged classes, the orphans and the poor. He introduced *Pallikoodam* providing free education for all at the schools attached to every parish church in Kerala. Chavara's success in all his undertakings was due to his spiritual

Application on Saint Chavara," *Herald of the East* 15, 1 (January-June 2023), 34; K.P. Molly, *Blessed Chavara: Life and Mission*.

²⁴ "Kuriakose Elias Chavara: Ahead of His Time," saintchavara.blogspot.de in [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ Kuriakose _Elias_Chavara](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kuriakose_Elias_Chavara); accessed on 15.07.2023.

²⁵ Cf. The Committee for the Cause of Blessed Chavara, *Compunction of the Soul, Dirge, Anasthasia's Martyrdom*, Vol. II, Ernakulam, 1989, vi.

vision. His deep prayer life was the source of his various apostolates. His life in the Lord inspired him to be an innovator and as a fervent religious he dedicated himself to the love and service of God and the humanity.

6. Core Values in Catechesis

Core values are a set of fundamental beliefs, ideals or practices that reflect and reveal how one's life is. They serve as guiding principles and help us to differentiate between the right and the wrong. They also reflect what is important to one person and what makes one happy.²⁶ Some of the core values are: Honesty, Integrity, Compassion, Creativity, Excellence, and Diversity. Core values may vary from person to person and from organization to organization. They may also change in the course of time as one grows and learns from one's experiences. Identifying one's core values may help us to achieve the goals, build relationships, and creatively solve problems in a way that aligns with one's own true self. Chavara's core values made him an exceptional leader and prophet of his time, and we find the following core values in his life.

6.1. Intimate Love with Jesus

Love of Jesus was the most fundamental characteristic that led Chavara throughout his life. In *Atmanuthapam* we read:

You are my Love, my joy and all my good fortune
 If not with you, how could I live my life
 My very breath, my food, my drink
 What solace have I save in you ²⁷

These lines underscore an intimate love relationship Chavara had with Jesus. The love of Jesus was the very source of all his ministries. His love for Jesus enabled him to respond to his priestly vocation during the critical moments of the death of his parents and brother due to the epidemic. He always cherished a strong desire to live for Jesus. Fr Leopold Beccaro wrote: "Those who came to know him were convinced of his unusual humility, extraordinary charity, unqualified obedience and submissiveness to the Ordinary. As a result, all loved and respected

²⁶ <https://sg.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/what-are-core-values>; accessed on 17.07.2023.

²⁷ The Committee for the Cause of Blessed Chavara, *Compunction of the Soul*, Vol. II, Ernakulam, 1989, 10, Stanza no. 144.

him; and they put their trust in his words.”²⁸ These unique virtues were the results of his intimate love with Jesus. As *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states: “Those who with God’s help have welcomed Christ’s call and freely responded to it are urged by love of Christ to proclaim Good News everywhere in the world ... All Christ’s faithful are called to hand it on from generation to generation by professing the faith, by living it in fraternal sharing, and by celebrating it in liturgy and prayer.”²⁹ In short, Chavara’s love of Jesus urged him to live for Jesus and spread the Gospel values through diverse ministries.

6.2. Total Dedication to the Church

Chavara’s love and devotion to the mother Church inspired everyone. He was an ardent lover of the authorities of the Church and he always obeyed their instructions wholeheartedly even in difficult times. Unconditional obedience to the superiors and authorities in the Church was an outstanding virtue of Saint Chavara. His love for the Church, urged him to do everything for the development and growth of the Church. During the devastating Roccas schism, he wrote to the Holy Father in Rome for guidance and instructions.³⁰ The Holy Father then ordered the Babylon Patriarch to call back Roccas.³¹ Chavara’s mature and prudent interactions in the critical moments helped to maintain the unity of the Church in Kerala.³² He made timely interventions that prevented the division of his mother Church.³³ “Chavara with his apostolic zeal and pastoral vision was vigilant and prudent to nurture the faith and traditions of the Church.”³⁴ His varying ministries and undertakings in the Church contributed to the growth of the Church both spiritually and temporally.

²⁸ Leopold Beccaro, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Mannanam: St Joseph Monastery, 2003, 12.

²⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 8, Prologue: no. 3.

³⁰ Alex Sebastian Kollamkalam, “Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara: A Saintly Father and an Orthodox Teacher,” *Herald of the East* 15, 1 (January-June 2023), 169.

³¹ Cf. Biju Tharaniyil, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 17.

³² Biju Tharaniyil, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 21.

³³ Jossy Maria, “Kuriakose Elias Chavara: A True Son of the Church,” *Herald of the East* 15, 1 (January-June 2023), 88.

³⁴ Naiju Jose Kalamkattu, “Editorial: Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara, Father or Doctor of the Church?,” *Herald of the East* 15, 1 (January-June 2023), 4.

6.3. Commitment to and Concern for the Poor

Chavara had a special love towards the poor and the marginalized in the society. His sense of justice was so great that he worked for the equality and harmony in the society. During his time, people had not heard of old age homes in Kerala but Chavara opened a home for the orphans. He believed that the service done to the poor, the downtrodden, the sick, the elderly and the orphans was a service to Jesus (Mt 25:40). He took collections from the wealthy public for this noble cause, and arranged for a special pot in all the Christian families and suggested to offer a handful of rice as they cook food for the family. According to him, the day we don't do any good for others, then that day will not be counted in the Book of life. He encouraged the people of God to take care of the poor and the orphans.

6.4. Great Longing for the Salvation of his own Soul

Chavara always longed for sanctity and salvation. He was convinced of the need to be vigilant for one's own salvation. Leaving aside this world and going for asceticism was one of the dreams of Fr Thomas Palackal and Fr Thomas Porukara. Along with them, Chavara worked intensely for its realization. During his First Eucharistic celebration, he ardently prayed for this great intention. Along with Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara, as the founder of the first indigenous Congregation, his priority was the salvation of souls. Thus, we find him as a great visionary of his time who initiated a monastic way of life. His preaching and writings contained a longing to see the Lord and to have the experience of salvation. The introduction of various devotional practices for the spiritual growth of the priests and the lay people shed light on his zeal for the salvation and sanctity of human persons.

6.5. Ability to Read the Signs of the Times and Creative Responses

Reading the signs of the times was a special gift of Chavara. He knew the conditions of his people and the problems they faced, and he creatively responded to solve those problems in the best way possible. He initiated many reforms in the socio-cultural and religious realms of the society. He had realized that the integral growth of a generation could be materialized only through good education,³⁵ and therefore, he established schools attached to every parish church. It was a timely revolution to bring in a bright future to Kerala society. The ministries he initiated in the society underscore that he was an extraordinary person

³⁵ George Thanchan, "Foreword," in Biju Tharaniyil, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Kakkanad: Chavara Central Secretariat, 2004, 5.

with multifaceted talents and gifts, for he could tirelessly work for the holistic development of his fellow beings. He was a great visionary who worked for the realization of his dreams to transform the society and the Church.

7. Conclusion

Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara helped the Kerala Church to become spiritually matured and productive by his catechetical ministry. He was a catechetical genius who knew the power of the faith formation in transforming the individuals and the society. He helped the faithful to understand and respond to the guidance of the Holy Spirit in life and thus strengthened them to witness the faith in Christ. He emphasised the spiritual dimension of the mystery of the Church and urged the faithful to have a personal intimacy with Christ.³⁶

Chavara resembled the sun rising on the face of the earth: The sun revolves around the earth and dispels the darkness and thus causes the growth of all living beings. Being the source of light, it assists in the creation of jewels, diamonds and agates in the land, and pearls and corals in the sea and contributes to the metals like gold and silver, and with such an accomplishment it comes to its setting.³⁷ Chavara was a glaring catechetist who could generate faithful disciples of Jesus through his life, teaching, preaching and writings. The innovations he made in the horizons of the society and the Church are countless. They testify that he was a gifted catechetist who could bring the Gospel rays everywhere and make people see the virtues of faith, hope and love. A good Christian is formed and sustained in faith by true catechesis. Chavara realized it and made remarkable contributions as a catechetist to form the Christians with firm foundation on the Gospel values. He was able to touch the hearts of the children, adult, elderly, men and women and make everyone to walk on the Way (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22) as genuine disciples of the Lord. He brought in renewal and reformation in every realm, and he became an authentic prophet of the day.

³⁶ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 242, no. 921.

³⁷ Kuriakose Elisius Porukara, the second CMI Prior General in the Biography of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara, quoted in Paul Kalluveetil & Paulachan Kochappilly, ed., *The Lord of Heaven and Earth: Chavara Studies in Honour of Fr Lucas Vithuvattickal CMI*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2004, 3.

FAMILY CATECHESIS IN THE *CHAVARUL*

Ann Mary Madavanakkad CMC♦

Abstract: Catechetics is an essential aspect of religious education, for it plays a crucial role in nurturing the faith of the believers. Rooted in the ancient traditions and adapted to modern times, catechetics encompasses those teachings, methods, and practices which transmit religious knowledge and foster spiritual growth. Family catechesis is a dynamic and transformative approach to religious education that places the family at the centre of faith formation. It recognizes the vital role of the parents and guardians as the primary educators of their children in matters of faith. In other words, the family is the cradle of the formation of children and the best catechesis is done in the family ambience. The *Chavarul* of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara, the code of conduct for families, which assists the families to lead a Theo-centric life following a love-centred ethics, can be considered one of the significant catechetical tools. The present article explores the various dimensions of the definition of family given in the *Chavarul* which embraces all the aspects required for a harmonious family life.

Keywords: Family, Catechesis, *Chavarul*, Marriage, Ethical issues, Image of God, unity, Parents, Children, Salvation of Souls, Love, Respect, Obedience, Last Testament, *Kudumbachattam*, Decalogue

♦ Ann Mary Madavanakkad CMC is a religious nun in the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel (CMC). She holds MSc in Psychology and Counselling, LTh in Pastoral Management from JDV, Pune, and LTh and Doctorate in Moral Theology from Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bengaluru. Her latest publication is "A Good Christian Family is the Image of Heaven": *Family Ethics in the Chavarul of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara* (TSSC 10). She lectures in different religious and theological institutes and formations houses, and currently, she serves as the Mission Formation Coordinator of the CMC Congregation. Email: srannmarycmc@gmail.com.

1. Introduction

According to Vatican II, “family is the first and vital cell of society.”¹ Pope John Paul II says, “the strength and vitality of any country will only be as great as the strength and vitality of the family within that country. No group has a greater impact on a country than the family. No group has a more influential role in the future of the world.”² The mutual love, union of mind and heart, and fidelity of a couple offer stability and hope to a world torn by hatred and division. By their lifelong perseverance in lifegiving love Catholic couples show the unbreakable and sacred character of the sacramental marriage and promote the dignity and worth of human life.

Today, families are at crossroads due to rapid changes. The ethical issues in contemporary families are complex and multifaceted, as they are often shaped by evolving societal norms, technology, and cultural changes. According to Pope Francis, contemporary society, with the explosion of the media and globalization, has made itself vulnerable to various vices and their consequences. As a result, the role of the family in building up a just, emotionally stable, and healthy society has gained attention and is a topic of concern for people of all religious backgrounds. The metaphor of “domestic church” stands as one of the sources of renewal for a Christian theology of family. St Kuriakose Elias Chavara, a visionary saint of the 19th century Kerala, was a promoter of the family values and tried to impart an ethical vision helpful for the families through his “*Chavarul*.”³

¹ Vatican II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 11 (AAS 58: 848).

² John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 42 (AAS 74: 134).

³ *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul* (Malayalam) or “The Testament of a Good Father,” or *Chavarul* was written by St Kuriakose Elias Chavara of the Holy Family (1805–1871), on 13 February 1868 to his native parishioners at Kainakary. He was an ardent devotee of the Holy Family and the founder of the CMI and CMC Congregations. *Chavarul* gives concrete suggestions and proposals regarding how to lead a good Christian family life in the context of Kerala society. It was published in English in 1910 under the title “Testament of a Good Father.” The title *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul* though not formally given to the letter by the author himself, affirms that this letter should be accepted as coming from a loving father, as his Testament. See Leo, trans., *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara*, Vol, IV: *The Letters*. Hereafter *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara* is referred to as CWC and *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul* is referred to as *Chavarul* and St Kuriakose Elias Chavara as Chavara.

Family catechesis has the potential to transform not only individual families but also the entire faith communities. When families actively engage in their faith together, they become witnesses to the power of God's love in their lives. The impact ripples out into the society as the families rooted in faith bring about positive change, foster moral values, and contribute to the building of a just and compassionate world. As part of his family catechesis, Chavara proposes an emphatic definition on family in the *Chavarul* which includes various aspects that are inevitable to make a family as the image of heaven. This definition highlights the purposes of family such as, the unity of the family members, the love and affection shared by parents and between parents and children, the respect and obedience the children should have towards their parents, the harmony they should uphold with God and the people, and their duty to seek eternal salvation of all. To set the context for the discussion, first we look into the challenges and prospects that the families face currently and the relevance of Chavara's definition of the family in the present socio-cultural context.

2. The Theology of Marriage and Family

The theology of marriage and family evolved over the centuries from the time of the Fathers of the Church to later theological development and the magisterium. Ephrem (306–373 ACE) exalts the intimate relationship of the first couple.⁴ Following St Paul, John Chrysostom gives instruction to the parents and the children. He exhorts, the husband should respect wife and *vice versa*. He says, "as the partner of one's life, the mother of one's children, the foundation of one's every joy, one ought never to chain down by fear and menaces, but with love and good temper. For, what sort of union is that, where the wife trembles at her husband?"⁵ Chrysostom advises the parents to discipline their children gently without provoking them.⁶ Augustine teaches that marriage is good.⁷

⁴ Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis*, Translated by Edward G. Mathews and Joseph P. Amar, Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1994, 2:12.

⁵ John Chrysostom, "Homilies on Ephesians," Vol. 13 of *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Homilies on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, Edited by Philip Schaff, Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1994, 20.

⁶ John Chrysostom, "Homilies on Colossians," Edited by Philip Schaff, Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers Inc., 1994, 10.

⁷ John M Rist, "Saint Augustine: Virginité and Marriage-2," *The Canadian Catholic Review* 5. 2 (1987): 57–64, 57.

According to him, marriage is good *a priori* as it is instituted by God,⁸ and it is also good *a posteriori* because of its three observable goods such as *proles* (offspring), *fides* (fidelity), and *sacramentum* (sacrament).⁹ In Augustine's opinion, *bono fides* refers to marital faithfulness. He encourages the spouses to refrain from engaging in sexual activity outside of their marriage. *Bono proles* refers to the acceptance of a child in love, nurturing in affection, and upbringing him or her in the Christian formation.¹⁰ In his words, "no relationship which lacked this intent could be called marriage."¹¹ He gave priority to *proles* than the other two.

Thomas Aquinas, one of the leading theologians of medieval period, discusses the essence of marriage. According to him, developing an intimate relationship between the couple is the essence of matrimony, and monogamous indissoluble marriage is the demand of human nature.¹² For him, their intimate and inseparable union leads to their mutual affection, by which they enter into the intimate sexual expression of their mutual love through which God blesses them with children. The responsibility of the upbringing of children is a divine assignment to the spouses, which should be accomplished with mutual help.¹³ There are several prominent figures from eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, including Alphonsus Liguori and Chavara, who taught on marriage and family. Alphonsus Liguori has given comprehensive instructions on how to lead a good life which is applicable to all families.¹⁴

⁸ Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, Vol. 7 of *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series 1, Edited by Philip Schaff, 1886-1889, 14 Vols. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1994, 9.2.

⁹ Augustine, *De Genesis ad litteram*, In *PL*, 34:245-486, Vol. 2 of *The Ancient Christian Writers*, Books 7-12, Edited by Johannes Quasten, Walter J. Burghardt, and Thomas Comerford Lawler, Translated by John Hammond Taylor, New York: Newman Press, 1982, 9.7.12.

¹⁰ Augustine, *De Genesis ad litteram*, 9.7.12.

¹¹ Rist, "Augustine: Virginité and Marriage-2," 59.

¹² Aquinas, *Summa Theologica: Supplementum*, New York: Benziger Brothers, 1922, q. 44, art. 2.

¹³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 3 vols, Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, New York: Benziger Brothers, Inc., 1946-1948, III, q. 29, art. 2.

¹⁴ Alphonse De Liguori, *The Great Means of Salvation and of Perfection, The Ascetical Works*, vol. 3 of *The Complete Works of Saint Alphonsus De Liguori*, Edited by Eugene Grimm, Brooklyn: Redemptorist Fathers, 1927, 355-56.

3. Family in the Context: Challenges and Prospects

Families today face a wide range of challenges that can vary depending on cultural, socio-economic, and individual factors. Economic pressure, including unemployment, low wages, and rising the cost of living, may create financial stress within families. It may further lead to conflicts, anxiety, and strained relationships. Balancing the demands of work and family life may sometimes lead to ethical dilemmas, such as deciding between career advancement and spending quality time with children. Long work hours, inflexible work schedules, and the blurring of boundaries between work and personal life due to technology can strain family relationships. Parenting is increasingly complex, with parents facing issues such as finding quality childcare, helping with remote learning, and navigating the digital world's impact on children's development and safety.

Mental health problems within the family, including anxiety, depression, and addiction have a profound impact on family dynamics and require significant support and resources. High rate of divorce and separations create emotional and financial challenges for families. Co-parenting, child custody, and maintaining healthy relationships after separation can be difficult. Caring for aging parents or relatives, known as the "sandwich generation," can be challenging, particularly when trying to balance caregiving with one's own family and career responsibilities.¹⁵ Excessive screen time and technology use lead to issues like screen addiction, reduced family communication, and concerns about online safety. Navigating the education system, addressing learning disabilities, and ensuring access to quality education are common concerns for many families. Rising healthcare costs and concerns about access to quality healthcare put financial strain on families, particularly if they face chronic illness or unexpected medical expenses.

¹⁵ By "sandwich generation," it means caring for individuals at both older and younger life stages. J. Bourke, *Elder Care, Self-Employed Women and Work-Family Balance*, Palmerston North: Massey University, 2009; T. Cook, *The History of the Carers' Movement*, London: Carers U. K., 2007; M. Raschick & B. Ingersoll-Dayton, "The Costs and Rewards of Caregiving Among Aging Spouses and Adult Children," *Family Relations* 53, 3 (2004): 317-325; E. P. Stoller, "Parental Caregiving by Adult Children," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 45, 4 (1983): 851-858.

Looking into these factors, sometimes, we might think that family gets the least attention today. It does not mean that family had no challenges in the past. Though gravity and magnitude vary, as in our time, during the time of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara as well, family had to face several challenges. *Chavarul* continues to inspire the Church's vision of the family. Its significance must be understood in the light of Chavara's profound knowledge of the challenges that the families had to face at that time, and his fatherly concern and love for the families. It is noteworthy that his instructions and advice to the families are relevant and helpful for the present-day families, though the context is different, and the problems they face are diverse. Moreover, we may be amazed to see how the *Chavarul* reflects the modern theological insights on the family. Thus, we may say that the *Chavarul* goes ahead of its time in many respects, though it is deeply rooted in its historical and socio-cultural context. The *Chavarul* can be called a unique document in many ways: it presents the Christian theological vision of the family and indicates various challenges and problems the families face; it offers guidelines to lead a family life rooted in love; it inspires the families to be nourished by prayer and spiritual practices.

4. An Overview of the *Chavarul* and the Family Catechesis Envisioned by Chavara

The present article focuses on the *Chavarul* of Kuriakose Elias Chavara, his teachings on marriage and family are studied in detail. It consists of spiritual instructions, theological visions, moral principles, psychological insights, social norms, corrective measures, and practical suggestions for the sound growth and development of the family toward its original vision in the plan of God—"the image of heaven."¹⁶ Exhortations to Christian families are presented in the form of family catechesis embedded in the Word of God, as well as a practical interpretation of the Ten Commandments on how to live the family life as envisaged by God the Father. The following paragraphs deal with an overview of the *Chavarul* and discuss the definition of family given in the *Chavarul*.

4.1. An Overview of the *Chavarul*

St Kuriakose Elias Chavara had written many letters to different groups of people including the ecclesiastical authorities, priests, sisters, families,

¹⁶ *Complete Works of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, vol. 4: *The Letters*, translated by Augustine Keemattam, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2020, "Introduction," 184. Hereafter it is referred as *Chavarul*.

and individuals. Among them, eighty-eight letters are available, of which one is known as *Chavarul*. The *Chavarul* is one of the most significant contributions of Chavara to the family. It contains a set of guidelines based on the Christian concept of the family as well as practical wisdom that mirrored the vision he had for a truly happy, peaceful, and blessed family life. The *Chavarul*—a catechetical text—contains forty precious instructions addressed to the parishioners of Kainakary. It remains as a relic of the sacred memories of the saintly life of Chavara. It comprises an introduction and the main body of forty instructions in two parts. Twenty-four precepts in the first part discuss the characteristics and mode of conduct of a good family, while sixteen precepts in the second part are solely dedicated to the spiritually balanced and morally healthy upbringing of children. Although there is no proper conclusion, an appendix serves that purpose.

In the introduction, Chavara gives a brief description of the Christian family, and in the appendix, he notes that he was impelled by a sense of justice and love to his relatives by flesh and entrusted this work to them, saying, "this is my last testament [Will or *Kudumbachattam* or family code] given to you"¹⁷ and "this script will not perish even when I am dead and gone."¹⁸ Chavara instructs them that this family code should be read every first Saturday of the month.¹⁹ Here the author makes reference to his death, though not imminent, and describes the letter as the 'Testament.' A majority of the forty exhortations are elaborated with a good number of didactic stories, allegories, historical episodes, and biblical events or words.²⁰

Chavara believed a family that functions according to its original vision must strive to be impeccable. The original divine plan for marriage and family is clearly outlined in the creation account of Genesis. We understand God's purpose of marriage as one of companionship, marital union, indissolubility, and procreation (Gen

¹⁷ *Complete Works of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, vol. 4: *The Letters*, translated by Augustine Keemattam, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2020 [hereafter used as *Chavarul*], "Epilogue," 201–202.

¹⁸ *Chavarul*, "Epilogue," 201.

¹⁹ *Chavarul*, "Epilogue," 202.

²⁰ Benny Nalkara, "The Guidelines for the Formation of the Youth as Reflected in the *Chavarul* (*Testament of a Loving Father*) by St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara," *Vinayasādhana* 9. 2 (2018): 35–42, 35.

1:27–28; 2:23–24).²¹ Taken up by this biblical understanding of family, Chavara took a keen interest in developing healthy relationships in families and penned down the *Chavarul*. It is unique and notable for being a treatise on family, issued by an ecclesiastical leader,²² directly addressing Christians for the upbuilding of God-fearing families and the upbringing of children.

4.2. The Family Catechesis Envisioned by Chavara

The term catechism is derived from the Greek word “*katecheo*,” meaning “to instruct” or “to teach.”²³ It refers to the systematic and intentional process of educating individuals about the beliefs, doctrines, rituals, and moral principles of a particular faith tradition. The origins of catechesis can be traced back to the early days of Christianity when the disciples were instructed in the teachings of Jesus Christ. The practice evolved over centuries as the need for a structured approach to religious education. The primary objective of catechesis is to provide individuals with a solid foundation in their faith, enabling them to understand and articulate their beliefs effectively. Catechetics seeks to deepen spiritual awareness, foster moral development, and encourage active participation in religious practices.

In the introduction of the *Chavarul*, Chavara gives a sound definition of a Christian family involving its social, spiritual, and interpersonal dimensions. According to Chavara, “A good Christian family is the image of heaven. The *raison d’être* of a family is that the members live together by the bond of blood and affection, with children duly respecting and obeying their parents, walking peacefully before God and each one, seeking eternal salvation according to his or her proper

²¹ Patrick Mathias, “No to Divorce (Mt 19:3–9): An Exegetico-Theological Perusal,” Pages 33–58 in *Marriage and Family at the Crossroads*, Edited by Patrick Mathias, Chennai: Don Bosco Publications, 2017, 35.

²² On June 8, 1861, the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly, Msgr. Bernardino Baccinelli, appointed Chavara as the Vicar General for the St. Thomas Christians, and he continued in this office until his death in 1871. See A. Mathias Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications & Chavara Central Secretariat, 2020, 224–26; Mathias Mundadan, *Indian Christians: Search for Identity and Struggle for Autonomy*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2003, 81. During the time of Chavara, there was no appointed bishop for the Syro-Malabar Church.

²³ *Katecheo* means to teach orally, to instruct. <https://www.Biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/kjv/katecheo.html>, Accessed on 25.09.2023.

state of life."²⁴ This definition of family, which is condensed into six clauses, contains the core of Chavara's family catechesis.

4.2.1. A Good Christian Family is the Image of Heaven

The divine dimension of the family is stressed in presenting it an "image of heaven."²⁵ This statement underscores Chavara's emphasis on the family as a reflection of the Triune God's nature as a communion of love. The Holy Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—exists in a perfect communion of love. By calling "family is the image of heaven,"²⁶ Chavara highlights the idea that the love and unity found within a family mirror the divine love and unity within the Holy Trinity. In this context, the family is seen as a sacred institution where love, mutual support, respect, obedience, and selflessness are ideally practiced, echoing the love that exists within the divine community of the Holy Trinity. The family resembles heaven when its members are intimately related to each other and are ready to fulfil their responsibilities with respect and loving service to each other.²⁷

Chavara believed that the family is the *sanctum sanctorum* of society.²⁸ This perspective reinforces the significance of family life within the Catholic teaching and underscores the importance of nurturing and supporting the families the Church and society. His definition of the ideal family is based on this theological vision of the family. For him, God is the Father of the

²⁴ *Chavarul*, "Introduction," 184. *Chavarayachante Sampoorana Kruthikal*, Vol. 4: *Kathukal* (Mal.), 133. Nalla Kristyānikudumbam ākāsmōkshathinte sādriyamākunnu. Kudumbathinte nyāyam enthennāl chōrayālum, snēhathālum thammilthammil kettapetta pala ālukal kāranavanmārude nēre āchāravum kēzhvazhakavum anusarichu thampurānōdum manusyarōdum samādhānamāyi nadakayum, avaravarude anthasinu thakathinvannam nithyagathiye prāpikunnathinu prayatnam cheythu kūtamayī jeevikukayum cheyyunnathākunnu. *Chavarayachante Sampoorana Kruthikal*, Vol. 4: *Kathukal* (Mal.), 133. Hereafter *Chavarayachante Sampoorana Kruthikal* is referred to as CSK.

²⁵ *Chavarul*, "Introduction," 184; CSK, Vol. 4: *Kathukal* (Mal.), "Introduction," 133; Mampra, "Chāvarul of Chavara: A Precious Gift to Families," 10.

²⁶ *Chavarul*, "Introduction," 184. *Chavarayachante Sampoorana Kruthikal*, Vol. 4: *Kathukal* (Mal.), 133.

²⁷ Thomas Mampra, "Chavarul of Chavara: A Precious Gift to Families," *Vinayasadhana* 9. 2 (2018): 7–13, 10.

²⁸ Latin word *sanctum sanctorum* refers to 'holy of holies.' See Ann Elizabeth, "Chavara: Visionary and Karmayogi of Families," *Herald of the East* 10. 1 (2014): 119–32, 124.

family of humankind.²⁹ In the spiritual family of Chavara, the mother's place was taken by the Blessed Virgin Mary, to whom his earthly mother had dedicated him³⁰ and the entire humankind as his own brothers, sisters, and children.³¹ Thus, a Christian family is envisioned to be a kingdom where Christ reigns supreme – for Jesus has come to take us into the family of God (Jn 14:1-3). He gives us a share in the sublime communion of the Trinity. We are called to be in communion with God and one another in imitation of the communion of the Divine persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Jn 17:11-21). This active and dynamic communion is seen in its deeper sense in the Holy Family.³² Chavara, on his deathbed, looking at the picture of the Holy Family, confessed,

Throughout my lifetime I have spent the life in this Holy Family. I have put on the name Kuriakose of the Holy Family for this memory. My devout parents made me remember the great family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, and I have always seen it in my heart, remembered it, and venerated it. Because, their grace has always protected me, I could, by the divine grace, dare to say that I have not lost the baptismal innocence."³³

Vatican II exhorts that God's eternal plan (Eph 1:3-13) for all men and women is their participation and sharing in the divine life (Jn 1:3; 2 Pet 1:4).

²⁹ CWC, Vol. 3: *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, Edited by J. Chirayil and George H. Ambooken, Translated by Jose Chittilappilly, Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Bl. Chavara, 1990, 9-12. "Father, I did sin against your goodness. Punish me as you will. The love of my corrupt body was instrumental in disfiguring your whole body." CWC, Vol. 3: *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 11. Here, Chavara calls Jesus as Father.

³⁰ CWC, Vol. 2: *Compunction of the Soul, Dirge, Anastasia's Martyrdom*, Translated by Mary Leo, Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Bl. Chavara, 1989, 4-8, 6. See also Thomas Kochumuttam, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, (Theological Studies on Saint Chavara - 1), Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2017, 390-93.

³¹ Kochumuttam, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 396.

³² Sebastian Athappilly, *Christian Images of Salvation*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2016, 33.

³³ *Positio Super Introductione Cause et Super Virtutibus ex Officio Concinnata* (Cause of St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara), Vatican: 1977, 548; C. D. Valerian, *Malankara Sabhā Māthāvinte Oru Vēra Santhānam*, (A Heroic Son of the Malabar Church) or *Vannya Divya Sree Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan* (Reverend Fr. Chavara Kuriakose Elias), Mannanam: St. Joseph's Press, 1939, 315; Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 349.

The Father summons people to realize this plan in union with their fellow human beings to form the wider family of the People of God.³⁴ The mutual love between the couples that results in procreation explicitly portrays a true and living image of God, the Creator and Saviour.³⁵ This fruitful love which represents God's inner life helps us to understand and describe the mystery of God himself; for in the Christian vision of the Trinity, God is contemplated as Father, Son, and Spirit of love.³⁶ Pope Francis' insights on the Trinity and family give us the same idea: "The Triune God is a communion of love, and the family is its living reflection."³⁷ In this respect, with a gaze of faith and love, grace and fidelity, we need to contemplate the relationship between human families and the Holy Trinity. Pope John Paul II sheds light on this when he said, "our God in his deepest mystery is not solitude, but a family, for he has within Himself fatherhood, sonship, and the essence of the family, which is love. That love in the divine family, is the Holy Spirit."³⁸ The family is thus related to God's very being;³⁹ His presence in the family makes it an image of the Holy Trinity in the world.

A Christian family is blessed by sacramental grace, and it is because of this sacramental grace that the family becomes a witness of the presence of the mystery of the Trinity. The dynamism of love between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the source of the love and communion within family life.⁴⁰ Thus, this Trinitarian dimension, which is found in the Pauline theology of family, expresses the mutual love between the couples as the "mystery" of the union of Christ and the Church (Eph 5:21-33).⁴¹ Pope Francis says,

The Word of God tells us that the family is entrusted to a man, a woman, and their children, so that they become a communion of persons in the

³⁴ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 9 (AAS 57:12-14).

³⁵ Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 11 (AAS 108: 315).

³⁶ Michael J. Himes and Kenneth R. Himes, "Rights, Economics, and the Trinity," *Commonweal* 113 (1986): 137-41, 139; Richard M. Gula, *Reason Informed by Faith: Foundations of Catholic Morality*, New York: Paulist Press, 1989, 65.

³⁷ Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 11 (AAS 108: 315).

³⁸ John Paul II, *Homily at the Eucharistic Celebration in Puebla de los Angeles*, AAS 71 (1979): 184.

³⁹ John Paul II, *Homily at the Eucharistic Celebration in Puebla de los Angeles*, AAS 71 (1979): 184.

⁴⁰ Antony Chundelikkat, "Sacrament of Marriage and Family as Domestic Church," *Indian Journal of Family Studies* 5. 1 (2007): 38-57, 54.

⁴¹ Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 11 (AAS 108: 315).

image of the union of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit...The family is called to join in daily prayer, to read the Word of God and to share in Eucharistic communion, and thus to grow in love and become ever more fully a temple in which the Spirit dwells.⁴²

This same aspect of the Trinitarian family is reflected in Chavara's definition of family in the *Chavarul*. It invites the families to witness heaven in their lives by growing in love, compassion, and human virtues to find fulfilment and self-actualization.⁴³ It recommends that the families reflect on God's creative work by praying together, meditating on His Word, and sharing in the Eucharistic communion to nourish the family bond. This in turn will enable the families to serve as the temples where the Holy Spirit makes His dwelling place. The Spirit transforms it into an ever more authentic image of the Holy Family of Nazareth, directing everyone in the world evangelistically towards Jesus. In this way, the family becomes a true and living image of heaven.

4.2.2. Unity of Mind and Heart

In the definition of family in the *Chavarul*, Chavara exhorts "that the members live together"⁴⁴ – "*kūtamāyi jēvikukayum cheyyunnathākunnu*."⁴⁵ He focused his attention on the fact that the supreme rule of the Christian family is mutual love and the consequent unity of mind and heart. When we reflect on unity based on biblical texts, the Yahwistic account of creation (Gen 2:24b–25) clearly affirms that the union of man and woman as husband and wife is the basis for any human family. The Priestly account of God creating man and woman equally in his own image and likeness (Gen 1:27) entails the purpose that they live in harmony as husband and wife, by respecting their equality and celebrating their differences. Every marriage needs to be centred on this reality of communion and companionship. The first man Adam gazed at the first woman and said, "This, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen 2:23). This physical commonality is the reason for which the Scripture says, "a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Gen 2:24). Firstly, becoming one flesh points out clearly God's purpose of marriage, namely the union of a man and a woman as husband

⁴² Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 29 (AAS 108: 321).

⁴³ *Chavarul*, I:1, 185.

⁴⁴ *Chavarul*, "Introduction," 184.

⁴⁵ *Chavarul*, "Introduction," 184. The word unity is not mentioned in the English translation. But it is cited in the original Malayalam version. CSK, Vol. 4: *Kathukal* (Mal.), 9/6, "Introduction," 133.

and wife, as ordained by God Himself.⁴⁶ Secondly, the aspect of procreation and the continuation of human race is an important part of marriage. After the creation of man and woman, God blessed them saying, "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (Gen 1:28). This is yet another purpose for which God has ordained marriage right at the beginning of creation itself. Thirdly, the creation of the woman from man's ribs (Gen 2:21-23) is a symbolic gesture, which reveals the intimate relationship between man and woman and their union. Man and woman are made for each other.⁴⁷ Since marriage is originally designed by God, it is intended to be heterosexual and monogamous.⁴⁸

When Chavara focused on the need to have the union of heart and mind, he wished to emphasize the union of the spouses and the intimate relationship between the parents and the children in the family life as one of its most important virtues. Chavara's special devotion to the Holy Family led him to understand the secrets of unity in the family. In the Holy Family, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph had certainly personal differences in terms of age, gender, temperament, needs, likes, and dislikes; but despite of these differences, they were perfectly united by love.⁴⁹ Chavara's focus on the requisite of living together in the union of mind and heart necessitates the union of the spouses and the intimate relationship among all the members of the family as one of its most imperative virtues.

4.2.3. Bond of Blood and Affection

The definition of family as "living together" of the members is complemented by the "bond of blood and affection": "The *raison d'être* of family is that the members live together by the bond of blood and affection."⁵⁰ For Chavara, family is a *koinonia* of members bound together by blood and love. This explains the importance of communion in the family; an incredible and unbreakable bond created by those who are related by blood.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Mathias, "No to Divorce (Mt 19:3-9)," 35.

⁴⁷ Mathias, "No to Divorce (Mt 19:3-9)," 35.

⁴⁸ Kenneth O. Gangel and Stephen J. Bramer, *Genesis*, in HOTC, Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002, 30.

⁴⁹ Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 54-55.

⁵⁰ *Chavarul*, "Introduction," 184.

⁵¹ George Thekkekara, "Degeneration of Family and Familial Bond Today," *Encounter: A Journal of Interdisciplinary Reflections of Faith and Life* 9. 2 (2018): 69-82, 69.

In the context of consecrated life, Chavara has a beautiful instruction to his confreres regarding the kind of love that should exist among them. He advises them to be like the children born of the same mother. He says, "the number of monasteries be any, you must have a genuine love for one another, as if, born of the womb of the same mother, nurtured by the milk of the same mother. This should never weaken instead it should become stronger daily. Remember this as a special piece of advice."⁵² It indicates the kind of love that the members should adopt in their relationship with one another. They ought to be like siblings who know how to make the happy times even better and hard times easier. Although there can be a lot of friction among them, they play a unique role in one another's lives to strengthen the bond and celebrate life. He continues, "the strength of a monastery does not consist in the thickness of its walls, but in the virtue and religious zeal of the monks who dwell in them."⁵³ Here, Chavara implies that the community is strengthened by the virtuous life of the monks lived in mutual love and communion. It is fraternal love that gives us a sense of belongingness to our community. Pertaining to this family spirit in the religious life, Chavara constantly addressed his fellow members at the monastery as "beloved brethren," "loving sons," and "sons"⁵⁴ and he addressed sisters as "my dear little children".⁵⁵

Chavara states that the essential purpose of family is realized when the members live in union with each other by the bond of blood and affection.⁵⁶ The family originates in marriage, which is not a mere external union of two persons, not a union merely for the continuation of the human race or the family, rather, it is first of all the union of a man and a woman in their totality, a total and mutual sharing in every dimension of their life. Through their mutual love and sharing of life,

⁵² *Complete Works of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, vol. 4, *Letters*, Translated by Augustine Keemattam, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2020, 6/5, 115. Hereafter it is referred as *CWKEC*, Vol. 4: *Letters*; *Chavarayachante Sampoorana Kruthikal*, vol. 4. *Kathukal*, Edited by Lucas Vithuvattickal, Mannanam: St. Joseph's Press, 1982, 6/3, 100. Hereafter it is referred as *CSK*, Vol. 4: *Kathukal*,

⁵³ *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara*, vol. 4, *The Letters*, Edited by Lucas Vithuvattickal and K. C. Chacko, Translated by Mary Leo, Mannanam: The Committee for the Cause of Bl. Chavara, 1990, 6/1, 65. Hereafter it is referred as *CWC*, vol. 4: *The Letters*.

⁵⁴ *CWC*, Vol. 4: *The Letters*, 6/1, 61; 65; 66.

⁵⁵ *CWC*, Vol. 4: *The Letters*, 7/2, 76; 7/7, 83.

⁵⁶ *Chavarul*, "Introduction," 184.

they become channels of sanctification for each other.⁵⁷ In Catholic sacramental theology, the highest meaning of marriage is love.⁵⁸ Marital love affects all the other aspects of marriage, including marital sexuality and procreation. The love between married Christian partners reflects God's love towards humankind. For this reason, Walter Kasper says, "the love that exists between man and wife is an epiphany of love and faithfulness of God that was given once and for all time in Jesus Christ and is made present in the Church."⁵⁹ In marriage, the communion of persons occurs when two people freely give themselves to each other and accept one another in love. The fruit of this union is their offspring.⁶⁰ This communion is found in its most sublime form in the Holy Trinity. According to the Christian belief, God is the Trinity, a community of persons, and each of the three persons in the Trinity is said to be related to each other in boundless charity and unites them together to be a single unity.⁶¹ It is this pattern that is replicated in a finite and limited way, in the community of humans, particularly in the community of the family. True love consists precisely of spouses' mutual self-gift.⁶²

According to Chavara, the ideal of unity in the Holy Trinity is the ideal that is to be replicated, realized, and personalized in our families. True love consists precisely of spouses' mutual self-gift to one another.⁶³ This self-giving love begins in the sacrament of marriage, which is understood as a communion of life and love experienced as a covenant for the realization of total personal completion.

4.2.4. Respect and Obedience to Parents

Chavara affirms that a good Christian family is a community of a few people joined together "with children duly respecting and obeying their

⁵⁷ Shaji George Kochuthara, *The Concept of Sexual Pleasure in the Catholic Moral Tradition*, Roma: Editrice, Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2007, 104–105.

⁵⁸ Bernard Häring, *Free and Faithful in Christ*, vol. 2 of *Moral Theology for Clergy and Laity*, New York: Crossroad, 1978, II, 534.

⁵⁹ Walter Kasper, *Theology of Christian Marriage*, New York: Crossroad, 1981, 30; Kochuthara, *The Concept of Sexual Pleasure in the Catholic Moral Tradition*, 387.

⁶⁰ Charles E. Curran, *The Moral Theology of John Paul II*, 164–65.

⁶¹ Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 54–55.

⁶² Curran, *The Moral Theology of John Paul II*, New York: T & T Clark, 2005, 164–65.

⁶³ Curran, *The Moral Theology of John Paul II*, 164–65; Kochuthara, *The Concept of Sexual Pleasure in the Catholic Moral Tradition*, 434.

parents.”⁶⁴ This clause – ‘respect and obedience to the parents’ – of the definition of the family is a reflection of the fourth commandment of our Lord. Chavara’s obedience to his parents and to the authorities he was entrusted with can be traced in his writings addressed to his fellow religious. He instructed them: “The only mark of a religious is that one totally giving up one’s will and obeys as if one does not have eyes and ears. One who does so is a true religious. Those who practice perfect obedience [to ecclesiastical authorities, major superiors, local superiors, and one another] will enjoy heavenly peace already here in the monastery which is a miniature heaven.”⁶⁵ For Chavara, obedience to his parents, superiors, and equals was his hallmark. This obedience is explicit in his life as we see him submissive to his authorities even when his health was deteriorating towards the dusk of his life. In that situation, when he was asked whether he would be shifted to Mannanam or stay at Koonammavu, he responded, “do I have a will of my own? I do not wish to do anything according to my own will. I am ready to do only what I am asked to do.”⁶⁶ This is an edifying example of his spirit of humble submission to the superiors, which remains as a source of inspiration to his fellow religious and each one of us.

According to the biblical perspective, respect and obedience to the parents are connected with the fourth commandment in the Decalogue. Similar norms with regard to respect and obedience to parents exist in all cultures and religions because the relationship between the parents and the children is one of the most fundamental and universal relationships experienced by human beings.⁶⁷ Unlike other commandments, it has a specific promise attached to it, namely, “long life and general well-being”

⁶⁴ *Chavarul*, “Introduction,” 184.

⁶⁵ *CWC*, Vol. 4: *The Letters*, 6/3, 70–71; *CSK*, Vol. 4: *Kathukal*, 6/3, 99–100.

⁶⁶ *CKC*, Vol. 1, 10. Another example of Chavara’s obedience on his sickbed was marvellous. During his last illness, as insisted by Fr. Philip OCD, Pro-Vicar Apostolic in the absence of Vicar Apostolic Mellano, he was shifted from his living room to an out-house on the campus. Though it was painful for him, he quietly obeyed the order of his superiors. *Positio*, 546–547, Leonard Moolayil, “An Account of the Illness and Death of Chavara, September 1869 to January 1871,” (Malayalam Manuscript in AMSJ), 5; Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 142.

⁶⁷ Andrew Anil Sequeira, *Living Christian Life*, 5 vols., Bangalore: Claretian Publications, 2015, *Living Christian Life: Christ, Law and Ten Commandments*, Vol. 3, 165.

(Ex 20:12; Deut 5:16).⁶⁸ It explains the basic reason why one must be particular in their faithful observance. Children and adults are both obliged to their parents (Mk 7:9-12). Hence, this command is meant not only for the children but also for the adults. The commandment required the adults to provide physical and material support, honour, love, and care for the elderly.⁶⁹ Chavara advises the children: "You are bound by the commandment of God to respect your parents and to ensure that their minds are not burdened or aggrieved. If you violate the fourth commandment of God, it will bring down God's curse not only in afterlife but also in the present."⁷⁰ The book of Sirach outlines the ways and means that the children must follow to care for their parents (Sir 3:1-16). Respecting or honouring the parents implies giving them their rightful place and honour in return for their significant role in God's continuation of life by giving birth to the children, nurturing, and educating them, and providing material and spiritual support to them. The children too when they are grown up, are obliged to help the parents with their material and spiritual necessities, look after them in times of sickness and affliction, provide for their healthcare, whenever necessary, and make them feel happy and contented.

4.2.5. Harmony with God and the People

The definition further explains the purpose of the family as the members who "walk in peace before the Lord and the people."⁷¹ The longing of Chavara to be at peace with God can be seen in his meditations: "Here I come before you, O my Heavenly Father, with a heart full of repentance and firm purpose of amendment to feel your peace in my heart."⁷² Chavara's distress about the lack of peace in the families is tangible through his letter, wherein he expresses his grief on the families that become the cause of sin, dissensions, conflicts, destruction, and death. The ultimate purpose of writing the *Chavarul* to the families was to enlighten them from this gloom of tumult and give them divinely

⁶⁸ David Clyde Jones, *Biblical Christian Ethics*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1994, 156.

⁶⁹ Raymond F. Collins, "Ten Commandments," Pages 383-87 in vol. 6 of *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Edited by David Noel Freedman, New York: Doubleday, 1992, 385.

⁷⁰ *Chavarul*, II:16, 41.

⁷¹ CWC, Vol. 4: *The Letters*, 9/6, 102.

⁷² CWC, Vol. 3: *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 3.

inspired clarity and peace of mind.⁷³ In one of his letters to his confreres, Chavara ascertains: "Those who practise perfect obedience will enjoy heavenly peace already here in the monastery, which is a miniature heaven."⁷⁴ It implies that submission to God's will as well as that of the will of parents and elders will bring true peace in the family, and such families will become heavenly abodes.

Through the life of Chavara, it can be comprehended that he is a role model for everyone to imitate, both in family and religious life. Chavara, a peace-loving person, took all the care to ensure that this peace and harmony were always maintained in his community. Whenever he gave any directions, he never used an authoritative tone. Each one felt that they were equally loved and respected by him. His gentleness and sweet temper made him easily approachable by all. He was exceptionally kind to the sick and oppressed. He lightened the burdens of all who suffered by demanding nothing of them that was beyond their capacity. He could win the hearts of many with his affectionate, compassionate, quiet, and simple nature.⁷⁵

In ordinary usage, peace denotes the absence of conflict. In Christian understanding, it refers to a positive state of life, both individual and communal.⁷⁶ The concept of peace in the Old Testament is derived from the Hebrew word *šālôm* which comes from the root *šlm*, meaning to be complete or whole. It denotes the social and personal well-being of everyone in the widest possible sense. It refers to the prosperous and harmonious functioning of the whole personality, its well-being, and keeping up good relations between persons or groups.⁷⁷ A prominent teaching in the Old Testament is that God is the giver of peace in all its fullness (Lev 26:6; 1 Chr 12:18). Peace reigns in a community when there is harmony between God and His creatures (Isa 27:5) and among His creatures themselves (1 Sam 16:4-5; Job 5:23). A community is active when people treat one another with goodwill and love, but no peace is possible where there is malice (Gen 37:4; 2 Sam 3:21-23; 1 Kings 2:13; 2 Kings 9:17-22; Ps 120:6-7). When a

⁷³ Chavarul, "Introduction," 184-85.

⁷⁴ CWC, Vol. 4: *The Letters*, 6/3, 70-71; CSK, Vol. 4: *Kathukal*, 6/3, 99-100.

⁷⁵ Z. M. Moozhoor, *Blessed Chavara: The Star of the East*, Translated from Malayalam by Sheila Kannath, Kottayam, 1993, 105.

⁷⁶ James F. Childress and John Macquarrie, eds., *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986, 460.

⁷⁷ M. Rodri'guez, "Peace in the Bible," Pages 37-38 in vol. 11 of *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America, 1967, 37.

community is at peace, its members can experience safety and prosperity (Isa 26:3). Peace is found by doing good.⁷⁸

In the New Testament, peace is considered a gift from heaven, brought to the earth by the angels: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours" (Lk 2:14). It is the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22) that enables us to become children of God, for Jesus Himself said: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God" (Mt 5:9). Just like the angels gave the good news of peace by announcing the birth of Jesus, so too His departure from this world with the mandate of spreading the good news was accompanied by his memento of "peace be with you" (Lk 24:36-43; Jn 20:19-22, 26); "peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you" (Jn 14:27); "I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace" (Jn 16:33). It helps us to enjoy the fruit of the Holy Spirit and makes us partakers in the kingdom of God (Rom 14:17). Therefore, we are exhorted to pursue this peace (Heb 12:14; 1 Pet 3:11) and allow the sovereignty of Christ in our hearts (Col 3:15), and maintain the unity that we have in Christ, the "one body," that is controlled by Christ's peace.⁷⁹

When Chavara advises the families to maintain peace with God and people, he intends that the family members should respect and love each other by sharing the burdens, accepting the differences, guiding and directing each other gently; keeping a clear conscience and leading a disciplined and orderly life, which would bring peace and harmony to the families. In a world full of sorrows, Chavara desires for families to be an abode of sweet consolation, peace, and order.

4.2.6. Seeking Eternal Salvation

In the *Chavarul*, Chavara stressed that each one should "seek eternal salvation according to one's own proper state of life."⁸⁰ He further penned down his sorrow over the family's ignorance towards the pursuit of their own salvation as: "It is most distressing for members to live in a family where no one is concerned about the service of God and their own eternal salvation."⁸¹ Throughout Chavara's writings, we find

⁷⁸ Konrad Schaefer, "Psalms," Pages 663-710 in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary for the Twenty-First Century*, Edited by John J. Collins, Gina Hens-Piazza, Barbara Reid, and Donald Senior, London: T & T Clark, 2020, 679.

⁷⁹ McDonald, "The Letter to the Colossians," 1712.

⁸⁰ *Chavarul*, "Introduction," 184.

⁸¹ *Chavarul*, "Introduction," 184.

that the primary purpose of all his activities was driven towards the intention of the salvation of souls. Chavara's spiritual director, Fr Leopold Beccaro testified that Chavara never held himself back from any kind of work, for he was always prompted by the salvation of souls.⁸² Chavara, in his testament to his fellow priests, exhorts the purpose of founding the congregation, "God has willed to found this congregation for the salvation of our Christian brethren."⁸³ Aiming at the salvation of souls, Chavara founded the Confraternity for Happy Death.

From his discourse on discernment, we understand Chavara's quest for the salvation of souls and the means to attain it. He says,

The body is more precious than the clothes it wears; the soul is more precious than the body. If both the body and clothes are threatened with danger, save the body and let the clothes perish. If both the body and the soul are in danger, sacrifice the body and save the soul. The body will perish today or tomorrow, but the soul will live forever. Hence, all the work done in the world should be directed towards the benefit of the soul.⁸⁴

Chavara reminds us to keep two important things in mind. The first one is not to forget at any time that we will die at the most unexpected moment and that death will creep on us like a thief, and so we must remember the words of our Lord: "Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour" (Mt 25:13). And the second is to keep away from mortal sin that engenders fear of death. When we realize that we have sinned mortally, we must at once make a perfect act of contrition and seek pardon for our sins through confession before going to sleep.⁸⁵ Another quote from Chavara's writing sheds light on this understanding of salvation. Regardless of how great a sinner is, if a person repents of his or her sins at the moment of death, like the good thief who was hanged on the right side of the Lord, the gates of heaven will automatically be opened to him or her. This is the greatest happiness a person can have. Of all the help given to a person, the greatest is given to him or her at the moment of his or her death.⁸⁶

⁸² Leopold Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Blessed Chavara*, Edited by Lucas Vithuvathal, Mannanam: St. Joseph's Press, 2003, 12.

⁸³ CWC, Vol. 4: *The Letters*, 6/3, 71.

⁸⁴ CWC, Vol. 4: *The Letters*, 9/7, 120.

⁸⁵ CWC, Vol. 4: *The Letters*, 9/7, 119.

⁸⁶ CWC, Vol. 4: *The Letters*, 9/7, 118-19.

When we turn into the Bible, we observe that salvation is one of the key concepts of God's revelation to humanity.⁸⁷ In the song of confidence, the psalmist praises God's providence. Based on the faith in God, "my rock and salvation, my fortress" (Ps 62:3), the psalmist exhorts the faithful to trust God and divine *hesed*.⁸⁸ It is therefore crucial to be united with God.⁸⁹ The core of apostolic preaching was that Jesus alone saves (Acts 4:9-12; Lk 4:17-21). Jesus, the good shepherd, came to seek and save the lost, to heal the sick, to cleanse and wash away sins through His blood, to enlighten the confused, and to correct the wrong (Jn 10:11; Mt 8:7; Rev 7:14; Jn 8:12). He is the victorious liberator who defeated death, the world, and Satan through His death and resurrection to liberate humankind (Acts 26:18; Rom 5-8; 1 Jn 3:8; Col 1:13; 1 Tim 2:5; Rom 5:10). The human beings are redeemed and purchased by His blood and entitled to be the heirs of heaven, His children (Rom 8:17; Titus 2:14; 1 Pet 1:18; 1 Cor 6:20).⁹⁰

Chavara instructs the people to entrust themselves to God Almighty and strive for their salvation by preparing themselves to receive the effects of Christ's earthly acts. He continues this mission in each individual soul through the operation of the Holy Spirit in the Church, particularly through the sacraments, the liturgical re-enactment of His sacrifice and confession, the preaching of His Word, and the personal inspirations of His Spirit in the hearts of every human being.⁹¹ In order to be saved, everyone must respond with faith and reception of baptism (Mk 16:16), detachment (Mt 16:25), good works (Jas 2:14), and the practise of the virtues (1 Thess 5:8). Chavara exhorts the parents to serve as role models for their children by practicing detachment, charity, kindness, and faith in God. So that they might set a good example for children and live virtuously. If not, they may be lost in hell due to the negligence of their parents. If this is the case, the parents may be punished, and their own salvation might even be threatened.⁹²

⁸⁷ Walker, "Salvation," 1435. "For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by His life" (Rom 5:10).

⁸⁸ Schaefer, "Psalms," 687.

⁸⁹ Athappilly, *Christian Images of Salvation*, 27.

⁹⁰ W. G. Topmoeller, "Salvation," Pages 994-95 in vol. 12 of *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America, 1967, 995.

⁹¹ Topmoeller, "Salvation," 995.

⁹² *Chavarul*, II:1, 196.

In short, the *Chavarul* gives a precise definition of family taking into consideration the relationship with God, with oneself, and with one another, that is, trans-personal, intra-personal, and inter-personal relationships.

5. Conclusion

In this article, we have explored the vision of the ideal family as the image of heaven. Here, the family locale is deliberated as the most natural environment for a child's formation and overall development. In Chavara's viewpoint, a good Christian family is the image of heaven, and he insists that every family should reflect the qualities of heaven. There should be unity of mind and heart, as well as a strong and stable bond among parents and between parents and children. They should respect and obey each other, maintain peace with people, and do everything possible to ensure the eternal salvation of all. The *Chavarul* highlights the parental responsibility to mould and shape the minds and hearts of the children and build their character by acquiring virtues, norms, and manners that would enable the children to stand in good stead for the rest of their adult lives and allow them to contribute to an orderly and peaceful society. This kind of upbringing would make both the parents and the children worthy of the eternal salvation promised to all who remain faithful till the end.

The remarkable definition of family envisioned by Chavara in the *Chavarul* is an effective guide for family catechesis that recognizes the family as the fundamental unit of faith formation. Parents as primary educators have a great responsibility in the upbringing of the children and their faith formation, for their involvement and commitment to the same strengthens family bonds, nurtures personal faith, and enables a deeper understanding of religious teachings. As the families grow in their faith together, they become a powerful force for constructive change in the world, embodying the transformative power of God's love.

KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA OF THE HOLY FAMILY: A PASTOR WITH THE SENSE OF MYSTERY AND THE EXPERIENCE OF THE DIVINE

Paulachan Kochappilly CMI♦

Abstract: This article is a humble attempt to trace the characteristics of Saint Kurikose Elias Chavara of the Holy Family with a particular reference to the Fathers of the Church, showcasing the sense of Mystery and the experience of the Divine manifest in his writings. Imbibing the spirit of Eastern theological outlook, Kuriakose Elias seems immersed in the Liturgical tradition of the Thomas Christians of India, which celebrates the Mystery of the Divine and highlights human dignity outstandingly. His *Colloquies with Heavenly Father (Dhyanasallapangal)* showcases Kuriakose's mystical, poetic, pastoral insights and inclinations soaked in spiritual conversation. The sequence of the article is simple: Mystery, Ministry, and Mercy, all moving in unison to enlighten and empower human beings to see the glory, joy, and beauty of the Mystery of the Trinity through the efficacy of human agents.

♦ **Paulachan Kochappilly CMI** holds a doctorate in Moral Theology from Accademia Alfonsiana, Rome. He defended his dissertation *Celebrative Ethics: Ecological Issues in the Light of the Syro-Malabar Qurbana* in 1998. Some of his published works, besides the edited volumes, include *Celebrative Ethics: Ecological Issues in the Light of the Syro-Malabar Qurbana* (1999), *Evangelisation as Celebration* (2002), *Life in Christ: Eastern Perspectives on Christian Ethics* (2010), *Spectrum of Ethical Imagination and Action* (2019), and *Eastern Perspectives on Evangelisation: "that your joy may be complete"* (2021). He has published more than a hundred articles in journals and periodicals. Prof. Kochappilly has been the Dean, Faculty of Theology and the President of Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bengaluru, India. He has served as the Director of Globethics.net India and has also served as HoD of the Department of Theology, Christ Deemed to be University, Bengaluru. Email: paulachan.kochappilly@cmi.in.

Keywords: Mystery, Ministry, *Guru mantra*, Clothing imagery, Economy of salvation, Addai and Mari, *darśan veedu*, *Bethrauma*, darśan, Eastern Liturgy, Robe of glory, Fathers of the Church

Introduction:

Saint Kuriakose in the Footsteps of the Fathers of the Church

Instruction on the Study of the Fathers of the Church observes the importance of the sense of Mystery and the divine experience. "In their attitudes as theologians and pastors, they showed to a marked degree their deep sense of mystery and their experience of the divine."¹ Kuriakose Elias Chavara of the Holy Family was immersed in the Trinitarian Mystery and intimately experienced the Divine—his life and ministry vouch for them, which we shall examine in this brief account.

Imbued by the sense of Mystery and imbued with the divine experience, the hallmark of the Fathers of the Church, Kuriakose's *Colloquies with Heavenly Father* vouches for his outstanding reach of the Mystery in his spiritual experience. He writes, "O my Father, how graceful is your face! David's rapturous song praising your face's beauty rings in my ears. I have heard and come to believe that your face is a source of joy and consolation to those who look at it."² Kuriakose raises his eyes to God's countenance, lifts his heart, and converses with the Lord, "O my soul, hasten to Him and thank Him for His great mercy."³ He locks himself with the Lord of the Eucharist in the Tabernacle and keeps gazing at the beauty and glory of God's presence, "O Let me have a closer look at the holy face of my creator. This holy face is the source – the light that brightens the angels and the lives of those in misery."⁴ These excerpts give us a taste of Saint Kuriakose's *guru parampara* and the *guru mantra* of the master regarding the divine Mystery.

In shepherding the people of God, the Fathers of the Church used a more experiential and mystical method, congenial to biblical style and substance, rendering in the cultural ethos. They were good pastors after the image of Jesus Christ, the good shepherd. Naturally, they took up

¹ *Instruction on the Study of the Fathers of the Church*, Congregation for Catholic Education, published in *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition (English), 15 January 1990: 8-15.

² Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father* in *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara*, Vol. III, trans. Jose Chittilappilly, The Committee for the Cause of Bl. Chavara, Mannanam, 1990, 6.

³ *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 10.

⁴ *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 11.

the biblical imageries and types to interpret the faith as reasonable and relating to the faithful. Saint Ephrem took up the clothing imagery from the Pauline corpus of "put on Christ" (Rom 13:14; Gal 3:27). The whole theology of "robe of glory" is typical and topical to convey the Mystery of Baptism – the narrative of putting on Christ – tangibly.

Saint Ephrem employs this imagery as a means of linking together in a dynamic fashion the whole of salvation history; it is a means of indicating the interrelatedness between every stage in this continuing working out of divine providence. Basically, there are four main episodes which go to make up this cosmic drama: at the Fall, Adam and Eve lose the "Robe of Glory" with which they had originally been clothed in Paradise; in order to re-clothe the naked Adam and Eve (in other words, humanity), God himself "puts on the body" from Mary, and at the Baptism Christ laid the Robe of Glory in the river Jordan, making it available once again for humanity to put on at baptism; then, at his or her baptism, the individual Christian, in "putting on Christ," puts on the Robe of Glory, thus re-entering the terrestrial anticipation of the eschatological Paradise, in other words, the Church; finally, at the Resurrection of the Dead, the just will in all reality re-enter the celestial Paradise, clothed in their Robe of Glory.⁵

Seen from this backdrop of Saint Ephrem, there is a likelihood to imagine Kuriakose was deeply immersed in the divine Mystery celebrated in the Eucharistic Liturgy of the catholic wing of the Thomas Christians of India,⁶ for the Liturgy is an elaborate experiential ambience of the Mystery of the Trinity unfolding the Mystery of human beings springing from the Mystery of the Holy Trinity. A concise illustration of it is found in the celebration of the Qurbana:

God the Father, You are holy. You alone are the true Father! All Fatherhood in heaven and on earth comes from you. Eternal Son, You are holy. Everything is created through You. Holy Spirit, You are Holy. Everything is sanctified through you.⁷

⁵ Sebastian Brock, *Hymns on Paradise*, Vladimir's Seminary Press, New York, 1990, 66.

⁶ The naming of the Catholic church of the Thomas Christians of India as "Syro-Malabar Church" is of later origin.

⁷ *The Order of the Syro-Malabar Qurbana*, Syro-Malabar Bishop's Synod, Commission for Liturgy, Kakkanad, 2005, 51.

It is confessional in style and the summary of the economy of salvation. All pastors and ministers of the mysteries of salvation share this foundational experience, the roadmap of the revelation and faith of every Christian. Accordingly, all pastors participate in the fundamental experience of Jesus Christ, the Master and Saviour of the world. For instance, we encounter Jesus experiencing this Mystery during his ministry. Jesus said:

I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father and no one knows the Son except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him (Mt 11:25-27).

We are called to inherit the vision of Jesus, and Kuriakose was blessed to share the same. The editors of the book *The Lord of Heaven and Earth* comment on the above passage, "Every human being is called to be blessed with Jesus' vision. They are to enter in union with the new Adam to celebrate the new creation."⁸ Disciples are challenged to imbibe the spirit of their master. They observe, "Chavara was blessed with the vision of his Guru. Thus, he could see God's cosmic faces and hear the creator's cosmic voices in the entire creation. He dedicated his life to make every face the divine face, every voice the heavenly voice."⁹ The experience of the Mystery is agreeable to all his followers, and the pastors have been following the path of the master in their life and ministry. Beautiful illustrations of the immersive experience of God's Mystery and the ministers' unworthiness are celebrated in the Liturgy.

Well-versed in the Liturgy of Addai and Mari, Kuriakose might have picked up the disposition natural to a pastor from the Qurbana and deepened it through his mystic and poetic writings. In the Qurbana, the priest prays the following prayer during the singing of Sanctus:

Woe to me! I am dismayed! For my lips are unclean. And I live in the midst of people with unclean lips. My eyes have seen the King, the almighty Lord. How awe-inspiring is this place where today I have seen the Lord face to face! This is none other than the House of God!

⁸ Paul Kalluveetil & Paulachan Kochappilly, ed., *The Lord of Heaven and Earth. Chavara Studies in Honour of Fr Lucas Vithuvattickal*, CMI, Dharmaram Publications, Bangalore, 2004, 9.

⁹ P. Kalluveetil & P. Kochappilly, *The Lord of Heaven and Earth*, 9.

Lord, may Your mercy be on us. Clean us who are unclean and sanctify our lips. Lord, enjoin the hymns of us, who are feeble, with the praises of the Seraphim and Archangels. Praise be to Your mercy that has unified the inhabitants of heaven and earth."¹⁰

The experience of the ineffable Mystery of the Eucharist shaped the vision and mission of Kuriakose. Devotion to the Eucharistic Lord springing from the celebration of the Qurbana is unparalleled in the life of Kuriakose. His writing, *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, is studded with the incredible experience of the Mystery and his unworthiness to approach the Eucharistic Lord.

Sense of reality and significance of Mystery stand or fall together, for one reveals or conceals the other. Either truth and Mystery exist together, or none. Reality is the ground and meaning of the Mystery. There is no mystery without the reality. Mystery makes reality more experiential and comprehensive, providing an aura of sacredness and reverence to what is beheld. Reality shrouded in Mystery becomes more attractive and appealing to human senses and, consequently, to human reason.

Celebrations make events and moments more inspiring and motivating. So the ministers and pastors in the Church discerned the Mystery from reality and helped the folk navigate their lives in the context of shepherding to the green pastures and calm waters. The pastors knew well how to balance Mystery and reality to give them a sense of purpose and significance in people's lives. Kuriakose was no exception.

A mystery takes us closer to reality, with all its diversity and plurality. It is equally valid that reality brings us to the realm of Mystery, for everything is a riddle when approached closely and intimately. For instance, a person is a reality, but at close examination, we realise they are a bundle of mysteries, seeking further explanations and investigations. In this connection, we appreciate the insight of Soeren Kierkegaard, "Life is not a problem to be solved, but is a reality to be experienced." Later, Gabriel Marcel improved the statement by articulating, "Life is a mystery to be lived, not a problem to be solved." Approaching things and persons as mysteries rather than problems helps people to anchor their relationships concerning realities, and such a disposition will nurture and foster an ambience of overall sacredness, which is fast disappearing from human interactions and involvements.

¹⁰ *The Order of the Syro-Malabar Qurbana*, 52.

The mentality of commodification, cut-throat competition, and the attitude of use, misuse, and abuse are rampant in our present-day scenario. Sacredness and sacramentality of creation should be reclaimed at the earliest, which alone leads us to a prosperous future.

Pastors always try their best to draw the folk to the mysteries of God in the context of their everyday lives. As a result of an encounter with the Lord, pastors share their joy, peace, and bliss with their people, leading them to the awe-inspiring presence of God as the Samaritan woman evangelises the dwellers of her city. Jesus, during his conversation with the Samaritan woman, was giving a tour of the mysteries of God in light of the turn of events in history and her personal life. As she encountered the Messiah in Jesus at the well of Jacob, the city dwellers, in turn, experienced the Saviour of the world in Jesus and said, "It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world" (Jn 4:42). Whether it is the case of the Samaritan woman or with the people of the city, turning to the Saviour is gradual, respectful, and dramatic. It gives us a beautiful pattern of drawing people to the glory of God.

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, while involved in the manifold things, was taking the people step by step to the mysteries of God and enabling them to participate in eternal life. For example, Jesus taught about the question of God's creation and providence in the world through simple narratives. Jesus taught the people, "Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. . . . Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these" (Mt 6:26, 28-29). He invites his disciples to see the beauty of the created realities. Then, he alludes to the glory and wisdom of God, leading us to the new earth and heaven, a world vision perfectly blended with cosmic and eschatological.

As a good shepherd to the newly established religious congregation, Kuriakose shares his paternal and fraternal thoughts with his confreres in a letter addressed to members in different communities:

Beloved brethren, this humble community of ours is not founded by humans but by God Himself. He has founded it miraculously; you are all witnesses to the truth that God has nurtured and brought it up. Hence, persecution by humans rejection or obstructions by creatures cannot destroy it. But one thing can annihilate it, that is, if we forget

the meaning of our call, forsake the responsibilities of our religious life and fail in humility, obedience, charity, religious discipline and genuine devotion and are satisfied with appreciating them in words and not in deeds.¹¹

These words of Kuriakose come from a heart absorbed in the sense of Mystery and deep personal divine experience. Further, in the same circular, he admonishes, "The strength of the monasteries is not the thickness of the walls, but the zealous and devout life of its members."¹² Being the first Prior of the Monastery, Kuriakose reminds his friends to anchor their lives on divine providence and humble obedience.

In what follows, I would like to discuss the sense of Mystery and the divine experience of Kuriakose Elias Chavara of the Holy Family under three headings mutually interrelated: 1) Sense of Mystery and Sense of Ministry; 2) Experience of the Divine and Empowering of the Human, and 3) Sense of Mercy and the Pastoral Ministry.

1. Sense of Mystery and Sense of Ministry

A sense of Mystery surrounds the realities of life; all relationships illustrate a mystery of some sort, which evokes a kind of sacredness and fascination. A hallow of indescribable nature encompasses persons and things that attract us to them but with awe and reverence. Kuriakose expresses his sense of vision and mission:

Nourishing his soul, he was tutored in paths
Of virtue; to assist at the Holy Qurbana
Gently taught to tread the ways of holiness;
To shun all evils that'd retard his onward march (*Compunction I*,
137-140).

Such attraction to reality coupled with Mystery represents ineffable beauty. This incredible experience leads to imagination and serves as successive inspiration for action in the real world. This invisible, mysterious hallowing is the knot of Mystery and ministry, encircling the beholder simultaneously to transcendence and immanence. The greater

¹¹ Kuriakose Elias Chavara and Leopold Missionary, "A Circular Letter Addressed to All Members of the Congregation Written on 1 July 1869" quoted from *Complete Works of Kuriakose Elias Chavara. Letters*. Vol. IV, trans. Augustine Keemattam, Chavara Central Secretariat, Kochi, 2000, 102.

¹² K. E. Chavara and L. Missionary, "A Circular Letter Addressed to All Members, 107.

the experience of Mystery around reality, the larger the expression of it in terms of translation and transformation.

The Lord of mercy in His great compassion
 To His blessed mother did enslave me
 And while on nectar, Mother on earth fed me
 At her feet, Mary kept me safe hourly (Compunction, II, 1-4).

People who glimpse the Mystery will show great enthusiasm and energy to walk the path of darśan. Such darśan in the religious realm gives added impetus and momentum to commit wholeheartedly to facing challenges squarely. The life of Kuriakose was an ode to the Lord encircled by divine Mystery and divine mercy. He vents his foundational experience on different occasions:

God almighty, who was in the beginning
 You created me, a son of Adam
 O God, wherefore this grace, reveal to me
 O Lord eternal, your infinite mercy.¹³

A worm creeping on the face of the earth
 You created me from the dust of dust
 Granted me a guardian spirit so pure
 That I may dwell on earth in grace and ease.¹⁴

What shall I render you, my Lord, 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?¹⁵

The mystical experience of the Mystery takes one to the terrain of ministry, an overflow of the vision or darśan. To have a *darśan veedu* for the religious communitarian life may be seen from this angle. *Bethrauma*, the house on the hilltop, tells volumes on the sense of Mystery, irradiating the biblical and Indian spiritual and religious traditions manifesting the thirst and hunger for divine Mystery.

As the Mystery, so the ministry. The mystery dimension of the experience envelops and empowers the agents to enlighten and enhance the people, leading them to the realisation of the darśan in their own

¹³ Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Compunction of the Soul*, I, 1-4, trans. Mary Leo, CMC, The Committee for the Cause of Blessed Chavara, Mannanam, 1989.

¹⁴ *Compunction of the Soul*, I, 17-20.

¹⁵ *Compunction of the Soul*, I, 37-40.

lives. There is an energy welling up in the heart of the one who beheld the reality, always overflowing with Mystery. The religious experience of God is not an exception to this phenomenon. Devotees who behold the darśan of the Lord God will feel compelled from within to communicate communion with others who also seek the same darśan of the Mystery of God.

The Lord of mercy, the Son of God
His glorious splendour, I long to see.¹⁶

The whole mission of Kuriakose was to help people experience the same Mystery in their life contexts. When the pastors encounter the Lord of Glory and Mystery daily, a blessing bestowed on them intermittently becomes a game-changer in their ministry to the people of God. All desire to have a glimpse of the Lord, the sense of Mystery which accompanies as usual, and those who have witnessed the significance of Mystery, in turn, will pass this memorable character of the glory beheld by the ministers.

The Good Shepherd, seeking his flock
That had gone astray, I long to see.
The Lord of goodness, proclaiming Himself
As our loving friend, I long to see.¹⁷

Seeing the characteristics of the Good Shepherd in Jesus Christ, Kuriakose puts the robe of a good shepherd on to make others experience the goodness and friendliness of God to those who have gone astray from the fold. His ministry resembles the ministry of Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, seeking the flock of his time, a Church in deep slumber sans religious leadership and saintly pastors.

The sense of Mystery is coupled with an experience of the divine and never in a vacuum. Kuriakose's sense of Mystery is founded on the Mystery of the Holy Trinity and everything that belongs to the Lord of all. The experience of the Divine empowered Kuriakose to carry out the mission of the Lord in the world.

2. Experience of the Divine and Empowering the Human

The encounter with the Divine transforms people. They possess a holistic perspective, charged and shaped by the spiritual outlook. Kuriakose was

¹⁶ *Compunction of the Soul*, III, 1-2.

¹⁷ *Compunction of the Soul*, III, 97-100.

blessed to have the vision of the Lord, and through it, he gained a mission for the world:

When your bright visage, I see
 My gloom effaced, love glows
 In your look of mercy, I behold
 A gentle saviour, not a judge.¹⁸

Kuriokose finds himself rooted in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the experience in him a gentle saviour instead of a judge. His friendship with Jesus and ecstatic experience of the Eucharistic Lord transformed his image of God. The sacred knowledge empowers and overpowers his outlook and, consequently, his commitment. His vision of the Lord becomes his mission for the world.

O Lady, clad in the rays of the Sun
 Holding the moon at your feet
 Forgive the sins of sinful me
 And fold me to your feet!¹⁹

Beholding a compassionate image of Mother Mary raises concurrent feelings in the saint and takes refuge at her feet. Human beings begin to see things through the luminous eyes of their faith experience. He is enlightened by the divine mysteries and empowered by the spirit to translate his darśan with greater involvement and interest.

Merciful Lord, Son of Almighty God
 O, that I may see!
 Sea of Mercy, seat of compassion
 Who effaced the stain of sin.²⁰

The experience of the Divine is deep-seated in the saint. His experience is fundamental to the biblical revelation of God; it is founded on mercy and compassion, the very nature of God. A gaze at the sacred mysteries leaves lasting impressions on the contemplative, expanding the horizon of vision and mission. The experience of the Divine is an anointing to undertake a particular ministry to accomplish the task of God for our times.

¹⁸ *Compunction of the Soul*, V, 163-166.

¹⁹ *Compunction of the Soul*, III Contd., 65-68.

²⁰ *Compunction of the Soul*, III Contd., 1-4.

My Lord the Blessed Babe Emmanuel
Did choose to make his dwelling in my heart.²¹

Rightly, our saint sees God as Immanuel, God-with-us and enjoys his indwelling presence in his heart, making it the temple of the Holy Spirit. The cave of the heart is a celebrated spiritual imagery in India, to which Kuriakose attests importance in his spiritual journey. Seeing things from the perspective of the Lord God, people become prophets and pastors of outstanding command to execute the will of God in their daily lives. These people feel the urgency and advocacy.

Under his [Kuriakose] leadership or inspiration, a good number of apostolic initiatives were undertaken: the establishment of seminaries for the education and formation of the clergy, the introduction of annual retreats, a publishing house for Catholic works, a house to care for the destitute and dying, schools for general education and programs for the training of catechumens. He contributed to the Syro-Malabar liturgy and spread devotion to the Holy Eucharist and the Holy Family. In particular, he dedicated himself to encouraging and counselling Christian families, convinced as he was of the fundamental role of the family in the life of society and the Church.²²

We get a glimpse of the various apostolates Kuriakose undertook to empower society and the Church through his eventful religious priestly missionary zeal. P. Ramachandran, Governor of Kerala, said, "Fr. Chavara's life is an inspiring and edifying saga. From the day he was ordained as a priest of the Catholic Church, the Father dedicated himself wholly to God and worked piously for the social, cultural and educational uplift of his fellow beings."²³

R. Venkataraman, former President of India, acknowledges and acclaims the yeomen contribution of Kuriakose to humanity, a testimony to the human development and empowerment of people:

²¹ *Compunction of the Soul*, IV, 189-190.

²² John Paul II, Address at the Beatification of Kuriakose Elias Chavara and Alphonsa Muttathupadath at Kottayam, on 8 February 1986. Quoted from Z.M. Moozhoor, *Blessed Chavara: The Star of the East*, Current Publications, Kottayam, 1993, 128.

²³ P. Ramachandran, "Blessed Chavara a Man of Deep Vision," in his welcome address at Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara Stamp Release Function, Trivandrum, December 20, 1987, quoted from Z.M. Moozhoor, *Blessed Chavara: The Star of the East*, Current Publications, Kottayam, 1993, 132.

It is well over a hundred years since Father Chavara left us. And yet, he is a living inspiration for thousands and thousands of persons. He is gratefully remembered as a profound scholar, an educationist, and a builder of institutions for the underprivileged, the illiterate, the destitute and the needy.

Few people have been able to combine the contemplation of God with the service of man as naturally and creatively as between the world of faith and the world of action. Father Chavara represented both. A mystic, he could also be an engine of activity. Capable of withdrawing into his innermost being, Father Chavara was, at the same time, a motive force for the establishment of a social order in which everyone could live in dignity and faith.²⁴

People from all walks of life acknowledge the towering personality of Kuriakose and his leadership in society, including the head of the state. The President made an emphatic statement on the contribution of our saint and the source of his strength to carry out the good news to people.

Through the encounter with the Lord in the context of his life, Kuriakose puts on Christ and commences living in Christ. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is the supreme example in this regard. He lifts his eyes to God in praise and thanksgiving, and, in turn, Jesus goes down the lane doing great ministry regardless of caste and creed. For instance, Jesus said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants" (Mt 11:25). Immersed in the divine experience, Jesus invites all to the loving and comforting presence, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Mt 11:28-30). Anyone who experiences the divine presence in life will go forth to reach out with a healing touch and deliver peace and prosperity. Blessing the Lord follows the blessing of the people, bringing down the joy and peace of God to all. The prayer of Our Father is a typical example in this regard: the first part of the prayer celebrates the divine presence of God - heaven on earth - and as a result of this experience, there is the presentation of the human need for daily

²⁴ R. Venkataraman, "Father Chavara Represents Indian Community at its Best" (his address at Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara Stamp Release Function, Trivandrum, December 20, 1987), quoted from Z.M. Moozhoor, *Blessed Chavara: The Star of the East*, Current Publications, Kottayam, 1993, 128.

bread and a life of forgiveness, to hasten the dawn of the reign of God in the community.

On his way to Damascus, Paul had an extraordinary dramatic encounter with the Lord, a turning point in his life and mission. "Now, as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly, a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying, "Saul, why do you persecute me?" He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." The men who were travelling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing" (Acts 9:3-8). This episode shows a typical example of religious experience and concurrent commitment. Saint Paul recalls this foundational religious experience repeatedly, for it transformed his life and mission. A man of divine experience cannot but empower humans in their spiritual or material necessities. The faith experience of Saint Paul throws light on the fruitfulness and fearlessness one gathers through the knowledge of the Lord. He confesses his stance for Jesus Christ, "No, in all these things, we are more than victorious through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:37-39). We see the dynamics of the spiritual experience empowering human agents to share the conviction of their hearts in following Jesus Christ, the foundational understanding of Saint Paul.

There has been a concerted effort from different quarters to establish Kuriakose as a social reformer. He deserves to be adorned as a forerunner of nineteenth-century Malabar's social, economic, religious, and cultural reform. Mathias Mundadan points out some of the salient features of his ministry in the Church for the world's welfare. "The activities the Blessed undertook for the renewal, reform and all-round development of the Church were many and varied: his close association and his exemplary cooperation with the vicars apostolic and the missionaries, his services as vicar general, his pioneering actions in the fields of education, social service and liturgical reform."²⁵ Nevertheless, it is to be acknowledged and orchestrated sufficiently that he could

²⁵ A. M. Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Dharmaram Publications, Bangalore, 2008, 224.

empower people because of his overarching spiritual encounter with the Lord. Silently yet eloquently, Kuriakose is a message for those who are engaged in empowering people in different fields of human life to have a sound spiritual experience, ecclesial belongingness, and concomitant vision to accomplish the mission of Jesus for our times. The oneness with the Lord gives the activists the energy and enthusiasm necessary to empower human beings, rendering human dignity, gender equality, and the bounty of creation towards a prosperous and, harmonious, happy life on earth. God's love experienced in the cave of the heart urges us to work to empower people.

Aptly said, "St Kuriakose Elias Chavara is revered today as a spirit-filled person who contributed towards rejuvenating the Christian life and initiating reform in the social life of the people of Kerala."²⁶ Thomas Chathamparampil captures the dynamics found in the founder, who was an outstanding spiritual and social leader, in his words:

He was a leader and activist who could give direction to the Church and the society of his time. He is the co-founder of a Congregation for men and women. But at the same time, his saintly life shows categorically how a saintly person like him can, also going through the sufferings and agonies of life, remain firm and solid in his faith, turning every such moment as a moment of blessings and grace and to declaring with confidence finally with a sense of gratitude to God that he has never lost the baptismal grace which he has received.²⁷

Here is a beautiful blend of spiritual depth and active commitment in its zenith. Faith in the Lord confers the impetus to carry out the mission despite troubles and tribulations.

Sense of Mystery and experience of the Divine leads to the act of mercy through pastoral ministry. Kuriakose, having had the divine touch, is a champion of pastoral ministry.

3. Sense of Mercy and the Sense of Pastoral Ministry

As stated earlier, the spiritual experience takes the agent on the path of transformation, both oneself and others with whom the agent works.

²⁶ Thomas Chathamparampil, "Word of Blessings," in *Agonies and Ecstasies. Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Thomas Panthaplackal, (Theological Studies on Saint Chavara -9), Chavara Central Secretariat, Kakkannad, 2022, 7.

²⁷ T. Chathamparampil, "Word of Blessings," 7.

Grant, O Mercy, that with sanctity my soul may flood;
Forgiveness of sins through your precious Blood.²⁸

This engagement for change is the field of pastoral ministry. Equipped with the experience of the Divine, the pastor moves smoothly and enthusiastically in bringing God's dream come true in the given context.

Kuriakose, immersed in the sense of Mystery, is imbued with a sense of mercy, for God's nature, name, and face is mercy. Mercy is the synonym for God. Wherever there is mercy, there is God. Mercy is divine. When showing mercy, human beings become divine in human form. Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, emphatically teaches, "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Mt 5:44-45). Luke calls the perfection of God as mercifulness. "Be merciful, just as your heavenly father is merciful" (Lk 6:36). We are called to imitate the mercy of God. Mercifulness is tangible, but the mercy of God is invisible. At the moment of acts of mercy, two things happen: one, the mercifulness of God is made credible; two, the divine in humans is made visible.

The Mystery of God takes us to the sense of mercy, for the Mystery of God is essentially mercy or compassion. Whoever experiences the Mystery of God experiences the Mercy of God, for it is the grace of God which bestows the gift of the divine encounter full of mercy and compassion. The sense of God is interwoven with the feeling of mercy, for God is mercy in nature; God cannot be but merciful. Mercy or compassion is the litmus test for a human person. To be compassionate is to be natural and normal for a human being, for everyone bears the image of God, and every time someone displays mercy through thoughts, words, and actions, they assume the original nature of a human being. Kuriakose was a replica of God's heart.

Kuriakose was found on his knees, asking for God's mercy. "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" (Lk 18:38) is a cry for mercy and healing. People attracted to the person of Jesus and convinced of the

²⁸ *Compunction of the Soul*, VI, 353-354.

healing power of Jesus repeated the plea for help. A sense of Mystery and the gift of mercy complement each other in healing and well-being.

The story of Zacchaeus in the Gospel of Luke gives us a typical pattern of Mystery leading ministry. Filled with awe and reverence for Jesus, Zacchaeus wanted to have a gaze of him. He takes the trouble to climb a sycamore-fig tree to see Jesus from afar. Zacchaeus is attracted to the personality of Jesus, and his surprise, having seen him on the tree, Jesus asks him, "Come down immediately. I must stay at your house today" (Lk 19:5). So Zacchaeus came down at once and welcomed him gladly. He does not attend to people's complaints on their way to his home. The encounter with the Lord had raised mixed feelings in Zacchaeus. He feels a sinner and is honoured to welcome Jesus in his house. As a result of the experience of the Mystery of Jesus, Zacchaeus publically declares, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount" (Lk 19:8). Communion with the Lord transforms Zacchaeus and enables and empowers him to continue the ministry of conversion. Kuriakose Elias Chavara, though he maintained baptismal innocence to the end of his life, often expressed his sinfulness and God's mercifulness in one go:

I deem not myself worthy of reaching high degrees of prayer and sanctity. I am a great sinner with a heart impure and opaque without virtues of cleanliness and modesty. I realise that I am not worthy to receive the spirit of contemplation and attain perfection.²⁹

In all humility, Kuriakose counts the blessings from God, all as a gratuitous gift from the Lord:

For is it because of my power and skill that I did things whatsoever? How is it that you came hither? Who called me from home? How did I become a Priest? How could I join the community and become so come by the present status? Do you think I deserve any one of these favours? Not at all, to be sure. If so, remember that God's will is being accomplished.³⁰

Having accomplished numerous things in his eventful life and ministry, Kuriakose enjoins God's mercy as the rationale for his magnificent missions. He further recounts his experience of the glorious

²⁹ *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 1.

³⁰ *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 1.

Mystery and proposes putting on the robe of glory. He muses, "So if you are humble enough to ask Him who brought you hither, you will certainly be gifted with the royal robe, i.e., higher degrees of prayer and sanctity."³¹ The Mystery of God not only helps persons to experience divine mercy but also moves by it to do the ministry, the work of mercy, which Chavara was well known for.

The monastery Chapel was the central stage of Kuriakose's life and ministry; it was the wellspring of his immersing mystery experience and the powerhouse for dispensing his all-round holistic ministry, taking religious, social, economic, educational, and above all, spiritual dimensions of human life. Time and again, Kuriakose underscores and exults mercy, the character of God:

Behold! My bounteous heavenly Father is seated on His Throne of mercy in the Chapel. On His right and left stand the Blessed Mother and our Patron, St Joseph. Close to them is St. Theresa in genuflection to intercede for her children, particularly for me, the sinner.³²

Kuriakose's contemplation focussed on the throne of divine mercy. An array of heavenly accompaniments is more than a comforting and encouraging experience to Kuriakose. He takes the courage to step into the heavenly Father's Mystery field, "So here I am on my feet to make a move to my Father's house with my country cap and walking stick."³³ Interestingly, he walks into the throne of God's glory without any fears and artificiality but fully armed with natural and cultural identity. A homely experience of the Father's glory empowers Kuriakose to ministry. Meditating on the parable of the Prodigal son, Kuriakose confesses, "Oh, it is a long time since I saw my heavenly Father's face! Like the prodigal son, I have squandered all the nice things you benignly bestowed on me."³⁴ As enjoyable, so is it attractive to see the swift change in the dispositions of Kuriakose, shifting back and forth from sinfulness to empowerment through God's mercy.

Notice the sudden surprise in the interior movement of Kuriakose, "My Father is out to embrace me! Oh, No, be off. I am not worthy to be touched by Him. So let me fall prostrate at His feet."³⁵ Soon, he changes

³¹ *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 1.

³² *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 3.

³³ *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 4.

³⁴ *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 4.

³⁵ *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 5.

the scene to a filial clinging to God the Father, "O my Father dear! I cast myself on my knees before your throne of mercy. I am bent on clinging to your pierced but live feet until you speak to me words of forgiveness."³⁶ The experience of the ineffable God's Mystery, Kuriakose captures the beauty of mercy through friendly conversation or sheer gazing at a friend's face. In his *Colloquies*, Kuriakose comes into the monastery chapel, the focal point of his immersive encounter with the Lord and utters:

This Chapel which is filled with your presence, is dreadful so far as a sinner is concerned. But I know you are present here not as a frightening judge but as a friendly Father. Great is your majesty and power. So also is your generosity and kindness. As you have said, there is a time of justice and salvation. I must seek it.³⁷

He is not tired of waiting. Instead, Kuriakose spends long hours before the Eucharistic Lord with zeal in oblation:

From atop your altars, let me offer
 Myself as a gift of love and reparation
 O, how long have I been waiting in love
 With zeal have I tarried, oh, how long.³⁸

Conclusion

The Divine Mystery encircled Kuriakose throughout his vision and mission, and everything came from the mines of his deep divine experience characterised by the Lord's mercy. Kuriakose's darśan of the Holy defined his pastoral ministry as flooded with joy and compassion. Schooled in the Eastern Liturgy of the Thomas Christians of India, Kuriakose picked up the mystery dimension of the Qurbana and, guided by the Holy Spirit, animated his ministries with the sense of Mystery and Mercy of God, the hallmarks of the Eastern Liturgical tradition.

Kuriakose breathed in and breathed out the Eucharistic Lord as his food and drink and tried to impart a mystic and poetic touch to the Christian life, marked by the intimacy with the Lord and the joy of the Gospel:

You, my love, my joy and all my good fortune
 If not with you, how could I live my life

³⁶ *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 5.

³⁷ *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 9.

³⁸ *Compunction of the Soul*, VIII, 17-20.

My very breath, my food, my drink
What solace have I save in you!³⁹

Along with breathing Jesus, Kuriakose developed a deep-seated desire to behold the Lord in his life. The caption, "God's will always and everywhere," a slightly modified version of his text to the contemporary audience from *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, leaves an image of a *yogi*, one in union with God in thought, word, and deed. The contemplation of the divine face took Kuriakose to action on the ground, inviting everyone to glorify God, establishing peace on earth and hope for human beings. Thomas Mampra sketches Kuriakose as:

A contemplative in action. Drawing deeply from India's cultural and religious traditions, he lived his cherished gift of Christian faith in single-minded commitment and ardent devotion to the Lord on the one hand and in deep communion with and selfless service to his fellow humans on the other. In his life and that of his community, the good news of Jesus of Nazareth found a new and refreshing expression, spreading its splendour and fragrance far beyond the confines of his neighbourhood."⁴⁰

I want to conclude this reflection with a passage from the Qurbana, which Kuriakose celebrated with great devotion, diligence and pure heart, and I am inclined to think that the Eucharistic Mystery shaped his sense of Mystery and the overarching divine experience:

Merciful God! Bless us. Grant that all of us, as one body, may properly please You throughout our lives by works of justice that reconcile us with You. Make us worthy to offer You never-ending praise, homage, thanksgiving, and adoration. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Lord of all, forever.⁴¹

³⁹ *Compunction of the Soul*, II, 143-146.

⁴⁰ Thomas Mampra, "Words of Appreciation" quoted from Z.M. Moozhoor, *Blessed Chavara: The Star of the East*, Current Publications, Kottayam, 1993, xiii.

⁴¹ *The Order of the Syro-Malabar Qurbana*, 39.

KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA A TRUE SON OF THE CHURCH Part II

Josy Maria CMC♦

Abstract: Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara had been a true son of the mother Church, for his love and ministries revealed his genuine love to the Church that he had cherished in his heart. This paper, which is the second part of the article, discusses the role of St Chavara as a social reformer of Kerala and his various contributions for the transformation of the society, especially in the field of education. In the nineteenth century, Kerala society has undergone major transformations by various socio-religious reforms. With the initiatives of Chavara a new awareness had been created among the faithful that the church is a servant at the service of the humankind, irrespective of caste, creed, color, or nationality. His instructions had contributed much to the families to become well-knit units of the society.

Keywords: St Chavara, Social reformation, Kerala society, Education, *jnanakurudanmar*, Caste system, *Vedopadesham*, Mothering experiences, *Koodappirappukal*, Evangelization, *Alochana*, Confraternity for Happy Death, Association for Charities, *Upavishala*

♦ **Josy Maria CMC** belongs to Pushparam CMC Province, Dehradun. She had her Theology studies at Dharmaram, Bengaluru and her doctorate at Angelicum, Rome. She has authored and published three books on Saint Chavara: 1. *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara the Founder of Women TOCD*, 2. *Fostering Feminine Genius: Saint Chavara's Theology of Women*. Another book on Chavara was co-authored with Fr Thomas Kochumuttom CMI. She has written a book on the Servant of God Mother Mary Celine, and has published the biography of Fr Leopold Beccaro OCD with the title *Malabarinte Manassarinja Mahamissionary*. Currently, she is a missionary in Peru and makes research on Saint Chavara's Contribution as Social Reformer and attempts to bring out the picture of Saint Chavara in the Manuscript sources. Email: jossymaria52@gmail.com

Saint Chavara and Social Awakening of Kerala

7. Social Context of Kerala in the Nineteenth Century

The Kerala society at the time of St Chavara was very much backward in social, cultural and educational levels. St Chavara was a visionary leader of the time who envisaged many plans for the spiritual and social progress of the Church and the society. In the nineteenth century, Kerala was thoroughly caste-ridden; it had the most rigid and elaborate caste structure in India. The low caste people were characterized as the poor and oppressed. They lived below poverty line, lacking even the minimum requirements for their survival in terms of food, clothing and housing.

They were not allowed to enter the Hindu temples, to bathe in temple ponds, and to go to the public markets. Kerala society was not based on the principles of freedom, equality, and social mobility. Neither men nor women of the low castes were allowed to wear clothes above their waist; any woman who wished to cover the upper part of her body was even made to pay special taxes. They were also prohibited from wearing ornaments and to construct houses with roof-tiles.¹ They were denied the right to education, property, development and participation. There prevailed untouchability and social, educational and economic backwardness were considered the criteria for the Scheduled Caste category. The Dalits had to break through the barrier of untouchability, not simply in its formal legal sense but in its wider social application.

Four major groups with strict hierarchical orders existed, namely, the Brahmins, *Kshathrias*, *Vaishyas* and *Shudras*. The lower castes population was numerically quite strong.² The *Pulayas* and the *Parayas* were the most inferior among the untouchables. They were not allowed to walk on the public roads, to go to markets and temples where even the animals might freely stray.³ Untouchability and unapproachability divided and degraded the society into opposing groups. The upper classes believed that not only the touch but even the proximity of certain classes caused pollution to them.⁴ These social groups had to keep some specified distance from each

¹ T. K. Velu Pillai, *Travancore State Manual*, vol. 1, Thiruvananthapuram: Government Press, 1940, 825.

² Leela Gulati, Ramalingam, and I. S. Gulati, *Gender Profile, Kerala: Looking Back into History*, New Delhi: Royal Netherlands Embassy, 2000, 1-6.

³ Samuel Mateer, "The *Paraya* Caste in Travancore," *The Journal of the Asiatic Society of Britain and Ireland* (1884), 180.

⁴ Poet Kumaran Asan described them as: The untouchables were also made unseeable, unapproachable and even unhearable.

other according to the position each occupied in the social order.⁵ Those classes were termed non-caste Hindus.

Having visited Kerala in 1897, Swami Vivekananda commented on the ugly type of caste system that existed in the society and pictured Kerala as 'a mad house of religion'. This observation was made 26 years after the death of Chavara and it gives us a clear picture of the pitiable social conditions of Kerala society. In the present article, we shall discuss the role of Saint Chavara in the awakening of Kerala society and culture from the shackles of inhumane caste divisions and unhealthy traditions in the nineteenth century. The academic discussions and writings in Kerala have never represented the reformatory nature and the role of the person of Chavara for the awakening of Kerala society. The scholars who have dealt with the aspects of history, culture, modernization and awakening of Kerala have neglected the social relevance of Chavara's activities and often remained silent or ignored it willfully.⁶ Many scholars attempt to depict the contributions of social reformers, like Sree Narayana Guru, Chattampi Swamikal, Vaikom Mohammed Moulvi, V. T. Bhattathiripad, and so on as the progenitors of renaissance in the Kerala society. In all these discussions, the Christian contributions were ignored; even if they were mentioned, they referred only to the contributions of LMS, CMS, Basel Mission, etc. In these latter instances, historians attempt to depict them as mere agents of colonial modernity.⁷ It is against such a social background, studies on Chavara's organized attempt to modernize the Kerala society becomes relevant; he brought forth reformation and awakening to a great extent in the Kerala society in the nineteenth century. He was well-known for reaching out to the poor and played a major role in educating and uplifting people, especially in the lowest strata of the society. Mannanam was the animating centre from where all the activities in the parishes or villages were monitored.

8. Integral Social Vision of Chavara

Jesus' option for the poor was an important characteristic of the mission of the Catholic community in Malabar. Jesus began his mission by proclaiming the absolute priority of the Gospel for the poor (Lk 4:16-19). The ministry of Jesus was different from that of the leaders of the Old

⁵ C. N. Somarajan, "Foundations of Kerala Society and Politics," *Journal of Kerala Studies* 15 (March-September 1988), 105.

⁶ See P. K. Gopalakrishnan, *Keralathinte Samskarika Charitham* (Malayalam), Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala State Bhasha Institute, 2010.

⁷ K. N. Ganesh, *Reflections on Pre-Modern Kerala*, Thrissur: Cosmo Books, 2016, 263.

Testament by the fact that it was directed to the lost sheep of Israel (Lk 19:10). Pope John Paul II observed that Asia is a “continent of plentiful resources and great civilizations, but where some of the poorest nations on earth are to be found, and where more than half the population suffers deprivation, poverty and exploitation.”⁸ The church in India has to show a preferential love for the poor, the voiceless. The early church translated the Gospel of love into life making themselves a sharing community.

The vision that guided and motivated Chavara to introduce the social uplift programs was his love for the people whom he called *Koodappirappukal* (siblings). For Chavara, God was his *appan*, merciful father, and all His children were his brothers and sisters. He translated this faith into charity to have a community of fraternal love and sharing. His compassionate heart could recognize all the troubles of his neighbors as the troubles of his own. He accepted every human being as his brother or sister, for he dreamed of a casteless society.

The steps taken by Chavara for the social development were mainly comprised of educational reforms, uplift of the *dalit*, formation of leaders, renewal of the families, women empowerment, literary contributions and charity works. His approach towards those who were in the periphery was fourfold: welcoming, protecting, promoting, and integrating them into the mainstream of the society. For Chavara, as a Christian, it was a natural expression of his faith commitment to be involved in the movement for *dalit* liberation. The motive force behind all these activities was the transformation of the society.

9. Social Sensitivity and Peace

For Chavara, his social sensitivity meant to feel with the needs of the less privileged, the poor and the marginalized and share with them his resources without calculating the rewards. He was compassionate towards the needy. He was engaged in the dynamics of liberation and empowerment of the oppressed in order to attain liberation in view of universal harmony. He felt that the economic and social uplift of the semi-starved millions was essential to their welfare and freedom.

Chavara expressed his solidarity with the neglected and the abandoned. He gave up all types of luxurious ways of life and lived with the minimum facilities because he knew that any hint of luxury will

⁸ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, 34. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_06111999_ecclesia-in-asia.html; accessed on 18.09.2023.

counteract the credibility of his social commitment as a priest and a Christian leader. Pope John XXIII in the Encyclical *Pacem in Terris* highlighted human rights as the foundation of peace in the human society⁹ and it can be firmly established only if the order laid down by God be dutifully observed.¹⁰ It emphasizes the importance of the cooperation of all men and women of good will in establishing peace. It speaks the language of universal brotherhood and solidarity of human beings. Since peace means absolute respect for the order lay down by God,¹¹ Chavara believed that unless and until the social discrimination had been removed from the minds and lives of the people peace would not reign in the society. Peace results from that harmony built into the human society by its divine Founder and actualized by the human beings as they thirst for ever greater justice.

With the initiatives of Chavara a new awareness had been created among the members of the church that the church is a servant at the service of the humankind, irrespective of caste, creed, color, or nationality. He brought an attitudinal change in the mindset of the official church and brought the church into a new relationship with the contemporary world. His vision represented a new concept of the society. The social vision of Chavara was an integral part of the evangelizing ministry of the Church and his social vision sought to proclaim the Gospel and make it present in the complex network of social relations. Chavara attempted to interpret the social realities in the light of the Gospel values.

Chavara's social consciousness enabled him to work for the integration of social reformation with his spiritual and apostolic visions. As he felt that he was called to a more direct social mission, all his activities had an essential dimension of social justice and liberation, for the Christians, on those days, were not an exception from the evil practices of untouchability and other caste discriminations.¹² They

⁹ John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, 126. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem.html; accessed on 18.09.2023.

¹⁰ John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, 1.

¹¹ John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, 1.

¹² See Scaria Zacharia, ed., *The Acts and Decrees of the Synod of Diamper 1599*, Hosanna Mount: Indian Institute of Christian Studies, 1994, 31-32.

practiced caste system and followed the rules of purity and of pollution, and the Synod of Diamper prohibited such practices by the Christians.¹³

10. Care for the Servants

Kerala witnessed different kinds of social discriminations against the low caste people in the nineteenth century. They were considered slaves even at the time of Chavara, and their human dignity was not recognized. Chavara's spiritual vision led him to be an innovator of many socio-pastoral, cultural, educational and social reforms. While he most conscientiously lived the life of a Religious, dedicated to the love and service of God, the same divine love in him inspired him to devote himself, as much as he could, to the love and service of fellow human beings. As a man of contemplation, Chavara conversed with God and sought His presence in the deepest realm of his heart. At the same time, he was an altruist – a man for others.

Chavara's counsels to the Christian families given in the form of the "Testament of a Loving Father" is universally applicable and are relevant to this day. In it Chavara had instructed the families to take care of the spiritual needs of their servants: "Masters should know that they are responsible for caring for the needs of their servants and in assisting them in their spiritual welfare."¹⁴ He also instructed them to limit the number of domestic workers in the families and spoke about the just wages to be paid to them regularly. Chavara had insisted that the domestic workers must be sent for the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist.¹⁵ His instruction about just wages and honoring the dignity of workers was something very unique and it was unheard of in Kerala. He specified: "Never withhold just wages from laborers or make undue delay in paying them, because it is an offence that cries out to God for justice. Do not insult the poor; neither should you vex them because if God sees them weeping, he will surely wreak vengeance on you."¹⁶ By insisting on paying decent wages to the workers at the right time without having them to wait for long, Chavara respected the dignity of human person, who has been created in the image of God.

11. House of Charity

Chavara expressed his love for the needy in a concrete manner by instituting a 'House of Charity' for the less privileged in the society. It is

¹³ Zacharia, ed., *The Acts and Decrees of the Synod of Diamper 1599*, 49; 202-203.

¹⁴ Chavara, *Chavarul*, I: 23. CWC., vol. 4, *Letters*, IX:10.

¹⁵ Chavara, *Chavarul*, 1:23. CWC., vol. 4, *Letters*, IX: 10

¹⁶ Chavara, *Chavarul*, 1:18. CWC., vol. 4, *Letters*, IX: 10.

heart-warming to see the way he encouraged or motivated his parishioners to open a house of charity in Kainakary. He presented before them many examples of people who were engaged in nursing the sick, helping the poor from European countries and also persons known to them, such as Father Ouseph Chavara from their own parish. The letter he had written to his parishioners motivating them to open a house of charity was inspiring.¹⁷ He knew very well that the worst discrimination, the poor had to undergo was the denial of spiritual care to them. Therefore, he made books available for those who live there and even arranged a library for them.¹⁸ In his 'Testament', he requested the members of his congregation to offer to the house of charity some of the relics from his collections as a sign of protection and salvation to them.¹⁹

12. Chavara, an Apostle of the Families

Chavara's act of writing of the 'Family Code' which he named 'The Testament of a Loving Father,' (*Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul*) was socially a responsible act that positively influenced the community, the society, and the world at large. He prepared this insightful and practical document on 13 February 1868, and it has reached millions of families all over the world because it has been translated into various Indian and foreign languages which has facilitated the renewal of families. Saju Chackalackal observed that this insightful and down-to-earth document, surprisingly, the first of its kind in the known history of the Church, offers practical direction to families in leading a God-fearing as well as socially commendable life. It emphasizes the role of parents and family members regarding the training of their children in religious, moral, and social values. He bequeathed to his beloved family members and relatives in his native village Kainakary and through them to the entire human family, this Testament, which, he believed, would keep him united with them by the regular reading of the text and following the instructions contained therein. While the biblical insights and inspiring anecdotes contained in the Testament attest to the fact that Saint Chavara had a deep sense of Christian foundations for leading a genuine family life, his insightful practical directives indicate how thoroughly he understood the dynamics of a family, especially on grooming children and nurturing discipline within the family. Family is the heaven on earth. It is with the intention of transforming all the families into heaven

¹⁷ Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 4, *Letters IX*: 11.

¹⁸ Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 4, *Letters V*:15.

¹⁹ Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 4, *Letters VI*:4, para 4.

on earth, that he, in a spirit of prayer and discernment and yearning for “God’s light and peace,” invited the family members to cultivate love, order, and peace, even if that would call for sacrificing personal convenience and comfort.

Being convinced that family is the “image of heaven”,²⁰ and the foundation of the Church, Chavara had great concern for the well-being of Christian families. He defined family:

A family is the 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 this proper state of life seeks to attain eternal salvation and lives peacefully.²¹

The family is the most precious human institution, and every couple has the important responsibility to safeguard it against the numerous forces that seek to destroy or weaken it. Chavara was a champion of families and his Testament to his parish community was a great treatise for effective family life. He gave importance to ‘family-centred spirituality’. He instructed his parishioners on the significance of family prayer, family timetable or time management, Sunday observance, relationship with their servants, etc. He inculcated in the family members their solidarity with the poor and sick and instructed them to visit and serve them on Sundays.²²

Chavara, being a devotee of the Holy Family, instructed the parents to guide their children in devotion to the Holy Family of Nazareth.²³ Chavara’s meditative eyes rested on the tender love of this unique couple for each other and for their child²⁴; on their fidelity to religious duties of prayer and worship; on their dedication to work as a means of earning their livelihood.²⁵ In his *Atmanuthapam* there are many lines in which Chavara praises the mutual commitment and subjection of Joseph and Mary.²⁶

²⁰ Chavara, *Chavarul* (Introduction), CWC., vol. 4, *Letters* IX: 10.

²¹ Chavara, *Chavarul* (Introduction), CWC., vol 4, *Letters* IX: 10.

²² Chavara, *Chavarul*, I: 22. CWC., vol. 4, *Letters*, IX:10.

²³ Chavara, *Chavarul*, II: 2. CWC., vol. 4, *Letters*, IX:10.

²⁴ Chavara, *Atmanuthapam*, cantos V: 110-114.

²⁵ Chavara, *Atmanuthapam*, cantos V: 158-174.

²⁶ Chavara, *Atmanuthapam*, cantos V: 118-126.

Chavara's instruction on mutual respect of husband and wife is considered very unique and original. He said: "By seeing the respect of the father towards mother, children respect her; in the same way mother's respect to the father is the model for children to respect their father."²⁷ In *Mulieris Dignitatem*, Pope John Paul II brought forth a new interpretation for the mutual subjection of husband and wife, which he called "the Gospel innovation" based on the Letter to the Ephesians 5:21-33.²⁸ The text reads: "All the reasons in favor of the 'subjection' of woman to man in marriage must be understood in the sense of a 'mutual subjection' of both 'out of reverence for Christ'."²⁹ At that time, in many circles, woman's subordination to her husband was often described as her punishment because of Eve's sin. But Chavara propagated the idea of 'mutual subjection' and mutual respect in view of developing healthy and holistic relationships within the families.

Once Chavara said, "I left my home and parents for the sake of God. Now I am writing this from Elthuruth. I have my brethren here who love me more than my own brothers and sisters. Tomorrow if I go to Koonammavu, I will have the same experience there as well; so also, if I go to Mannanam or to Vazhakulam."³⁰ In fact, he did not leave his family, instead it was widened, or expanded in order to embrace all the families as his own. Thus, the whole world became his own family.

13. Marital Spirituality or Family Spirituality

Despite its importance and relevance, marital spirituality is seldom talked about. According to Pope Francis' *Amoris Laetitia*, marital spirituality is the spirituality of the bond in which divine love dwells.³¹ The couples must strive for this spirituality during 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."³² It is not so much by doing extraordinary things, but by

²⁷ Chavara, *Chavarul*, II: 9. CWC., vol. 4, *Letters*, IX:10.

²⁸ John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 24. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1988/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19880815_mulieris-dignitatem.html; accessed on 18.09.2023.

²⁹ John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 24.

³⁰ Chavara, CWC., vol. 4: *Letters*, IX:7

³¹ Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 315. https://www.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf; accessed on 18.09.2023.

³² Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 315.

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.

In the third canto of Chavara's *Atmanuthapam*, a meditation on the deep mystery of Incarnation, he pondered deeply on mothering experiences of Mother Mary such as conception³³, pregnancy,³⁴ childbirth,³⁵ kissing and embracing of the newborn baby,³⁶ breast-feeding,³⁷ and so on, and presented these as spiritual practices. Those events are women's God experience and should be cherished, appreciated, celebrated and valued as such. In the Old Testament, priests were asked to make atonement and to offer sin offering for the woman who gave birth to her child (Lev 12:6-8). Whereas here is a priest who contemplates the great gift of giving birth and breast-feeding etc., and presents them as spiritual exercises and not as acts meant for atonement and sin offering. These events are to be celebrated and no more considered taboo for women. Here is an example of his contemplation on the experience of mother and child while breast-feeding:

With tender love, the mother breast-fed
the babe in joy, I long to see.
The holy awe, the mother enjoyed,
While feeding him, I long to see.³⁸

Chavara could be seen as a champion of restoring dignity to women's body and their mothering experiences.

To maintain true love and strong bond of communion in the families and the communities, Chavara had instructed to have real concern for those who are sick in them. His biographers have it recorded that he practiced it in his own life. Highlighting the example of Father Chacko Valliara, his nephew, he narrated his parishioners how persons were transformed by serving the sick.³⁹ He shared his own life experience with

³³ Chavara, *Atmanuthapam*, Cantos III: 8-10.

³⁴ Chavara, *Atmanuthapam*, Cantos III: 11-12.

³⁵ Chavara, *Atmanuthapam*, Cantos III: 23-24.

³⁶ Chavara, *Atmanuthapam*, Cantos V: 83-90.

³⁷ Chavara, *Atmanuthapam*, Cantos V: 37-40.

³⁸ Chavara, *Atmanuthapam*, Cantos III: 37-40.

³⁹ Letter to his parishioners encouraging them to open a house of charity in Kainakary, Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 4, *Letters IX:11.*

his parishioners of having strong family bond that prevailed in the monasteries where he lived.⁴⁰

14. Parents as Saints

In the Apostolic Letter *Gaudete et exultate*, 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... This is the holiness which we often find in our 'next door neighbors' who live amidst us and 'reflect God's presence'."⁴¹ Again, the Pope tells: "Our very parents become *living saints* with all their self-emptying concern and care for us."⁴² "Are you a parent or grandparent? Be holy by patiently teaching the little ones how to follow Jesus."⁴³ Meditating on the birth of Jesus, Chavara conveyed the message that the birth of every child is a holy and joyful event, and it unites the couples and the family members. The sleepless nights of nursing the children at their sick bed, postponing of so many activities, career sacrifices, etc., are some of the sacrifices of the parents. The prize of parenting comes at a heavy price.

Much before Pope Francis instructed the people of God to consider their parents as saints, Saint Chavara admired his mother as a saint. The life she lived in the family caring for her children and husband was enough for him to consider her a saint. Before receiving the Holy Communion or in preparation to welcome Jesus into his heart, Chavara first invited Mother Mary and his other favorite 'mother saints', including his own mother,⁴⁴ to be present with him when Jesus would enter his heart. He believed that he was not worthy to welcome Jesus into his heart, and therefore, he requested the presence and the virtues of these saints in his heart. It was his strong belief that his mother was deeply loved by God in the heavenly abode and that she would continue to support him in his faith journey.

15. Love for Nature and Eco-Spirituality

Saint Chavara's love for the nature or his eco-spiritual vision was evident in the process of searching and purchasing the land for the monasteries and other institutions. While planning to buy a new plot of

⁴⁰ Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 4, *Letters*, IX: 11.

⁴¹ Francis, *Gaudete et exultate*, 7. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20180319_gaudete-et-exultate.html; accessed on 18.09.2023.

⁴² Francis, *Gaudete et exultate*, 6, 14.

⁴³ Francis, *Gaudete et exultate*, 14.

⁴⁴ Chavara, *CWC.*, vol. 3, *Dhyanasallapangal*, 49.

land for a monastery at Chanaganassery, Chavara instructed the concerned person: "The place should be sufficiently distant from the marketplace so that the noise of the market may not disturb the life in the monastery. There should be water. There should be a river close by so that we can conveniently reach the place by boat. The place should be sufficiently large with big trees around to moderate the heat. Besides the space for the construction of the monastery, there should be place also for gardens, etc."⁴⁵ Chavara was a hard-working person, lived a simple life and he loved animals, too. Mannanam Chronicle records his love for animal husbandry:

The *Valia Priorachan* Father Chavara bought a she-buffalo for Rs. 5/- and kept it where the monastery had a marshy paddy field (*kary*) near the place called Vennathottiyil. Father Prior tended the buffalo with special care. In the course of time she gave birth to many calves – so many that some of them did not survive. Finally, the remaining twelve were sold in the *kary* itself for more than Rs. 300/- by auction. Mannanam Monastery bought one of them named, Manappara for Rs. 45/- and kept it in the same field as a memento of the past.⁴⁶

16. Pooling of Local Resources

Chavara's leadership qualities included pooling of resources for the projects he initiated for the welfare of the community. He did it by motivating the people of the locality. In 1860 when the convent for women was getting ready at Puthenpally Monsignor Bernardine Baccinelli wrote letters to the Priors of Carmelite monasteries and Carmelite cloistered nuns for financial help. The letter reads: "The building is still incomplete for lack of funds and I do not know when we would be able to accomplish this task. ..." ⁴⁷ But the approach of Chavara was to depend on local resources, not to look for foreign help. Even for the construction of seminary and center for higher education he did not look for finance from the abroad. He was a motivator, facilitator, and an

⁴⁵ Letter to Father Cherian, Parish Priest of Changanasserry, on 7 April 1868, Chavara, CWC., vol. 4, *Letters*, VIII:4.

⁴⁶ ASJM, Mannanam, *Mannanam Chronicle* (MSS), vol. 4, 61.

⁴⁷ AGOCD., *Plut.*35e. Letter of Monsignor Baccinelli to the Provincials, Priors and Religious of the Carmelite Order, dated 29 June 1860; APF., see also *Indie Orientali* 1859-1861, Vol.17, ff. 1420-1421. The letters written on the same date to both men and women religious have the same content with a slight difference.

inspiring leader. Through the circular letter written to the parish priests in 1850, he motivated the priests to raise fund for the same.⁴⁸

The following testimonies loudly speak that within seven or eight months a two-storied convent building was ready at Koonammavu, that too, with the generous contribution of the local people. The sisters, too, knew the source of money for the construction of the convent. They wrote: "Our Fathers by their efforts and their letters, inspire some persons, to give us donations... Once or twice loans were taken from the monastery and some others and works were continued."⁴⁹ They have recorded the name of the persons who contributed the wood and other materials for the construction work.⁵⁰ The sisters continued, "Towards the end of the work, too, once it happened like this. Seeing that the money was over they said, "Let us send a letter to Kaduthuruthy, Muttuchira and see whether we get some money or not."⁵¹ It was a real wonder. They collected Rs. 600/- in cash and sent it, through the Father Superior of Mannanam monastery.⁵² Chavara wrote the details of the donations he received, especially from the parishes of Kuttanadu, in his dairy.⁵³ Regarding the money collected for the construction of the convent, on 20 February 1867 when the construction was just completed, Monsignor Baccinelli reported it to Propaganda Fide: "Their house is constructed with the alms given for this purpose by the faithful of some churches and priests; in the meantime they live, it can be said, in a hut miserable in everything."⁵⁴ Not only for the construction of the convent but their daily life expenses are met with their own money not with any contribution from the bishop, he testified: "They sustain themselves with the dowry (patrimony) that they must bring with; for three poor I provide for the food at the rate of about 14 coins a month for each one."⁵⁵

Other contemporary documents testify to the fact of local contributions for the construction of the convent. *Alochanapusthakam* clearly bear witness to the fact that even bishop did not donate anything for the same. "When there was no hope at all, still they hoped against

⁴⁸ Chavara, CWC., vol. 4, *Letters*, IX:2.

⁴⁹ CKC, vol. 1: 46.

⁵⁰ CKC, vol. 1: 47-48.

⁵¹ CKC, vol. 1: 48.

⁵² CKC, vol. 1: 48.

⁵³ Chavara, CWC., vol. 1: *Chronicles*, 174-175.

⁵⁴ Baccinelli Report 1867, Q. 72, p. 76.

⁵⁵ Baccinelli Report 1867, Q. 72, p. 76.

hope. Without anything from the Very Reverend Archbishop and from the *Pidiyary*, in a miraculous way, so to say, from the local churches, from the faithful and in a manner unheard of (as a new news) from the parish priests, obtained about Rs. 8,000/- most of which were collected through letters. Thus within a short span of time, the convent was built in a fine model....⁵⁶ *The Chronicle of Mannanam Monastery* adds to the reason why they could not receive any thing from Baccinelli or from *Pidiyary* system: "But it would take time for the collections of *Pidiyary* to come and funds were needed now for the seminary and other beneficial activities undertaken by the archbishop."⁵⁷ Bishop's main interest at that time was the opening of the seminary at Puthenpally⁵⁸ and to buy a land and construct a monastery for Latins at Manjummal for which two boys were studying by staying with the novices at Koonammavu monastery.⁵⁹ This has been corroborated by the report of Baccinelli to Rome in 1867. He says, "Another one [monastery] emerges now, the foundations of which have been completed, and this will be the first one for the Latins."⁶⁰

The story of the construction of the Koonammavu convent gives evidence to the influence of Chavara, the recognized leader of the people. The people were ready to support generously whenever he approached them for help and thus the convent was built in seven or eight months with the generous help of the local people.

17. Imparting Education for Social Empowerment

The following section deals with the educational vision of St Chavara against the socio-economic and educational background of Kerala in nineteenth century. Chavara a man of unique vision realized education as the best means of human uplift and social mobility. His contributions laid a strong foundation for the educational, social, and financial development of Kerala.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the state government of Travancore began to take interest in the field of education in line with

⁵⁶ ASJM, *Alochana*, 139. (Book of Consultation of the Monastery at Mannanam), 1864-1871. It is the record of the discussions and deliberations of the monthly council meeting of the TOCD Superiors of all the monasteries with Chavara and Father Leopold, the Delegate Provincial, held at Mannanam Monastery (1864-1871).

⁵⁷ Chavara, CWC., vol. 1 *Chronicles*, 130.

⁵⁸ The seminary at Puthenpally was opened on 15 August 1866.

⁵⁹ Chavara, CWC., vol. 1 *Chronicles*, 132.

⁶⁰ Cf. Baccinelli Report, 1867, Q. 63, p. 73.

the Protestant missionaries. Political leaders, for example, Gouri Parvathi Bai, with the assistance of Diwan Colonel Munro, introduced a system of free education under state control in 1817.⁶¹ But this was only the privilege of upper caste males of the time. Both the Hindus and the Protestants profited out of this.

Catholics were not allowed to step into these institutions. Monsignor Baccinelli cleared his position in these words: "I do not allow anyone to go to them, as even to those of the gentiles, and if anyone goes there, I punish him until he leaves. I tolerate only for prudential reasons, and for not being able to do otherwise, that some goes to schools, that a little ago the government has erected. However, there too the teacher is a catholic and errors against the faith are not taught."⁶²

Realizing that the catholic community would even remain subjugated if they did not move with the times, Chavara decided that the religious congregation should concentrate on educational work. He knew that education is the key to development. He opened schools where apart from Christian doctrines, Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic in vernacular were taught. Monsignor Baccinelli reported to Rome that in all the schools in the diocese, "it is taught to read, write, calculate, compose well in good Malabar language, etc. ... In these schools the English language, history of India, geography, etc, are taught."⁶³

18. Popularization of Education

Chavara marked the beginning of the popularization and reformation of education in the Catholic Church in Kerala by practically executing the motto, "A school for a Church." Fr Kuriakose Elias Chavara established the first school for the dalits at Arpoochara in 1864,⁶⁴ and initiated the popularization and reformation of education in Kerala.

Numerous documents testify that under the leadership of Chavara several schools were established attached to the churches and monasteries from 1864. Till then, the Catholics had no opportunity to educate their children because Monsignor Baccinelli was very much against the Catholics going to the schools run by the schismatics and

⁶¹ V. NagamAiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, vol. I, Thiruvananthapuram: Gazetteers Department, Kerala Council for Historical research, 1999, 475.

⁶² Baccinelli Report 1867: Q. 51, pp. 70-71.

⁶³ Baccinelli Report 1867: Q. 51, pp. 70-71.

⁶⁴ *Alochana*, Archives of St Joseph's Monastery, Mannanam, (ASJM), The Book of Consultation of the Monastery at Mannanam, 1864-1871, p. 139.

heretics. He allowed them in certain cases to go to the schools run by the government.⁶⁵ i) Historical documents show that there is a steady increase of the number of Catholic schools after the appointment of Fr Chavara as the Vicar General. It deserves our attention that the number of schools which was only one in 1864 rose to 42 by the year 1866 and became 191 by the year 1867. This highlights the efforts of the TOCD priests under the leadership of Chavara, the Prior and the Vicar General. After 1861, when Chavara was appointed the Vicar General of the Syrian Christians, there was a surge in the number of schools because of his tireless efforts of Chavara and the TOCD priests.

In the official report submitted to the Propaganda Fide in Rome on the state of the Christians of the Eastern Church in the Vicariate apostolic of Verapoly in 1867, Archbishop Bernardino Baccinelli mentioned the number of schools as 191 attached to 104 Suriani Parishes and the subjects taught to the students: Besides Catechism on Sundays, they were taught to read, write, calculate, compose well in Malayalam, etc., on weekdays.⁶⁶ It marked the beginning of reformation of education in Kerala. Chavara efficiently executed the idea 'a school for a church', (*Pallikkoru pallikkoodam*) and inaugurated a social awakening.

Chavara established a Sanskrit School, attached to St Joseph's Monastery at Mannanam in 1846. Inspired by St Ephrem Chavara explained to the priests that education brings sight to the blind, the blind of spirit as well as the blind of sight.⁶⁷ He envisaged different stages of learning, language study, study of other subjects, etc., for he was convinced that those who are not educated are spiritually blind (*jnanakurudanmar*). According to him, it was due to this blindness that the Christians in Kerala lacked the seed and sapling of sanctity. On 25 March 1850, he had sent a circular to the parish priests to motivate them for a centre of education, where Malayalam, Tamil, Latin, Syriac, etc., could be taught and to collect from the parishioners a contribution of ten percent of the income for the running of the centre.

Chavara instilled in the parish priests the significance of education and made them realize that the knowledge alone could uplift a

⁶⁵ Baccinelli Report, 1867, Q. 53, p. 70.

⁶⁶ ACO., Archivi Congregazioni Orientali 1862-1877. Scritture referrite Congressi Malabarensi, ff. 150-172.

⁶⁷ Chavara, CWC, vol. 4 *Letters*, IX:2. Circular Letter to parish priests written on 25 March 1850.

community.⁶⁸ He reminded them of the grave responsibility in sustaining and spreading education: "The priests are duty-bound to teach the faithful,"⁶⁹ he maintained; he also insisted the necessity of an integral education as well as the religious foundation of educational action.⁷⁰ "One school for one church" was the rule. His educational contributions laid a strong foundation for a just society in which all human beings were considered worthy of erudition, justice, respect and dignity. Since October 1864, under the direct guidance of Chavara, the TOCD community was committed to uplift the people of God, especially the marginalized. Their main concern was to support the church - at the local and regional level - in assisting people at every stage of their development and growth. Responding to their right to education of the *Dalits*, we see twenty points of pastoral action, introducing practical guidelines to help plan and assess pastoral care of people on the periphery.

When Fr Kuriakose Elias Chavara was the Vicar General of the archdiocese of Verapoly, the idea "a school for a church" was executed among the churches in Kerala. 'By implementing the idea', he marked the beginning of a popularization and reformation of education. Monsignor Leonard Mellano's circular letter on 7 November 1872 stated the crisis the schools in the vicariate faced due to a lack of interest from the part of the parents to send the children to the school, some schools were without students, and without teachers. ... The remedy he suggested was to open a Sanskrit school in every parish. He offered to provide textbooks for the said schools.

Education for the marginalized was a solid step against the caste-dominated and privatized form of education prevalent in Kerala. Although the new schools were attached to churches and supervised by the priests of the monasteries, education was meant for the general public; access to education was open to all without the caste or color-based discriminations: he aimed at inclusive and integral education of all. Chavara desired that the kingdom of God of all-pervading love,

⁶⁸ Chavara, CWC, vol. 4 *Letters*, IX:2. Circular Letter to parish priests written on 25 March 1850.

⁶⁹ Chavara, CWC, vol. 4, *Letters*, IX:2. Circular Letter to parish priests written on 25 March 1850.

⁷⁰ Chavara, CWC., vol.4, *Letters* IX:2 Circular Letter to parish priests on 25 March 1850.

should reach all people, all minds, the rich as well as the poor, the oppressor as well as the oppressed.

19. Evangelization and Integral Human Welfare

Instilling new vigor and enthusiasm for evangelization in the priests, Pope Francis pointed out that many of our brothers and sisters live without the strength, light and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ, without a community of faith to support them, without meaning and a goal in life.⁷¹ In his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* he instructed that more than by fear of going astray, my hope is that we will be moved by the fear of remaining shut up within structures which give us a false sense of security, within rules which make us harsh judges, within habits which make us feel safe, while at our door people are starving and Jesus does not tire of saying to us: "Give them something to eat" (Mk 6:37).⁷² The Pope wants us to rediscover mission as the priority. Narrating the sad plight of the vicariate of Varapuzha, Leopold Beccaro wrote to Rome on 23 November 1873 regarding the evangelization kept in a low key.⁷³

Chavara took initiatives to amplify the evangelization of the downtrodden (Mt 28:18). He instructed all the monasteries to get involved in the evangelization by taking the good news of Jesus to the periphery and he made them realize that it cannot be left to the professional ministers, missionaries, and evangelists. Chavara had genuine love towards the marginalized and the less privileged of the society, especially the *pulayas* of his time. In 1860s, on the part of Chavara, we see an urgency to bring them to the mainstream of the society. The document called *Alochana* and the *Chronicle of Mannanam Monastery* vol.3, many pages of the *Chronicle of Varkey Parappuram*, and other contemporary documents speak of the fresh enthusiasm of Chavara and the TOCD monasteries towards the evangelization of the people of the suppressed classes. Baccinelli appreciated their ministry of evangelization among the *Pulayas* and the celebration of sacraments for them.⁷⁴

⁷¹ The Congregation for the Clergy, Instruction "The pastoral conversion of the Parish community in the service of the evangelising mission of the Church", on 20 July 2020, 3.

⁷² Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), n. 49: AAS 105 (2013), 1040.

⁷³ Leopold, *Leopold Missionariyude Kathukal*, I:1.

⁷⁴ Baccinelli Report 1867, Q. 68, p. 75.

Till the nineteenth century Syrian Christians were not willing to preach the Gospel to the lower castes. As we see in the canons of the Synod of Diamper, Christians also enjoyed the privileges of the upper caste and practiced untouchability, apparently sharing the value system of the then Kerala society that was divided into different classes and castes.

According to Pope John Paul II, "Solidarity is not a feeling of vague compassion or superficial tenderness for the misfortunes of so many people near and far. On the contrary, it is firm and constant determination to cooperate for the common good."⁷⁵ Saint Chavara believed that the service of faith and the promotion of justice could not be separated, because they are radically united. Fr Leopold Beccaro reported to his superiors in Rome regarding the process of welcoming the *Pulayas* to the church. According to his letters, 30 persons were given baptism in the month of July 1860 and 300 people were preparing themselves to be admitted to the Church. He also noted that when baptism was administered to *Pulayas* there was strong criticism from various sections of the society, including Christians. Their comments were like this: the church in which they were given baptism was polluted; even the sacrament of baptism was contaminated.⁷⁶ Fr Mathew Palakunnel also had mentioned the objection and reactions against welcoming the low caste people to the Church.⁷⁷ They were admitted to the church only after making proper preparation by way of retreats, catechism classes, etc. Fr Leopold Beccaro reported that the neophytes learned by heart the 'Catechism of Saint Bellarmine', which was taught by lay persons. It was conducted in some rooms of the TOCD novitiate house and some other houses in Koonammavu.⁷⁸ Such classes were conducted also in some other districts under the inspection of TOCD Fathers. Chavara prepared a text for the 'rite of baptism of adults',⁷⁹ which he translated from Latin to Syriac. Chavara made clear that the

⁷⁵ John Paul II, *Sollicitudinei Socialis*, 38. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html; accessed on 18.09.2023.

⁷⁶ Mathew Thundathil, trans., *Father Leopold Beccaro OCD, Theresian Missionary (1837-1914)*, Trivandrum: CIPH, 2014, 83.

⁷⁷ Palakunnel Velliachante Nalagamam [Malayalam], p. 14.

⁷⁸ Leopold Beccaro, *Leopoldu Missionaryude Kathukal* [Malayalam], ed. Jossy, Aluva: CMC Publications, 2010, II:1, pp. 29-32.

⁷⁹ ASJM, *Chronicle of Mannanam Monastery*, vol. 3 [MSS], 1864-1871; see also Palakunnel Velliachante Nalagamam [Malayalam], p. 14.

celebrations of the sacraments are the moments of encounter between Christ and the faithful, an encounter that deepens the faith.

The efforts taken by Chavara to bring up those at the periphery calls for a pastoral conversion inspiring us to be authentic missionaries. Chavara's mission of evangelization was Kingdom-oriented. He gave sufficient importance to conversion and transformation of the members through the power of the Gospel, which could be seen in his continued efforts to make them grow in faith and assimilate and incorporate them to the mainstream of the community. It also indicated that the admission of the *dalits* to Christianity was not only an addition of members by way of baptism, but also this resulted in a change of their identity, improved social status, dignity and better social and cultural progress through education which was denied for them for centuries.

Chavara wanted to inculcate in the low-caste a healthy awareness of self-worth. He wished that they would not be ostracized from the society; but for this they must develop self-confidence and live a sound moral life. With these objectives he opened schools at Mannanam and Arpookara, and later at Edathua, Pulinkunnu and Kainakari, which were all accessible to the deprived classes. Introducing 'noon feeding' in the schools he assured their regular attendance. He insisted on decent wages to workers at the completion of the work.⁸⁰ The two pious associations, namely Confraternity for Happy Death and Association for Charities (*upavishala*) were meant to help, especially those of the lowest in the society to have a peaceful and happy death. Chavara, in his circular letter to his confreres and in his *Chavarul*, stressed the right of everyone to live a decent life and the duty to support it.

20. Vedopadesham for the Downtrodden

The *Alochana* records the thorough planning and preparations of the TOCD Fathers to commence the classes for the *dalit* children and people in the peripheries. It was decided to encourage the people of the locality to build a small structure to house the school for the *pulayas*. Since it was assessed that it may take longer, they decided to spend the money from Mannanam Monastery and to begin the school on 9 October 1864 itself. On that day, at 10 am, 75 people both men and women gathered at the Monastery, and they were taught, and the Good News was preached to them.⁸¹ During the following months more members were added to the

⁸⁰ Chavara, *Chavarul*, I:18. CWC., vol. 4, *Letters*, IX:10.

⁸¹ ASJM, *Alochana*, September 1864, *Alochana*, p. 26.

group. Father Ephrem of Mannanam Monastery prepared the group by preaching retreat to them; out of them nineteen men and women received baptism in a solemn celebration in the Mannanam Monastery Chapel. The new Christians were instructed to join for the Eucharistic celebration daily at 5.00 am, which was offered specially for them.⁸² *Alochana* gives the picture of how they were cared for and how the whole community of Mannanam and other institutions were involved in their upbringing and further development in faith by raising their social status. Besides the pre-baptismal catechumentate, the post-baptismal catechism was arranged. 'Vedopadesham'⁸³ was the common term used for instructing and incorporating them into faith. Similar type of instruction was continued for their children and the adults.

TOCD Fathers took care of 42 schools in the central Travancore in 1866.⁸⁴ Schools were opened in Elthuruth and Ambazhakadu as well. When all the parish priests gathered for their annual retreats, the Prior of Mannanam Monastery reminded them of their greater responsibility to educate the children of their locality.⁸⁵

21. The Table of the Lord

Gathering around the Eucharistic table, eating from the same bread, and drinking from the same cup together constituted a new culture of uniting the newly baptized members. The 'Altar of the Lord' or the sacrifice of the Holy Mass remained the unifying factor of the newly formed Christian community. They were brought to a new freedom because until then they were not allowed to enter any place of worship; they had no right to worship. They were encouraged to worship, to enjoy, and experience their communion with the Lord and with one another. The Fathers took keen interest to gather the new Christians on Sundays to care for their pastoral needs; and their number was 100 in 1866,⁸⁶ and 250 in 1870 in different places of Kuttanad (Pulincunnu, Edathua, Changanassery, Kalloorkadu, etc.).⁸⁷ They were all well-mannered, devout, and of good character, the priests observed.⁸⁸ The first Holy

⁸² ASJM, *Alochana*, p. 105.

⁸³ 'Veda' stands for religion as well as sacred Scripture. 'Upadesam' is instruction. They were instructed on both the Bible and the Christian religion.

⁸⁴ ASJM, *Alochana*, p. 111.

⁸⁵ ASJM, *CMM*, vol. 3, p. 122.

⁸⁶ ASJM, *Alochana*, p. 129.

⁸⁷ ASJM, *Alochana*, p. 269.

⁸⁸ ASJM, *Alochana*, p. 111.

Communion of the children was celebrated on the feast day of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Histry testifies that at Mannanam, there were two communities of Christians; the Holy Mass was celebrated for the new group of Christians separately; and to this day this division is perpetuated.⁸⁹

22. Midday Meal

Introducing midday meal, Chavara brought about a change in their food habits and food pattern. The children began dining together having the same food for all, which was never heard of in their life. This also brought about tremendous transformation in their attitude towards others: as they all ate together, a sense of oneness, unity, and togetherness began to emerge among students. As we see it recorded in the *Alochana*, it was the compassion of Jesus (Mk 8:2-3) that inspired the TOCD Fathers in planning for the distribution of midday meal at the beginning of November 1864. Their concerns were listed in the following manner: "On Sundays many children come for catechism; some are very poor; some of them come a long way; and the classes are till evening."⁹⁰ Hence they arranged free lunch for the children.

A good number of the *pulayas* and the *parayas* were agricultural labourers; they produced every grain of rice, but the irony was that the rice they produced went to the barns of their high caste masters and the wages they received were not sufficient to fill their hungry stomach.⁹¹ The wage for one week, for example, was just two measures of rice. Rice was a luxury for them. Since they were landless agricultural labourers or mere farm slaves, rice was available to them only for a few weeks of the year; as what they earned through their labour was too little, their rice stock would get over very soon. Hence, they used to eat radish,

⁸⁹ Although Chavara wanted to enable the new Christians from the Dalit community, come up in terms of social status, practically, the then traditional Catholic community was not mature enough to welcome them and to support them as their fellow Christians with equality. Given the fact that it would take longer to correct the mentality of the traditional Christians, Chavara and other TOCD Fathers made room for these new Christians by way of arranging for their separate Holy Mass, catechism classes, and other ecclesial provisions, which are continued even today, in the form of a personal parish, which is headquartered at Mannanam. Interestingly, and pitifully, when a new parish community was created at Mannanam, taking away all traditional Catholics, the Archeparchy of Changanacherry continues the same old strategy!

⁹⁰ ASJM, *Alochana*, in November 1864 (Entry on 1 December 1864).

⁹¹ K. L. Bernard, *Flashes of Kerala History*, Cochin: Victory Press, 1970, 120.

grains, chameleon, rats, or anything edible that they could gather. Naturally, *dalit* children were undernourished, illiterate, and were denied access to water resources in their villages and public roads or institutions due to the widespread social segregation. In the schools run by the TOCD Fathers, the children were led to the 'Table of the Lord' and were given 'midday meal', which attracted them to the schools.

One of the means sought for the preparation and distribution of midday meals was *pidiyari* scheme and the fathers sent letters to the neighbouring parishes and started collecting rice from the parishes of Pallippuram, Muttom, Vechoor, Vaikom, Muttuchira, Kudamaloor, Kaippuzha, etc.⁹² When schools were opened in those parishes, they also made use of the *pidiyari* scheme in their own respective places. Therefore, on 3 December 1865, the fathers bought eighteen acres of paddy field with the purpose of meeting the expenses of the schools.⁹³

23. Dress Distribution and Enhancement of Self-Respect

Men and women of low castes of Travancore were not allowed to cover their chest clothes. Children walked around naked as Chavara observed during his *Kalari* education.⁹⁴ He specifically instructed the parents not to allow children go naked even inside the house.⁹⁵ It was in this social situation that he decided to distribute dress for women and children when they started coming to the church for learning catechism. A part of the collection at the Mannanam Chapel on the feast of Saint Joseph was spent to buy the clothes for the children. Chavara introduced uniform dress at Mannanam in May 1865.⁹⁶

This was a noticeable change from a church which was hitherto inwardly focused to an outwardly focused church, and it was easily accomplished by a strong leader with pastoral concerns for the downtrodden. That leader was committed to the mission of leading the church to the peripheries. It is understood that the culture of the church follows the culture of the leadership. The leaders' understanding and ownership overflow to everyone.

Thus, with the concerted efforts of the priests, parents, housewives or mothers of the families and many others, within a period of three to four

⁹² ASJM, *Alochana* in November 1864.

⁹³ ASJM, *CMM*, vol. 3, p. 90.

⁹⁴ Chavara, *Atmanuthapam*, Cantos 1: 93-112.

⁹⁵ Chavara, *Chavarul*, II: 3. Chavara, *CWC.*, vol 4, *Letters*, IX:10.

⁹⁶ ASJM, *Alochana* in May 1865.

years, a system of common education was established; regular classes were conducted with a prescribed syllabus; in addition, the system of paying the salary, midday meal, uniform, pastoral care of the students as well as their parents, etc., were taken care of. Before 1864 Catholics had no doors opened for education of their children because Monsignor Baccinelli was very much against the Catholics going to those schools run by non-Catholics.⁹⁷ Chavara brought in revolutionary changes by the schools he and his confreres started in different parts of Kerala.

In 1864, Chavara had changed his residence to Koonammavu, but very often he visited Mannanam to motivate his confreres and to take care of the educational projects initiated there. Religious instruction and general education were, for Chavara, two sides of the same coin. He regarded education as a means to uplift the poor. It was indeed a revolutionary act at that time. Thus, the system of education, the Lord's Table, the midday meal, and distribution of dress, etc., brought forth a social transformation in Kerala. During the formal release of the stamp of Kuriakose Elias Chavara, held at Trivandrum on 20 December 1987, R. Venkataraman, the then President of India, affirmed: "Christian missions worked among the *adivasis*, the aboriginals, and among the *Harijans*, in a practical implementation of the Christian ethic of service. Few people have exemplified this dimension of Indian Christianity as memorably as Father Chavara." He called Chavara a strong social prophet of the time and appreciated the role of St Chavara as a social reformer of Kerala and his various contributions for the transformation of the society. He could be rightly called a Prophet of our times.

The education must be deep-rooted with strong fundamentals of moral and spiritual training along with intellectual formation, psychological maturity, and skill development. Chavara visualised a comprehensive education and he inspired his successors to continue it with timely renewal.

⁹⁷ Baccinelli Report 1867, Q. 53.

WRITINGS OF SAINT KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA

I. Chronicle (Complete Works of Saint Chavara Vol. I)

1. Chronicle of Mannanam, Volume I
2. Chronicle of Mannanam, Volume II
3. Some Old Histories (Including Roccas Schism)
4. Chronicle of Ambazhakkadu Monastery
5. Chronicle of Koonammavu Convent

II. Literary Works (Complete Works of Saint Chavara Vol. II)

1. *Athmanuthapam* (Lamentation of a Contrite Soul)
2. *Maranaveettil Padunnatinulla Pana* (Canto to be sung in the House of a Dead Person)
3. *Anasthasyayude Rekthasakshyam* (Martyrdom of Anastasia)

III. Spiritual Works (Complete Works of Saint Chavara Vol. III)

1. *Dhyanasallapangal* (Meditation Colloquies)
2. *Dhyanarambhakramam* (Order of Starting Meditation)
3. Prayer to Holy Virgin Mary
4. *Dhyanakurippukal* (Meditation Notes)
5. Some Prayers Recited by Saint Chavara
6. 40 Hours Adoration

IV. Letters (Complete Works of Saint Chavara Vol. IV)

1. Letters Addressed to the Holy Father
2. Letters Addressed to the Prefect of the Congregation of Propaganda Fide
3. Letters Addressed to the Bishops

4. Letters Addressed to the Superior General of the Order of Discalced Carmelite (OCD), Rome
5. Letters Addressed to the Members of the Congregation
6. Common Circulars to the Members of the Congregation
7. Letters Addressed to the Sisters
8. Letters Addressed to the Diocesan Priests
9. Circular Letters
10. Letters Related to Transactions

V. Other Writings

1. Life History of Palackal Thoma Malpan
2. Eclogues (Shepherd Plays - Published by Kerala Sahithya Academy Trissur - 2014)
3. *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul* (Testament of a Loving Father)

VI. Unified by Saint Chavara

1. *Tukassa* (Liturgical Order)
2. Liturgical Calendar
3. Office for the Dead
4. Order of the High Mass

Book Review

Naiju Jose Kalambukattu CMI, ed., *Mystery of the Church: Models and Images*, (Samanvayam Contextual Theology Series -13), Delhi: ISPCK, 2022, pp. xii+378, price Rs 475.00. ISBN: 978-93-90569-98-4.

The book, *Mystery of the Church: Models and Images*, edited by Naiju Jose Kalambukattu is really a handbook of Ecclesiology, especially in the Indian context. This book is very relevant today because Pope Francis visualizes synodality as the ecclesial style, a style appropriate for the Church of Christ. The words of Pope Francis, “You have shown how the practice of synodality, traditional but always to be renewed, is the implementation in the history of the People of God on the way, of the Church as a mystery of communion, in the image of the Trinitarian communion”, convey the fact that based on the Tradition, the Church has to renew Herself to be real vehicle of salvation. Then she can prepare her children to receive the fullness of salvation in the *eschaton* through the sacraments.

In his vision Church is synodal at every level that it may bring new vitality for the life and mission of the Church. Besides the Introduction given by the editor, the book contains twenty articles, written by eminent scholars of ecclesiology. The contributors of this edited book discuss different models and images of the Church in the Scripture, patristic sources and writings, magisterial teachings and papal documents to highlight the identity and mission of the Church.

The first two chapters base the concept of the Church in the Sacred Scripture. Christoph W. Stenschke in his article “The Blueprint of the Church and its Synodal Nature in the Acts of the Apostles” opines that according to the Book of Acts, synodality is an intrinsic aspect of ecclesiology. By beautifully narrating how the early Christians came to decisions and put into practice what was agreed on, even in difficult situations, the author affirms that the Christian community in the Book of Acts serves as a model of the present Church which is pursuing synodality. The paper “Paul’s Images of the Church” by George Kudilil illustrates the different images of Church in the Pauline writings. Paul

uses images like Body of Christ, Temple, Household of God, Letter from Christ, Olive Tree, God's Field, God's Building, Bride of Christ, Those who are clothed with Christ and Citizens with Saints, *etc.*, to express the unity, mutual relationship and support that exists in the community. The equality of the members in the Church is highlighted in this paper.

Pauline understanding of the image, 'bride and bridegroom' is studied in Naiju Jose Kalambakattu's article, "Church the Bride and Christ the Bridegroom". This chapter observes that the nature and significance of the Church, and her relation with Christ have been expounded through various images and models. The Church, the bride, comes into being from the side of her bridegroom and she is the continuation of Christ. Hence, she has the same mission of Christ in the world. Therefore, the author affirms that she has to be genuine in imbibing and interiorizing the vision and accomplishing and achieving the mission of her Groom.

There are three chapters in the book which deal with Ecclesiology in Syriac documents and Syriac Fathers. By analysing three ancient documents *viz.*, *Odes of Solomon*, *Acts of Judah Thomas*, and *Book of Steps* from the Syriac Semitic pole, Roselin Aravackal brings to light the imageries and types of the Mysteries the Church found in them, in the paper "Ecclesiological Underpinnings in the Ancient Syriac Sources". The author opines that the *Book of Steps* is unique among the Syriac Patristic writings as it provides a more systematic and developed ecclesiology than other Syriac Fathers. The article affirms that these Syriac sources have their roots in Sacred Scriptures and Midrashic traditions. The article "Syriac Christian Vision of the Mystery of the Church" by Thomas Kollamparampil highlights the importance of faith (eye of faith) to 'see' the metahistorical elements of the Church, basing on the writings of early Syriac Fathers like Aphrahat, Ephrem, *etc.* The vision of Syriac Fathers is proved to be quite holistic, universal and aptly inspiring for the concerns of world peace, religious harmony and human development, communion of Churches, ecumenical concerns of Christians, and wider ecumenical concerns that embrace the whole humanity and the whole creation. St Ephrem is the champion of using Marian imageries in his *madrāšē* and *memrē*, and Emidio Vergani, in his article "Mary as Mother and Model of the Church in Ephrem the Syrian", highlights the mariological motifs in the Ephremian writings. The author presents Mary as mother and model of the Church by means of images taken from Ephrem's texts. For Ephrem, Jesus was the same time Son, Brother, Bridegroom and Lord.

Many Marian images are ecclesiological too. Hence the author concludes that the Church is recognised in Mary.

From the Patristic age, the Ecclesiology of St Augustine is also dealt with in Gabriel Quicke's article, "The Concept of the Church according to Saint Augustine". The profound unity between Christ and the Church is expressed in the well-known doctrine of *Totus Christus*, the 'whole Christ'. Augustine extends the notion of the Church by referring to the righteous of the Old Testament who are made righteous by the Spirit who poured forth love in their hearts. As it is seen in the *Shepherd of Hermas*, Augustine also says that the Church existed from the very beginning of humanity.

The relation of Ecclesiology with other theological disciplines is a matter of study of this book and it is beautifully done in the following articles. Sophy Rose highlights the bond between the Holy Trinity and the Church in her article "Intrinsic Relation between the Trinity and the Church". She expounds that the Church originates from the divine economy of the Holy Trinity. The economy of God has a three-dimensional actualization process: the planning by the Father, realization through the Son and the completion in the Spirit; yet it is one holistic act of God. The article "Holy Spirit and the Church: Pneumatocentric Church" by Peter Neuner explains how in early Christianity, the Church was seen primarily as the work of the Holy Spirit. Even though this conception was replaced by increasingly institutional thinking because of hierarchization and clericalization, the author hopes that in the synodal process initiated by Pope Francis, by listening to all the members of the Church, the frankness of speech, freedom of the Spirit, signs of the Spirit's action shall be found new relevance. "Pilgrim and Eschatological Nature of the Church with its Four Marks" by Davis Varayilan looks at the Marks of the Church from a pilgrim and eschatological perspective. The attributes of the Church, such as one, holy, catholic and apostolic, emphasize her journey towards the eschaton. This eschatological perspective makes the Church inclusive, dynamic and dialogical.

Church as a communion of Churches is an important teaching of *Unitatis Redintegratio* and this book gives particular interest with regard to it. Isaac Arickappallil in his article, "Communion Ecclesiology: Church as Communion of Individual Churches" posits that the Second Vatican Council instilled a re-awareness of its own reality and the particular Churches, their own identities in the universal communion, as lived in the

first millennium. However, unless and until the tripolar (Syriac-Greek-Latin) truth is given due recognition in the universal scenario, it remains an incomplete ecclesial task and a misnomer. "The Developing Church: Reflections on the Ecclesial Model, People of God" of Jacob Marangattu opines that title, 'People of God' given by the Second Vatican Council highlights members' equality and mutual communion. Marangattu recommends to consider the Church as a Collective of Disciples. It will serve to restore the tradition of the early Church in which all the believers were involved in the mission of the Church. The article "Vision for a Tribal Church" by Naiju Jose Kalambukattu presents a vision for a tribal Church. He says that the tribal Church with incarnational approach must be a 'Church from Below which is sensitive to and fully immersed in the tribal context: an open Church' without walls that breaks down the barriers found on the way to the Kingdom of God.

The book helps the reader to understand the Ecclesiology of the Syro-Malabar Church based on its Mar Thoma Margam and liturgy. Paulachan Kochappilly describes the ecclesiology of the Syro-Malabar Church as an epiphany of the celebration of life in Christ, witnessing to the *margam* of Jesus shared by Mar Toma Sliha, crystallized into Mar Toma Margam, and characterised by the Mar Toma Sliba. Ecclesial life is the celebration of life in Christ - celebration of the Qurbana - compels them from within to share the joy of Christian life with others, beginning with family and going beyond the borders. Pauly Maniyattu in his article "Ecclesiological Musings in Sacred Liturgy: A Study with Special Reference to the Holy Qurbana in the Syro-Malabar Tradition" makes a survey of the Syro-Malabar Qurbana to examine the vision of the Church reflected in the prayers of the Qurbana. As the axiom *lex orandi lex credendi* upholds, the ecclesiological vision of the Syro-Malabar Church is very well manifested in her liturgical celebration.

Church's relation with monasticism and families are studies in the two articles: Naiju Jose Kalambukattu attempts at the "Ecclesial dimension of monasticism" that has always remained very lively in the Eastern Churches for true monasticism was considered the ideal of Christian life and was described as the flowering of baptismal life.

Pope Francis's vision on Church and synodality is a matter of discussion in the work and three chapters are dedicated for it. Francis Thonippara in the article presents the multi-dimensional "Ecclesial Vision of Pope Francis". By analysing the writings of Pope Francis, Thonippara

underlines the pilgrim character of the Church, a Church that is always on the move, not stagnant but open and shares the joys and sorrows of the people. Cyril Kuttianickal, in his article "Church as the Family of Families" explains the Church in essence as a family of families because family is the primary place where the Gospel is lived, transmitted and radiated. It is where a child is introduced to the family of God, which is the Church. It is the place where one experiences the ecclesial communion and the mystery of the Holy Trinity. In the article "Rediscovering Synodal Church for the Third Millennium" by Joseph Scaria Palakeel affirms that Pope Francis picks up the 'unfinished agenda of ecclesial reform' with the words, "We must walk together: the people, the bishops and the pope. Synodality should be lived at various levels". He is convinced that "it is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium." Archbishop Thomas Menampampil reflects on the teachings of Pope Francis who urges us to come out of our 'comfort zones' and reach out to the 'periphery' in the paper, "Reaching Out to the Periphery: Pope Francis' Vision of the Church as a Field Hospital". The Pope exhorts the people to work for the culturally excluded, socially marginalized, psychologically complex-ridden, and religiously guilt-laden. Pope criticizes the "arrogance of the enlightened", and contrasts it with the "special wisdom" of the people of God, which alone can ensure a future for the Church and humanity.

In short, the book, *Mystery of the Church: Models and Images*, is a well edited and analytically arranged one. It deals with almost all the realms of ecclesiology in the context of Synodality with and Syriac and Indian perspective. The sequence of the book is very logical. The concept of the Church in the age of Scripture, Patristic age and modern age is systematically ordered with good connections and cross-references. Since the book is the result of a long and disciplined study of many scholars, its reading will surely profit the readers with an experience of comprehensive understanding of the theme, ecclesiology.

Aneesh Jacob Kizhakkevedu

St Ephrem's Theological College, Satna

Email: jkaneesh@gmail.com

Book Review

Naiju Jose Kalambukattu CMI, ed., *Spirit and Creative Imagining: Festschrift in Honour of Prof. Dr Sebastian Elavathingal CMI*, (Samanvayam Contextual Theology Series -13), Delhi: ISPCK, 2022, ISBN: 978-93-90569-75-5

Rev. Dr. Sebastian Elavathingal CMI, “an erudite teacher, accomplished writer, innovative thinker, creative artist, gifted musician, composer, and above all a man of authentic simplicity and humanity” (as testified by Dr. Joy Philip Kakkanattu CMI in his forward), has been an extra-ordinary gift not only to the Universal Church but to the secular world also. His contributions to the world of art and music as a gifted artist as well as to the field of priestly formation as the Dean and Rector of the *Samanvaya* Theology College for more than a decade are incomparable. The book *Spirit and Creative Imagining*, edited by Naiju Jose Kalambukattu CMI on the occasion of the golden jubilee of Dr. Elavathingal’s religious consecration, is a token of respect to him from the theological world. Besides the forward, preface and introduction by Dr. Joy Philip Kakkanattu CMI, Dr. Benny Thettayil CMI and Dr. Naiju Jose Kalambukattu CMI respectively, this book comprises of 20 well studied articles dealing with three important areas related to his ministry and mission – Art and Music, Ministry of Formation and Contextual Theology.

As a Festschrift, it has a perfect beginning in the articles by Dominic Nattunilath CMI and Davis Varaliyan CMI. The first article gives a detailed narration of the life of Dr. Sebastian enumerating every minute detail of his inspiring life – family background, missionary aptitude, formative innovations, artistic skills, etc. Besides, as the chief editor of the International Journal ‘In Christo’ since 2004, Dr. Sebastian is presented as revealing the amazing complementarities of artistic creativity and spiritual formation in priestly and religious life. Fr. Dominic also enlists the books, articles and editorials written by Dr. Elavathingal in about four pages. In the second article, Dr. Davis concentrates on the creative contributions of Dr. Sebastian. According to him, Dr. Sebastian’s

“prominent contribution to *Samanvaya* Theology College is contextualizing the academic programmes ... through a method of encounter and insertion, experience and reflection and interpretation and action.” The discussion is concluded by Biju Thekkekara CMI with a beautiful exegesis of two important biblical passages. He writes on how St. Stephen’s vision in the Acts of the Apostles and the Lukan episode of the presentation of Jesus in the temple share the same spiritual background and invites us to direct all our exoduses to the Lord as Dr. Elavathingal has done.

Eight of the remaining seventeen articles discuss on the themes related to art and music in connection with different branches of theology. The article by Sabeesh Jacob Vettiyadan establishes how the Indian Philosophical concept of ‘Darśan’ goes in conformity with the Orthodox (Eastern) theology which is a visual theology with its two obvious indicators – theology in colours (Icons) and theology in acts (Liturgy). Then Paulachan Kochappilly continues the same line of thought by presenting the Eucharistic liturgy as a treatment to our senses taking us to the realm of divine-human meeting ground through signs and symbols and encompassing the mundane, human and divine domains. Naiju Jose Kalambukattu adds force to this discussion through his two well prepared articles. First he presents icons as means of divine revelation and Christ as the ‘Icon of the Father’, also narrating the historical background of the development of Iconography. And in his second article Dr. Naiju deals with the liturgical music presenting it as a treasure of the Church and the heart of the liturgy.

Then Anto Amarnad makes a serious discussion on the concept of mystagogy where God, the greatest mystery, is presented as the supreme mystagogue and the source of all revelations. The attempt of Fr. Lawrence Thomas is to establish the importance of art and music in catholic tradition as well as in the ecclesiastical responsibility of catechesis. Finally while Henry Angel in his article “Aesthetics and Morality: Some Reflections” brings to light the fascinating interplay between art, aesthetic experience and morality, Jerin Pendanath’s article “*Via Pulchritudinis* as a response to the Ecology Crisis” invites the readers to perceive the cosmos through ‘the way of beauty’.

The next three articles are on three different dimensions of formation. While Viju Painadath Devassy underlines the indispensability of an

integral nature of formation and Shepherd Thelappilly concentrates on the aspect of transformation in the formees reflecting on the holistic and creative vision of formation, Syam Vettikulangara contextualizes the theme giving more importance to the missionary dimension of formation in the North-Indian context.

The third group of articles – on Contextual Theology – begin with Abish Perumbully's attempt to give a biblical model for inculturation of Christian proclamation in India making St. Paul's speech at Areopages as the type to follow. Jose Chittooparampil's article on the theme 'Mission and Contextualization' insists the mission of Indian Church in bringing transformation and change for a better India. Cyriac Kuttiyanickal points out the necessity of stressing the significance of different contexts of people in the pluralistic context of India. Then Josin George Kaithakulam corrects the present type of development, proposing a culture of frugality against consumerism. While Johnson Vadakkumcherry indicates the necessity of the preservation of local cultures in the context of cultural globalization, Joby Jose Kochumuttam elaborates the theme in a Christian context in his article on Palliyogam – the indigenous pattern of administration existed among St. Thomas Christians. This article gets special attention in the present day discussion on 'Synodality'.

The book *Spirit and Creative Imaging* is a festschrift as well as a feast of theological discussion. All the 22 authors behind this collection of articles being universally renowned professors and theologians, its reading will surely provide the readers with authentic information about different dimensions of Christian life. A subject index at the end of the book also leaves room for a selective reading of the themes of interest. The editor of the book, Naiju Jose Kalambukattu, is to be specially congratulated for the excellent selection of topics as perfectly related to the theological interests of Dr Sebastian Elavathingal. In short, this book, as the 15th publication in the Samanvayam Contextual Theology Series, keeps universal standards not only in its external appearance, perfect binding and paper quality but in the novelty of its content also.

Alex Sebastian Kollamkalam

St Ephrem's Theological College, Satna

Email: alexkollamkalam@gmail.com