

HERALD **OF THE EAST**

Dharmaram Journal of Chavara Studies

Volume 12, Issue 2, July-December 2016

SAINT KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA

To the Desert and Back

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

Websites: www.dharmaramjournals.in; www.dvk.in

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Editorial

THE LURE OF THE DESERT

Chavara and the Attempted Flight from the World

Benny Paul Thettayil CMI
Editor-in-Chief

1. Introduction

In the modern world, even in the mist of all the meaning that modern life offers, there are several men and women who are lured into the desert to confine themselves to a secluded life either in a real desert or in a virtual desert, where they enter into the cave of their heart and meet God. One of those who longed for such life in the desert is St Chavara, who along with his elders dreamt of fleeing this *corrupt and corrupting world*. Looking at a few aspects of religious life today, we explore the reason for such a longing in any person of accomplishment, historically what it has offered a seeker and what it can offer a person today.

We feel really great when we are leisurely cruising along the calm lake of life on warm sunny days, with the gentle wind at our back filling the sail. When on the land it is also great when all the traffic lights are green and all modern systems on our palm top respond to our fingertips with the speed of lightning. We feel as though we are in the wonderland and have tapped into some kind of magical force and fruits of every choice we make, every action we take manifest at a level far beyond our expectations. These fruits that we or our ancestors produced have made life effortless for us. It is like finally we have learnt the intricate steps to the great cosmic dance of the universe. No more doubt and hesitation, no more confusion and uncertainty, just clear skies and smooth sailing ahead with no hint of clouds nor the tip of the iceberg showing. Our relationships in the world feel satisfying and nourishing; our work is satisfying as creative ideas flow, which in turn makes opportunities abound. Our life cannot be any better. Our cup is full and is overflowing. Life is like a dream and seems almost too good to be true.

It is during this uneventful but pleasant life that the interrogative thought crosses our mind: "How long this can possibly last?" And the accompanying temptation to brush the thought aside and dismiss it as the joys of life just keeps coming up and you are too busy enjoying the ride. On these occasions, there are two diverse possibilities looming in the horizon: one external and another internal that lead one to make a U-turn in life. Externally, even without you noticing them, subtle shifts occur in life. The person who was your mainstay in business begins to drift away, the joy of your personal life to whom you were so emotionally attached is no more, the partner that you depended upon proves to be untrustworthy, your own creativity takes a backward swing and new opportunities are hard to come by. Internally, you are fed up of the uneventful life that is positively monotonous.

For a while you rely on the revival mechanism in place. You switch on the set of good stories and excuses to entertain and distract your mind. You go to your business guru, your instructor on the art of life and spent your money on things that you already have or know. You do not feel alive any more. You begin to notice things that you had hardly noticed before. The sight of the poor and the underprivileged tug at your soul and gnaw at your heart. You want to do something, you want challenges, you long for a change. Either the external pressure or the internal impasse or the combined effect of both brings your life to a pause. Gradually, those green lights turn red and you come to a violent halt which catapults you and deposits you at the doorstep of what seems like a vast and endless desert.

Literally, the desert is a dry, hot, barren, hostile and often lonely place. In the early Christian spiritual tradition, the desert denoted this geographical terrain. Later, it assumed a figurative status. Figuratively, in the Christian spiritual literature, it refers to any place of retreat - a house of prayer, the seashore, the woods, a quiet room in one's home, or even one's heart - all these characterize the same kind of privation, which makes these places virtual deserts.

There are two possibilities in the desert both real and virtual. Either you embrace the change that you were longing for and the challenge that you were ready to face and you make the violent halt and the subsequent ejection a blessing in disguise, rise to the opportunity and begin a new life, because you had had enough of the uneventful and monotonous pleasant life. You find root in the arid desert, thrive against the odds and bloom in the heat. The other possibility is that you do not even notice your arrival in the desert. Your mind, in its infinite capacity to escape reality, helped by your gurus, still holds on

to the fantasy that everything is still working. The autosuggestion that you are taught to give yourself makes you believe that everything is in place. By and by, you catch the first draft of the wind that tells you that something is off, but you do not wake up, because you are hypnotised and are taught not to wake up. However, you cannot go on. Reality begins to dawn on you. You become aware that you are empty and dry. The autosuggestions do not work. Your attention is demanded by the reality that you had been hypnotized and you wake up to the reality with a start – a second violent halt. You are propelled into the deepest desert of awareness a vast interior terrain that appears to be an ominous territory, not the most exciting place to be.

Miguel de Unamuno, the Spanish philosopher holds that the best way to move into the future is backwards. He insists that, instead of running toward an uncertain future that may be a disconnected fantasy, it is infinitely better to look back in time to glean the pearls of wisdom that we may have overlooked along our pilgrim way. It is following this suggestion that seekers in the modern world plumb the wisdom of the early Christian spiritual seekers who took to the desert between the 3rd and 5th centuries AD.

2. History of the Desert

Historically, many people went into the desert for various reasons. A few generations after the books of the New Testament were completed, the once-outlawed Christianity became an accepted religion, a considerable number of Christians who wanted to live exclusively for God, left the fairly enjoyable life of the urban centres for the deserts to follow and live the radical simplicity of the Gospel. Others went to the desert to escape Roman persecution. Paul of Thebes was one of them. The life of Antony and Paul attracted many followers. The eremitic trend spread like wild fire and by the fourth century, thousands of Christians were found praying in the deserts of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Syria and Palestine. They lived lives of prayer and fasting, but their spirituality was centred in the realization that intimacy with God meant being at peace with others.

By the end of the 3rd century AD, hermits like Antony (c 251-356) had paved a desert spiritual path, which made him the *Father* of the Christian desert dwellers, whose cell is still visited by pilgrims in the modern times. Following this path in various ways, in about a century, there emerged three kinds of Christian seekers in the desert: 1) Solitary hermits; 2) Those who lived in Sketes who are named after Scetis where they lived; 3) Monks who lived in monastic communities like he

one founded by Pachomius in Southern Egypt These were responsible for their own dwelling and livelihood, but they typically met together with others in the area at week-ends for fellowship, breaking of the bread, and to share their thoughts transparently with an elder of their choice. Most of them were celibates or widowed men. However, a few women lived near the settlements of the monks.

3. Biblical and Early Christian Desert-Roots

Desert spirituality has biblical and early Christian roots. The Old Testament has a desert image for God as the one who walks the road with his people, guides them in many ways and sustains them by various means so that they would not lose their way, that they may discipline themselves to reach their destination. Desert is a dangerous place and for anyone in the desert, to lose the way is to face the possibility of wandering without life-saving food, water or shelter. For the biblical people of Exodus, God had become their way for them to be called later 'the Way' for they were following the Way.

The desert experience is common to both the Old and the New Testaments. In Exodus, in the life of Elijah and the prophecy of Hosea desert is a major theme. It plays an important role in the history of the people of God. The Middle East, where the drama of the salvation history unfolded and where Jesus chose to live, die and rise, was a land of deserts. The Scripture, both the Old Testament and the New often refer to the desert, the wilderness, or a place of solitude where God summons those whom He loves away from the cares of the world in order to make them concentrate on His love and the meaning of their life.

In Deuteronomy, God walked the difficult desert road with them, not as in the Pillar of Fire and a Pillar of Cloud as he did in Exodus but in the Law, instructing and leading them. "Remember how the Lord your God led you in the desert these forty years... He led you through the vast and dreadful desert, that thirsty and waterless land" (Deut 8:2, 15). In Deuteronomy the revealed Torah was the way for it was the Teaching spoken directly by God: 'So be careful to do what the Lord your God has commanded you, do not turn aside to the right or the left. Walk in all the way that the Lord your God has commanded you.' (Deut 5:32-33). In the desert, for the liberated slaves, this instruction was not an image of the general progress of a journey that one undertook, but a matter of life and death. In the desert, continuity of life depends upon the choice of the right paths that is interspersed with water holes, which contain water that is potable and drinkable. In

the desert, in the light of the Lord, for his sake and for the sake of the people, Moses had to know accurately how to read the map that is often not there!

In New Testament times it is likewise it is in order to discern God's will and prove his obedience that Jesus retired to the desert after his baptism (Mk 1:12-13; Mt 4:1-11; Lk 4:1-13). Before the commencement of the public ministry of Jesus, he spent a considerable number of his days in the wilderness in fasting and prayer. During his ministry, periodically he retreated to the desert to pray and to find peace and tranquillity. John who had come to usher him in, appeared in the desert. Paul's ambiguous presence in Arabia (Gal 1:17) points to the possibility of time he spent in the desert.¹ All these are instances of the attraction that the desert offers because God is the source of this attraction. "I am going to allure her and lead her out into the wilderness and speak to her heart" (Hosea 2:16).

God gave *formation* to his people keeping them wandering in the desert for 40 years. The desert was a testing ground, where they experienced a change of heart. From time to time, *confirmation* of their faith was called for. *Reformation* happened to them as they proved themselves obedient to his way of life. Finally, conformation took place when the people recognized again their Creator as also their Lord.

4. Life in the Desert

Life in the desert was simple. There was silence, silence and more silence. The only activity that broke the monotony of the silence and solitude of the cell was manual labour that was done mostly in silence. In addition to the *distraction* that the labour provided, it enhanced asceticism. Many of the desert seekers did manual work making baskets out of palm leaves and sold them in markets in the oasis settlements a few times a year. It was also a means of their sustenance. The ascetics of the desert saved a bit of the meagre produce and *indulged* in almsgiving, which was a luxury in the desert.

The very purpose of the *flight from the world* was to have something that they lacked there. Life in the desert was spent looking inward doing soul-searching. Continuous prayer was the focus and silence that they maintained sacred, created a congenial ambiance for various forms of prayer. The desert dwellers spent their time in *lectio divina*,

¹Tradition has it that he spent three years in the Arabian desert in preparation for his work for the Lord.

recital of the psalms, celebrating liturgy, and exercising the prayer of the heart. Thus the predominant features of the desert spirituality were *ora et labora*. However, they prioritised work on their inner life in order to move from the false ego to the true God-centred self. They analysed the destructive human passions, learnt to deal with them and developed methods of stillness, meditation and practice, which enabled them to replace these passions with their opposite virtues.

Scripture was the cornerstone of the monastic movement begun in the 3rd century by Christian men and women who lived in the deserts of Egypt. They read the Scripture, held it in memory and in the heart, used it as a means of prayer and meditation and followed scriptural precepts. Through the discipline of simple daily prayer, the seeker grew into a habit of deep listening to the Spirit, the Mystery dwelling within but is beyond themselves. There the seeker learnt to speak from the heart, out of silence, awe, wonder and wisdom, words that are different from the verbosity of advertisements and propaganda. Such words transmitted generative and regenerative power.

Stories of their holy lives leaked out to the public in the villages, towns and cities and attracted many seekers who searched them out, sought their guidance, or attached themselves to them in a similar way of life. They received the spiritual nourishment from the experienced ones. Strange were the ways of the desert that a disciple might ask for 'a word' and take weeks or even months to live that word and *on* that word until the disciple asked for another one. The depth of a word was explored in such intense a manner that the disciple entered the core of the word and remained there enjoying the silence that the concentration on the word facilitated.

5. The Fundamental Counsels

Three fundamental demands of the desert spirituality are to flee, to silence, and to pray. These actions of *flight*, *silence*, and *prayer* were a mature response to a human condition, which Thomas Merton compares to a shipwreck. It is not selfish to swim for help instead of drowning in solidarity with the fellow victims. This *swim*, according to him, is a purifying pilgrimage into the humbling revelation of our human brokenness and a transforming encounter with forgiveness. Negatively, it is an escape from a fruitless painful situation and positively, the escape is in view of moving to a fruitful, humanizing and healing suffering.

In a world that focusses on religious lives, which are in turn, centred on doctrines and dogmas and are driven by study and talk

about God and the problems of life, *silence* was an alternative. Productive as these exercises are, talk and thinking did not seem to lead them through the fire of transformation to waters that were still. In silence, the spiritual seekers of the desert addressed the heart, the whole person and explored the person and beyond in silence.

Christian Meditation is that unique prayer of the heart described by John Cassian, the historian of desert spirituality who brought the wisdom of the desert of Egypt and the Middle East out of the desert for others to marvel at. *Centering Prayer* has its provenance in the much celebrated *Cloud of Unknowing*, a work of an anonymous monk of the 14th century. The work enshrines the contemplative traditions of the desert that hinged on prayer, which is one of the fundamental demands of the desert spirituality.

6. Contrasting Monks of the Desert

It is deceptive to assume that life in the desert was monolithic and those who lived there were naval-gazing introverts who had nothing social in them. The aptitudes of contrasting personalities who came out of the society and went into the desert to embrace life in the desert were noteworthy. Archbishop Rowan Williams' *Silence and Honey Cakes: The Wisdom of the Desert* published in 2003 hinges on the contrast between the social aptitudes of the desert seekers. The theological probe that he makes into the life of the desert dwellers of the early Christian era is both demanding and inspiring. First of all, there was the introvert, silent, ex-imperial tutor Arsenius. Like him, most of the desert dwellers held high the principles of silence and solitude and employed them as a means to make their interior journey. Gradually, these traits became accepted and conventional as the authentic way. The deeper meaning of silence and solitude, as understood by the desert dwellers, was more about an attitude of hearing the inner differences between that which is false and true within. This discernment required some distance from both the humdrum of external and internal voices. Hence, the above-said flight and silence!

Complementing rather than contrasting the silent desert dwellers, there were others of a more affable and extrovert nature. The vivacious Ethiopian bandit Moses was one of them. He was positively talkative – a surprising trait in a desert seeker. Although these were of a later origin, they delighted in the company of those like-minded seekers who were committed to the same quest in a very different way. This lively way is the metaphorical and literal reality of *honey cakes* that

Rowan Williams refers to in contrast to *silence*. The metaphor of the honey cakes speaks of the nourishment and sweetness of being with others despite the possibility of mistreatment or opposition, misunderstandings or caricatures, conflict or tensions that arise within a community that impels one to flee from the desert spiritual arena.

Some of the seekers hopped like crickets from one hermit or community to another either because they were challenged or because they did not want to be challenged or still because they felt that they were *not* challenged enough. Sticking with one hermit or with one community gradually impelled the seeker to face himself/herself at a deeper, more demanding and transformative level. The commitment to stability and sticking to a person or place for consistent spiritual guidance were demanding. It was a temptation even in the desert to use the language of spirituality to serve one's ego rather than allowing the meaning of spirituality to transform the ego into a new person within community – the phenomenon is universal.

Perhaps some of them were emaciated on account of their austerities, which themselves were often eccentric. Some of them gave up the experimentation because they did not understand the strange ways the desert worked on human beings as they began to explore themselves in the new light of their faith, which itself was only in its nascent stage. These desert cells were the first monastic test beds where strange and unique God-experience and God-talk was happening. It is these experiences and their verbalization that even after the lapse of about two millennia speak to people at a profound level, which is neither dogmatic, doctrinal not theological.

7. The Coming of Age

Desert is the place where we confront the truth. That is where we deepen and expand our idea of who we are, as a result of which we begin to contribute to the transformation of the collective human spiritual experience. The desert is where we moult and let go of our limiting beliefs about who we are and why we are here. That is where we confront a self that is part of us, but hitherto hidden from us. Gradually, we undo the chains that bind us to whatever false notion of truth that hurled us into the desert in the first place. In all humility, we are led to stand face to face with the truth and make a commitment to become the servant of the truth, and that truth ultimately sets us free. Free of the strings and unencumbered by the baggage that we used to carry when we were cruising and camping, gradually, we come to feel

right at home in the desert – in the deep, quiet, dark places in the desert, far from the noise and distraction of life in the fast track.

It is in the desert that we come of age. It is there that we wriggle until we break the protective chrysalis and force ourselves to get out of ourselves and ascend to a realm where we are at home. It is extremely painful, because we give birth to ourselves. The pain teaches us much about our vulnerability and our beauty as human beings. Away from the glitter that distracts, the desert makes us aware of our value and worth. We become adults and take off to the immensity of the vast blue infinitude.

8. The Legacy of the Desert

What the desert dwellers found in the desert depended very much on what they were seeking for or what they were prepared to see. Out of the several significant results of the flight into the desert, two lasting legacies that have left their mark on Christian Spiritual tradition are the Christian Meditation and the centering prayer. Indeed, these come out of early Christian monasticism, which is only a further development of the early desert spirituality.² It was in the womb of the desert that the monks of the East and the West developed their unique spiritual lifestyle and contemplative prayer was at the heart of their life. One form of this prayer has one meditate on a single, sacred word to draw the believer closer to God by withdrawing from the usual compulsive infatuation with particular sensory objects, rituals and conceptual constructions. No other communities delved as deep into the desert and its spirituality as the Benedictines and the Trappists to whom these forms of prayer are attributed.

The desert offered them a stark and free setting for a life of penance and prayer. Its emptiness, silence and solitude were inviting and they had spiritual adventures of experimentations and improvisations. They had prepared themselves to face the demons in the open combat in the desert where they were supposed have inhabited, for the common belief was that the demons infested the wastelands. Perhaps it is in course of this preparation that the desert seekers came to

²Christian Meditation and centering prayer are two popular forms of contemplative prayer, designed by John Main, the Benedictine and the Trappists at Spencer, Massachusetts, respectively, the former promoted by the World Community of Christian Meditation under Laurence Freeman OSB and the latter by Contemplative Outreach, whose leader is Thomas Keating OCSO.

realize, in the bright light of the desert, that the demons were within them and not out there in the desert. They had to be engaged on the battleground of each one's soul. The eremitic vocation has the same purpose, as the name *hermit* applied to those who embrace such a life indicates. These spiritual experiences that the early seekers had in the desert in the 3rd and 4th centuries AD was developed into a coherent spirituality which touched various aspects of one's life.

There are many gems of sayings that the desert dwellers have left for the posterity to contemplate. 'Go to your cell and your cell will teach you all things,' they would tell their disciples. 'Place your head in your heart and stand before God all day' was the advice given to the novices in the desert. To the advanced ascetics they said: 'The one who abides in solitude and is quiet, is delivered from fighting three battles - those of hearing, speech, and sight. Then that person will have but one battle to fight - the battle of the heart.'

9. The White Martyrdom

The desert is a powerful symbol of the emptiness of life and the transcendence of God, which incessantly leave you feeling empty and longing for what can fill you in reality. This emptiness always left behind the possibility of a plenitude of the immaculate. The emptiness was translated into purity of heart, a heart that is free of immoderate attachments and sinful affections to centre itself on God. Becoming pure of heart, they saw God.

One of the reasons that dragged some of the desert dwellers to the desert was the lack of opportunities to suffer persecution and martyrdom, which was considered to be the red sanctity that opened the doors of the paradise. The Edict of Milan shut the doors of the red sanctity. A replacement of the bloody and externally violent martyrdom was made with a bloodless but equally violent martyrdom that involved one's interiority. The replacement that gradually evolved in the desert it came to be called white sanctity, a white martyrdom. In place of the physical end of life in death, white martyrdom involved a total giving over of one's life to God, which was the end of the life that the martyr led in the society. In place of shedding blood, the martyr had to shed all self-indulgence in favour of a single-minded search for God.

10. The Return to the World

Later, the desert tradition became a bridge between spirituality of the city and the desert. Having looked at the present reality of the world coloured by all its predicaments, the desert seeker makes his/her way into this silent wilderness either literal or figurative, and there touches the mystery of the future, the Kingdom of heaven. Having looked at the reality from God's perspective, he/she returns to the broken world's problems, tragedies, and hopelessness. The desert experience galvanizes him/her to a great extent that he/she feels neither impotent nor overwhelmed.

The desert seekers offer a message of both profound simplicity and depth. Before the development of academic Theology, these desert dwellers gleaned bits of truth about God and let them pass through the portals of the soul into the depths of their being. They asked all sorts of probing, transformative and discerning questions that kept them preoccupied in the desert in the first few Christian centuries.

From this solitary seeking God of in the desert, which is the earliest form of monasticism, the monastic life in community emerged, although the eremitic vocation continues as a distinct way of seeking God even today. In practical terms this spiritual quest is pursued through prayer in solitude and asceticism.

11. Conclusion

St Chavara had his companions had to settle for a virtual desert because their authorities judged that the provision for a real desert made for them would cause a brain-drain in the community. The authorities objected: "If those of you who are of some essence leave for the desert, who will be left to give leadership to the people of God?" It is this objection of the authorities that caused a turning point in the life of St Chavara and his companions. They looked for alternatives. When considered the pastoral exigencies of the Church, their dreams had to be materialized in such a way, which also would be beneficial to the people.

Gradually, they realised that the lives of the God-seekers in the desert have a contemporary meaning, as they point to the fact that each human being is called to be a contemplative, and to see God in the vocation that he has received and in the circumstances of his or her daily life. Moreover, on account of the promise of Jesus regarding his constant presence with us, it is not required to run off to the mountains or to the desert in a literal way to pray and to achieve

sanctity of life. Hence, following the suggestion of the authorities, St Chavara and his companions brought the desert into the city and lived in the virtual desert, still being in touch with the people in such a way that the desert and the city became mutual beneficiaries. *Their fervent, recollected prayer life activated their apostolate and their apostolate enriched their prayer life.* In this way, the realization of their dreams and the work for the salvation of the people found a *happy blending* in the community that they caused to be.

The present volume is titled, *To the Desert and Back*, which points to the desire of Chavara and his companions for a secluded religious life in the desert (*vanavasa*), but had to be settled for the same life in a desert that was virtual. In effect, they went into the spiritual desert and brought to the people in the city all that was good in the desert that the people might benefit from what they had found.

The volume has four entries that are directly related to the *desert life in the city*. The entry that opens the discussion is a contribution from Fr Paul Kalluveetil who is an authority on the life and mission of Chavara. As biblical scholar, he is looking at the religious vision of Chavara, mainly from a biblical point of view. He considers religious house as *tapasbhavanam* and *darsanavîdu*, a virtual desert that Chavara longed for. Followed by the vision of Chavara, we have an entry on the visionary himself. Fr Thomas Kochumuttom portrays Chavara as a mentor in the desert whose inspiring life has challenged many a seeker to found joy in life in the desert. In detail, Fr Thomas Kochumuttom delineates the contributions of Chavara both towards the Church and towards the Indian Carmelites.

The third entry of the volume is the second part of the interpretation of *Atmanutapam*, a poetic work of Chavara. Fr Jojo Parecattil explores the advaidic desert spirituality of Chavara as portrayed in the poem. He analyses the work in a staurological perspective and finds parallels in *tattvamsi*, which is one of the Indian *Mahavakyas*. Staurology is closely related to asceticism of the desert. The fourth and final entry of the volume is an investigation into the pitfalls of the modern desert life that is lived in the city. Fr James Thayil looks into the unwarranted infiltration of the elements of the city into the desert in the form of modern media, one the one hand, facilitating the dissemination of the good that is found in the desert among the city dwellers and on the other hand, hampering the serene life of the desert, which produced the good results.

The first and the last entries are papers presented at a conference organized by Abraham Puthukulangara, a friend, confrere and fellow

traveller in the *desert*, a conscientious mentor who lighted the path of many a young desert seeker as the Novice Master at Vinayalaya, the CMI Mission Novitiate at Bhanpuri, Jagdalpur. The conference was held on the occasion of its Silver Jubilee celebrations of the Novitiate. I thank him for the permission to make these two entries part of the volume.

RELIGIOUS LIFE IN CHAVARA'S VISION

Fr Paul Kalluveetil CMI

Abstract: Paul Kalluveetil CMI reflects on religious life in the vision of Chavara. The lack of a house of penance (*tapasbhavanam*) in the land goaded him to desire for a house of vision (*darsanavîdu*). The *tapasbhavanam* and *darsanavîdu* have to be understood in a deeper spiritual sense. The persons of *tapasbhavanam* totally dedicate themselves in communion and communication with God and humans and make the *darsanavîdu* a holy abode, where the devotees see the celestial visions and divine dreams. There, the members abide in the love of Jesus, sit before his eyes, walk close to him and converse always with him. Religious life is a call to live in the Holy Family. In the presence of Jesus, Chavara dwelt in the metaphorical world considering himself Zacchaeus of Lk 19, the prodigal son of Lk 15 and many more. There the religious learn the art of seeing, the art of remembering and the art of venerating the divine and thus become a consecrated community. It is the ecclesial art of Chavara that prompted him to find refuge in the *tapasbhavanam* and *darsanavîdu* and subsequently to lead hundreds to serve the Mother Church.

Keywords: Mannanam, *Chronicles*, religious, priest, *tapasbhavanam*, *darsanavîdu*, asceticism, charism, *Letters*, mysticism, devotees, David, Elisha, Mary, Abraham, Enoch, meditation, *Colloquies*, bridegroom, *bes rauma*, Holy Family, grace, metaphor, theology, Trinity, remembrance, liturgy, *dukrâna*, monastery, benefactors, salvation, self-realization, God-realization, Saviour, community, consecration, destitute, Joseph, Congregation, prayer, martyrdom, Carmel, rosary, money, Jacob, Roccas, authority, freedom, righteousness, judgement, obedience, poverty, celibacy, *Magnificat*, crucifixion, humility, Malpan.

1. Introduction

The words of St Chavara on pages 15-16 of the first volume of *Mannanam Chronicles* encapsulate his ideal of religious life:¹ "Since there is no house of penance (*tapasbhavanam*) in this Malayalam (land) there are a lot of defects in good things. There was a desire (I earnestly

¹The translations of the works of St Chavara are given literally in the study, since the existing English versions are defective.

desired) that at least the priest should have a house of vision (*darsanavîdu*), but was feeling sad since there did not exist any help.”

2. Two Sententious Titles

Chavara designates the religious house as *tapasbhavanam* and *darsanavîdu*. Both names have to be understood in a deeper spiritual sense. *Tapas* belonged to Indian ascetical tradition of *rishis*, who used to spend many years in meditative invocation of the name of a god (*namajapa*), renouncing all the bodily needs. Their rigid asceticism finally would please the deity, who willingly will grant to them whatever boon or largess they were longing for. Now the Chronicler envisages a community of *rishis*, and not individualistic endeavours. These persons of *tapasbhavanam* with a single heart and soul are supposed to totally dedicate themselves in communion and communication with God and humans, His living images. The second title given to such holy abode is *darsanavîdu*, where the devotees will be granted the charism of seeing the celestial visions and divine dreams, concerning the creator’s designs for the whole world, especially human beings. The Book of Genesis has repeated seven times in the narration of creation (Gen 1:3, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31), the phrase, “and God saw that it was good (*tôb*). The phrase may be thus interpreted. God, the source of fullness of goodness, filled the whole creation with His goodness; in everything there irradiated His beautiful and radiant face. But sin disfigured this radiance; especially human faces became ugly. Now the inhabitants of the *tapasbhavanam* and *darsanavîdu*, at this wretched sight, were prompted to spend their whole life to reinstate the primeval beauty to these disfigured faces.²

3. The Compendium of Religious Life

For St Chavara, religious life was a call to live in mystical union with Christ. In *Letters*, VII,6 he gives it the following articulation: “Abiding (*pârkal*) in the love of Jesus Christ, sitting always before His eyes (*kanmunbil irikkal*), walking close to Him (*arike nadakkal*) and

²The first religious house built at Mannanam hill was called *bes Rauma*, the house at top. It has spiritual and biblical significance. Mountains, which separate one from creatures, were considered as nearest to heaven, where humans can enter into communion and communication with God, e.g., Mount Horeb (Ex 3:1-2; 1 Kg 19:9-18), Mount Sinai (Ex 19), Mount Zion on which Jerusalem temple stood, Mount Tabor (Mt 17:1-8), and Mount of Olives (Acts 1:10-12). Most of the early religious houses were built on hills.

conversing always with Him (*thannodu kûde samsarikkal*).” These four acts make one bride, devotee (*bhakta*) and beloved friend of the heavenly Bridegroom.

3.1. The Abiding Ones

In popular Malayalam language *pārkal* implies the ideas of celebration, bliss, peace and self-realization. Those who enter the *Bes Rauma* have to make their whole life a *pārkal*. They are called to lead a life of bride/children in Jesus' house of celebration. For Chavara the room of the religious was the bride chamber of Christ (*Letters*, VII,2). It is a tiny heaven (*Letters*, VI,4). In John *menein* (abide) expresses the permanency of relationship between Father and Son, and between Son and Christian, which binds together Father, Son and Christian. This indeed connotes intimacy of union and love between Jesus and his disciples, which is patterned on the Father-Son relationship. Thus St Chavara envisioned religious life in its most sublime and mystical sense.

3.2. The Sitting Ones

It is the disciples and devotees who sit in the presence of the master (*guru*). In 2 Kings 4:38, we have the picture of the disciples of the prophet Elisha sitting at his feet. They fix their eyes on the face of the master and zealously and eagerly try to gather up every precious utterance which comes out of his mouth. When David was promised the grace of everlasting dynasty, he went and sat in the presence of his Master in order to give thanks in the language of heart (2 Sam 7:18-29). He acknowledged that he was a mere insignificant one whom the magnanimous Lord had made great. In Lk 10:39, Mary of Bethany is said to have sat at Jesus' feet listening to what he was saying. This is the real picture of a loving and dedicated *bhakta* in the Indian tradition. She was all eyes and ears in the presence of her Beloved, forgetting her duties of a host. The same evangelist tells the story of a sinful woman who wet Jesus' feet with her tears, wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them (Lk 7:37-38). The parable of Lazarus, the beggar who after his death was blessed to sit at the lap of the Abraham (Lk 16:19-31) is indeed fascinating. Abraham's lap was the symbol of heavenly bliss, celebration and self-realization. The only Begotten Son is depicted as sitting in the bosom of Father (Jn 1:18). St Chavara invites all the members of the religious community to attain this mystical status, in which the whole human person is inebriated by this blissful and celestial experience.

3.3. The Closely-Walking Ones

The inhabitants of the *darsanavîdu* should make their life not only acts of abiding and sitting, but also a continuous walking in the company of Jesus. This points out to their apostolic activities. Even their pastoral, social and educational apostolate should be performed in the company of Christ, in Him, with Him and for Him. Enoch is said to have walked with God; then he was no more; God took him (Gen 5:22, 24). This is what will happen to those who walk with God, making Him as bosom friend, listening to Him, speaking to Him and sharing the intimate secrets of the heart. One's joys and sorrows will become the joys and sorrows of the other. As a result of such an intimate union, the person of Enoch ceased to exist day by day; God made him His own. St Chavara envisages that the members of *darsanavîdu* should make their whole life an unceasing walking with God, so that they could say with Paul, "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20), and acts in me and through me.

3.4. The Conversing Ones

"Meditation means conversing with God; its work is to be in the company of God, sitting together with Him in love and conversing to a bosom friend" - thus has St Chavara defined meditation in his work *Colloquies*. According to him, the life of a religious should become an incessant colloquy with Christ the divine Bridegroom. The blessed father further explains this art: "When the friends sit together they will continue to converse together without stopping till they depart... they will not become silent as if they had no more matter for speaking. When there is love, there will be themes for conversation. No one needs to teach them such a colloquy. Even if the language is unknown, those who have love can understand whatever the other speaks... Even if they remain without uttering a word, they will find satisfaction in sitting nearby the beloved." Chavara and the members of *bes rauma* community practised this mystical art of contemplation. They became spouses/babies, both of whom will speak to the bride groom/mother whatever they think, want and dream. It is indeed the language of love, intimacy and freedom. According to Chavara the cell of a religious is the bridal chamber (*Letters*, VII,2), where one could hear the sweet voice of the loving Bridegroom (*Letters*, VII,7).

4. A Call to Live in the Holy Family

4.1. The Words of Chavara

According to St Chavara, the call of a religious is to live in the Holy Family, the members of which are Jesus, Mary and Joseph. He in his deathbed confessed to the inmates of the monastery at Koonammavu: "I have lived throughout my life in this Holy Trinity (pointing out to the picture of the Holy Family which was set near the bed so as it can be always seen). I am bearing the name Kuriakose of the Holy Family for this memory. My pious parents have made me remember this great family, Jesus, Mary and Joseph, and I am always seeing, remembering and venerating them in my heart, and because of it their blessing always protected me so that I have in the divine grace the courage to say that I have not lost the holy grace, which I had received in baptism."

4.2. A World of Metaphors

A special call of the CMI-CMC religious is to live in the world of metaphors. Chavara identifies the Holy Family with the Blessed Trinity. For him the Holy Family is not *like* the Blessed Trinity; it is not a simile. He does not merely compare them. This is indeed a mystical vision, which God will grant only to His beloved and selected children. Jesus, the Son of God lived in the world of metaphors, as he stated: "I am the bread of life" (Jn 6:35, 51); "I am the light of the world" (Jn 8:12); "I am the sheep gate" (Jn 10:7, 9); "I am the good shepherd" (Jn 10:11, 14); "I am the resurrection and the life" (Jn 11:25); "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6); "I am the real vine" (Jn 15). Chavara seems to have dwelt in the metaphorical world. For example:

- I, the Zacchaeus of Lk 19:1-10 (*Colloquies*)
- I, the prodigal son of Lk 15:11-32 (*Colloquies*)
- The cell is the bridal chamber (*Letters*, VII,2)
- Monastery is the little heaven (*Letters*, VI,4)
- The journey of Calvary is the marriage procession (*Colloquies*)
- The cross of Christ is the bridal chamber (*Colloquies*)
- The chapel is the Mount Sinai (*Colloquies*)
- The chapel is the Mount Zion (*Colloquies*)
- The face of Infant Jesus is lotus itself (*CS*, 3:55)
- The members of the community are twins (*kûdapirappukal*, *Letters*, VI,1 (four times); VI,4 (twice))
- Christians are twins (*Letters*, VI,4)
- The religious sisters are children (*Letters*, VII,2; VII,6; VII,7; VII,11)

Although the first person of the Holy Trinity is theologically called 'Father', Chavara uses the term *appan* to address Jesus. Here we find a special mystical and experiential grace granted to Chavara. He personally experienced in Christ the compassionate and affectionate heart of a *nalla* (good) *appan*, who is ever ready to forget and forgive the sins, infidelities and rebellions of his children. It was this way that the Lord revealed himself to Chavara. It is indeed a spiritual, intimate, personal and mystical knowledge and encounter, which transcend the human logic and the dogmatic and academic thinking of theologians. For Chavara, theology meant the art of articulating the personal experiences of man of flesh and blood.

4.3. The Art of Seeing

In his Last Words, Chavara mentions five acts that he was practising: seeing the Holy Family in his heart, remembering Jesus, Mary and Joseph in his heart, venerating them in his heart, living throughout his life in this Holy Trinity and bearing the name of the Holy Family. It was his pious parents who inculcated the devotion to Jesus, Mary and Joseph, while he was a child: "My devout parents made me remember the great family, Jesus, Mary and Joseph."

4.4. The Art of Remembering

The verb 'remember' is used thrice in Chavara's Last Words. His parents made him *remember* the great family – Jesus, Mary and Joseph; he was bearing the name of Holy Family in order to *remember* the Holy Trinity; he has always *remembered* in his heart this Holy Family. The term 'remember/remembrance' (in Hebrew *zkr*) has great significance in the Bible. It does not simply refer to mere re-calling to mind a past incident; rather it denotes an act of re-experiencing, seeing, hearing, touching, tasting and living an event here and now with the whole intensity. Salvation history is the story of God's act of remembering. Because He *remembered* Noah and the living creatures in the ark (Gen 8:1) He saved them. As the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob Yahweh *remembered* his covenant (Ex 2:24). He liberated Israel out of the slavery of Egypt and made them his people. Every year, the people of the covenant celebrated the Passover Feast as an episode of *remembrance* of the liberation. After instituting the Eucharist as the new covenant Jesus asked his disciples to perform it whenever they assembled together in *memory* (*dukrāna*) of Him. In the Syro-Malabar liturgy, *Qurbana* is called *dukrāna* eight times. It enacts the sacred mysteries of Jesus' passion, death, burial and resurrection.

St Chavara, who imbibed the spirit of the Bible and the liturgy, was a man who lived in the world of *dukrāna*. In his works there frequently occurs the term *ōrma* (remembrance). Under the inspiration of his parents he fostered in his life an incessant *dukrāna* practice of the Holy Family and began to see, remember and venerate Jesus, Mary and Joseph in his heart. The I-II cantos of the work CS tell the story of memories, how God remembered him, how he remembered the Lord, and the command of Jesus to him to remember God, as well as how he remembered Mary, and begged her and Joseph to remember him (see I,31-32; I,37-38; II,59-60; II,181-182; II,244; II,247-248; II,249-250; II,205; II,267; IV,197-200). Also in other places the word *ōrma* is often used: CS III, appendix 39-40; IV,201-202; IV,208-210; VII,344-345. This vertical dimension of *dukrāna* had also a horizontal dimension. The work *Chronicles* may be designated as a compendium of *dukrāna* of humans who, one way or other helped him in constructing the *bes rauma*. Chavara reminds his confreres to *remember* with gratitude the favours done by Archbishop Menesis, the Portuguese kings and the Jesuits who protected the ancestors from falling into Nestorian Schism (*Letters*, VII,4). Also he tells them that it is their duty to *remember* in their prayers Archbishop Bernardine, the missionaries Philipose, Merceline and Leopold with gratitude (*Letters*, VI,4). They have to *remember* before God the Beccaro household (the family of Leopold the missionary) who had generously helped the Congregation (*Letters*, VI,4). Chavara exhorts the members of the monasteries of Vazhakulam, Elthuruth and Ambazhakad to become *ōrmakkār* (those who remember) of their benefactors, Parai Tharakan, Kallukkarān and Ittoop respectively (*Letters*, VI,5).

Chavara, the saintly soul who loved his spiritual daughters like an affectionate father, asked them to receive the Holy Communion and *remember* the love of the Lord (*Letters*, VII,6), and to *remember* how sweet is the voice of their beloved Bridegroom (*Letters*, VII,6). They should not remember with gladness the evil acts of others, but rejoice at the *memory* of the virtues of fellow humans and *remembering* with gladness the virtues and acts of penitence of the saints, offer them to the Lord (*Letters*, VII,3). The sisters have to *remember* how the Almighty God thinks about their affairs and provides everything to them (*Letters*, VII,11).

To conclude, the art of *dukrāna*, which has both vertical and horizontal dimensions is the essential element of religious life. The more one delves into the depths of the world of *dukrāna*, the more

he/she becomes a grateful and praising being in his/her relationship with God and fellow humans.

4.5. The Art of Venerating

St Chavara confessed in his deathbed that he had venerated/honoured the Holy Family throughout his life. He asks the members of his congregation to become children of veneration and honouring (*vaṇakam*). In the Syro-Malabar liturgy, we render praise, honour, thanks and adoration to the Holy Trinity. In the same way, Chavara venerated the Holy Family. Like him, his children also have to become the honouring community of the Holy Family in their thoughts, words and actions. The family consisting of Joseph, Mary and Jesus was a community and communion of veneration. Joseph venerated throughout his life Jesus and Mary, and totally dedicated himself for their welfare. The earthly days of Mary were the time of *vaṇakam*. The Holy Virgin venerated Jesus, glorified the Lord and proclaimed the divine acts of salvation (Lk 1:46-55). One may designate Mary as the venerating temple, the abode of the Word and the holy dwelling of the Blessed Trinity. Jesus rendered praise to his heavenly Father (Lk 10:21), glorified his name (Jn 17:4), and prayed that the name of the heavenly Father be glorified on earth as it is in heaven (Mt 6:9). Thus He became a living temple, in which the people praise God in Spirit and truth (Jn 4:21); His body was transformed into the abode of the Father. According to Chavara, the religious are called to continue the honouring acts of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. They do this by practising veneration of the Holy Family. They have to do it individually and collectively, privately and publically. Such devotion belongs to the heart and soul of their religious call. In Chavara's vision, the religious are called to live as the communion and communication of those who as a community, praise, honour, thank and worship the Holy Family, the sublime paradigm of rendering *iḡārā* to the Holy Trinity. In this joyful act, they should find their God-realization (*Iswara sākshatkāra*) and self-realization (*atma sākshatkāra*).

4.6. Bearing the Name

"For this remembrance I am bearing my name Kuriakose of the Holy Family (*thōmmā kanthîsā*)" - thus declared St Chavara. He added the name Holy Family with his own name in order to remember it always. The Malayalam verb *dharikkuka* literally means to put on. We put on clothes, and they become a part of our personality. Paul exhorts us to put on Christ, the new man created to be like God in true

righteousness and holiness (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10). Only when the religious interiorize Christ's ideas and ideals, life vision, thought pattern, speaking style and the spirit of action, they will be persons who put on Christ. The name Jesus (in Hebrew *yahōshuwā*, its short form *yoshuwā*) meant "my Saviour is *Yahweh*". The Son of Man proclaimed this absolute truth by his thoughts, words and deeds. He throughout his life attested that it is the Father who alone grants salvation. Jesus became the paradigm of humans in singing the praises of the Father and blessing, exalting and glorifying Him (Lk 10:21; Jn 17:4). The Son prayed for the sanctification of God's name and taught the disciples to do the same (Mt 6:9). Christ became the temple in which God was worshipped in truth and Spirit (Jn 4:21). He spoke of his body as the Holy Temple (Jn 2:21-22).

Mary and Joseph put on or lived the name of Jesus. Mary called herself the handmaid of the Lord and acclaimed His saving deeds (Lk 1:46-55). She was indeed the temple, the house of the Word and of the Spirit in which acts of honour and worship to the Holy Trinity and to the Son of God were rendered. Joseph named the Virgin's child 'Jesus' in accordance with the instruction of the angel that the child would save the people from their sins (Mt 1:21).

The children of Chavara are called to put on the name of Jesus who is the central figure of the Holy Family. For this they have to appropriate this attitude and aptitude of *yahōshuwā*. The Compassionate God provided Chavara this ineffable grace, so that he could claim that he had lived throughout his life this sublime vocation. Chavara did his best to show the nobility, eminence, sublimity and loftiness - the meaning of the name *Miriam*. Like Joseph, he always brought growth, increase and addition even in the life of enemies.

4.7. A Consecrated Community

At his deathbed, Chavara consecrated his religious community and its members to the Holy Family. The elected Israel was destined to become the holy nation and royal priests (Ex 19:5-6). The Lord wanted them to lead a life of consecrated ones. The new covenant people have received the same call. The religious have to live as the loving, pulsating and moving Tents of the divine presence.

The concept of consecration involved two ideas - separation and service. First of all, one has to be totally and radically cut off from everything non-divine. The consecrated people have, so to say, move as a lamp before God (in the Indian ritual this act is known as *uziyuka* and such worshippers as *uzinjuvekkeppettavar*). In Christian vision, the

concept of non-divine includes whatever is inhuman. In Indian thought, one can call them *nivēdidar* (those who have become *nywediyam* - libation), *arppitar* (the poured-out ones), *thadīyar* (those who belong to Him, His), *thanmayar* (those who are full of Him, those who are conformed to Him), and *niyatar* (those who have the determined, decisive, definite, resolute, steadfast, unwavering, steady, keen and devout attitude and aptitude). These consecrated persons dedicate their lives for others and for God. Service (a better religious term is *sushrūsha*) is the inseparable element of separation. One can say separation is for service. In biblical tradition, the ritual of consecration consisted of anointing.

One becomes a consecrated person only when he/she is fully liberated from himself/herself. One has to be free from the fetters of egoistic beingness and havingness and become a destitute (*agathi*). Chavara calls such persons 'worms', who do not comprehend anything, mere babies who are incapable even to tell the mother that they are hungry (*Letters*, VII,10). Attaining this attitude of the destitute, one clings to the Lord in order to attain a *gathi* (safety and security). In Chavara's terminology, God, the mother will awake the sleeping babies and feed them (*Letters*, VII,10).

The members of the Holy Family serve as the best models of consecrated people. Coming to the world, Jesus proclaimed "Behold I have come to do your will, O God" (Heb 10:5-7) and consecrated himself to the Father. He began his public life by getting anointed by water and Spirit (Jn 1:29-34). In the inaugural speech of the public ministry, Jesus quoted the text of Is 61:1-3 about the Anointed One of the Lord (Lk 4:18-19). The Son of Man consecrated his disciples in the Word, which is truth (Jn 17:17-19). He lived the life of true *agathi*, and clung for everything to the Father. Hence, he could thus assert: "All I have is yours, and all you have is mine; and I have been glorified in them (Jn 17:10). He became a *nivēditan*, *arppitan*, *tadiyan*, *tanmayan* and *niyatan*. Before the Passion, He renewed his consecration to the Father: "For their sake I sanctify myself so that they also may be sanctified in truth" (Jn 17:19). And finally, on the cross, he was anointed in blood.

Mary offered herself completely to Jesus led a life of consecration. The Mother enjoyed the bliss (*nirvriti*) beholding the face of Jesus and hearing his voice. Her *fiat* ("Here I am, the handmaid of the Lord; may it be to me as you have said" Lk 1:38) was the articulation of the fact that she was nothing and she had nothing. The *Magnificat* (Lk 1:46-55) may be called the hymn of the consecrated ones.

Joseph, the protector of both Jesus and Mary was a paradigm of the consecrated persons. He spent his whole life for their welfare; he incessantly kept them in his mind, spoke for their sake, laboured for them, and suffered for their sake. His cherished yearning was to look at Jesus. To make Jesus joyful, nourish him, protect him and defend him. Joseph committed himself for these things. No words uttered by Joseph are recorded in the Gospels. In the presence of the Son of God he remained ever silent. That is why he is called *mamunāndran* (The Great Silent One). This *nivāditan*, *arpitan*, *tadiyan*, *tanmayan* and *niyatan* could hear the sound of the divine silence, which enabled him to dedicate himself for the service of Jesus and Mary.

Chavara consecrated himself for Jesus, Mary and Joseph. He lived the meaning of the name *yahōshuwā* (*Yahweh* is the saviour). God bestowed on him the blessing of keeping untarnished the grace granted to him in baptism (his Last Words). Still he called himself a great sinner and shed bitter tears of compunction. Always he confessed his unworthiness. "How could I claim the credit for what God had done through me? How did I come here? Who called me from my house? How did I get the grace of ordination to the priesthood? How could I join in the monastery? How did I get the Religious Congregation? Who designated me as the prior? How did I come here? Am I worthy of these graces? No, not at all. Yes, the divine will will be done, and it will be accomplished" (*Colloquies* p.13). He had a single desire throughout his life, to look at the most beautiful lotus-face of Jesus in loving solitude (CS: III:55-56). In *Canto V:157-158* he sings: "I yearn to gaze at you, and crave to hear your voice; but alas O Lord, my eyes are not worthy to contemplate your figure". Chavara has given verbal articulation to the Song of the Consecrated Person:

You are my Father, you my treasure
 You my blessing, without you what good have I?
 You are my love, my fortune
 How could I live without you?
 You are my breath, you my food and drink
 Ah, where would I get solace unless in you?

(CS, II:142-146)

Chavara dedicated himself to Jesus by chanting the following prayer: "My beloved God ... I offer you whatever I do and suffer this day and my whole lifetime, as attestation of my love for you. I offer myself to you together with the good deeds of Jesus Christ, of the Virgin Mary and of St Joseph. I offer you today and forever my thoughts, words,

actions, my predilections and all things, for your glory” (*Colloquies*, p. 68).

Chavara, who consecrated himself to Jesus, dedicated his life for the sanctification of others. All of his apostolate in the spiritual, pastoral, liturgical, ecclesial, educational, social and cultural field was meant for it. For this reason, during the Roccas Schism, he volunteered to embrace martyrdom.

Chavara, who consecrated himself to Mother Mary, thus sings her praises:

You are the Mother of Carmel, the most significant factor,
My chaste Mother, I got the status of your slave,
As I think of it today, how fortunate am I!
How unworthy and base am I! (CS, VII:173-176)

This devout Son offered himself to the Lady of Carmel:

Unto you this body and soul of mine
I offer, I entrust to you alone. (CS, IV:211-212)

Chavara took refuge in Mary:

O Virgin, my Mother, my sole hope...

Always I cherish your memory in my heart. (CS, II:245, 248)

Chavara yearned to gaze in love at the Mother who gave birth to the Son of God, who fed the child with celestial devotion, who knelt down before the Infant, who attended to the child’s needs. Chavara sought the intercession of Mary for obtaining a happy death. It was he who brought to Kerala the Holy Scapular, devotion to the Immaculate Conception, devotion to the Mother of Dolours, Sodality, Rosary Association and Our Lady’s Association for a happy death. The Saintly Father wanted to turn his heart into the blessed lap of Mary so that Jesus could joyfully occupy his seat there.

Chavara consecrated himself to St Joseph and called himself his servant (CS, IV:201-202). He prayed to the foster father of Jesus: “My beloved St Joseph... I prostrate at your holy feet with the hope that you, my father, will grant me the grace to conquer my evil habits and victory over enemies of my soul (*Colloquies*). In his needs he approached St Joseph. When he had no money to pay the daily labourers, he prayed to St Joseph for help. In answer, a man came to him with the money (*Chronicles*, p. 45). When he was disturbed at the thought of death, he turned for strength to St Joseph for comfort.

To conclude, Chavara wanted the members of his religious community to become a communion and communication of those who live a consecrated life.

4.8. A Relying Community

According to Chavara, the religious should be formed as a fellowship of those who entrust themselves to the Holy Family. He began the *Letters*, and *Circulars* in the name of JMJ (Jesus Mary and Joseph). The biblical concept of "relying upon" comprises of the ideas of clinging to and ensuing certainty. To rely fully upon others one has to get rid of the mentality that makes one assume, "I am something, I have something." When the crafty Jacob became crippled, he clung to God for his survival (Gen 32:22-29). The Psalmist who was the model of *agathi* proclaims: "In God, I trust; I will not be afraid. What can humans do to me?" (Ps 56:11). Psalm 91 may be called the song of those who trust in the Lord. Only those who are childlike can cling to God, the Mother and remain calm in the midst of troubles (Ps 131:22). Jesus, the central figure of the Holy Family is the perfect paradigm of relying persons. In Him there was no attitude of duality. Everything was in Him - love, truth, joy, auspiciousness and transparency. Hence, he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and blessed the Father who had hidden the mysteries of heaven from the wise and revealed them to little children, whose proto-type He was (Lk 10:21-24). He proclaimed the children as the greatest in the kingdom of heaven (Mt 18:1-5). The Son of Man who trusted the Father and entrusted everything to Him, enjoyed total confidence (Jn 11:42); He lived in His Father (Jn 6:57; 10:38).

Mary is the perfect human model of trusting and confident persons. To the angel she said: "I am the Lord's handmaid; may it be to me as you have said" (Lk 1:38). Although what was announced to her was beyond human comprehension, she totally committed herself to the Lord. She became blessed, since she has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished (Lk 1:45). The inner soul of her joyful, sorrowful and glorious mysteries was this kind of the clinging to God and the resulting confidence.

Joseph lived a life of total commitment to God. This gave him the grace not to be disturbed and grieved at the vicissitudes of life. Confiding in the words of the angel he received Mary as his wife (Mt 1:18-24). This silent soul remained unperturbed when he could not find a home for Mary at Bethlehem, during the flight to Egypt, and when the boy Jesus could not be found during the return journey to Nazareth. With the attitude of a true *agathi* Joseph clung to God, and because of which he enjoyed serenity and inner peace. The story of

Holy Family is the story of those who entrust themselves into the hands of God and live in security and divine peace.

Chavara, who was fully conscious of his nothingness, clung to the Holy Family for his existence and subsistence. This mentality of a true *agathi* enabled him to do great things in his life. He knew that it was not he, but Christ thought, spoke and worked in him (Gal 2:20). He considered himself the least one (*kurayappettavan*, *Chronicles*, p. 15), the petty one (*alpan*, CS III: appendix 40), imprudent one (*vakathirivillathavan*, *Chronicles*: p. 70), non-illuminated one (*thelivillathavan*, *Colloquies*), incapable one (*praptihinan*, CS II:277), unworthy one (*yogyathayillatavan*, *Chronicles*), good for nothing (*onninum kollathavan*, *Chronicles*), *agathi* (*Chronicles*), fool (*bhōshan*, *Chronicles*, pp. 71-75), great blockhead (*mahāmūdan*, CS II:350), block head (*mūdhan*, CS IX.31), blind one (*andhan*) deaf one (*bhadhiran*), dumb one (*mūkan*, *Colloquies*), worm (*krimi*, CS 1:6,17), earth worm (*pushu*, CS), pitiful worm (*kashta pushu*, *Colloquies*) and wretched worm (*akratha puzhu*, *Colloquies*). *Compunction of the Soul* is a poem of Chavara where he acknowledges that he a great sinner and sheds tears of contrition (see for example, CS I:129; II:31-34, 163-164, 349-350, 361-364; III appendix 63-64). Chavara begins his *Colloquies*: "I deem not myself worthy to reach high degrees of prayer and sanctity, as I am a great sinner with an impure heart, and opaque without virtues of purity and modesty. I realize that I am not worthy to receive the spirit of contemplation and attain perfection."

On the one hand, Chavara considered himself as the most deprived of human beings. On the other hand, he did not want to call himself a human being. He downgraded himself to the world of the meanest worms. As Jesus, his Master, Chavara lamented, "I am a worm and not a man" (Ps 22:6). What he claimed to have had was sins. For survival he clung to God. He begged Jesus to look at him with eyes of pity (CS II: 242). The saintly soul dared to address Jesus "as my Father" (*ente appan*), "my noble Father" (*ente manogunamulla appan*), "dear Father" (*priyamulla appan*) and "my graceful Father" (*ente anugrahamulla appan*). When he felt that Jesus was angry, he turned to Mother Mary: "My Lady my Mother, you alone are my hope" (CS VI:206); "my Mother please pray, opening your mouth (CS VI:210); "let me hide myself in your bosom" (CS VI:219-220); "when the Lord turns his glance into cruel sternness, let me hide my timid eyes beneath your throne" (CS VI:222-224).

When Chavara was filled with the sense of his unworthiness he ran to St Joseph (CS IV:201-204). "My kind Father, as I am greatly afraid, I get strength from the thought of you, my Father and mediator"

(*Colloquies*, 35). He found the devotion to St Joseph as the rope to cross over the deep ocean of death (*Letters*, IX,7). Such recourse to the Holy Family gave Chavara security and assurance to undertake great works for the growth of the Church and society. He ventured to construct the Koonammavu Convent when he had with him only 18 rupees. Lack of money was not a problem when he launched the press apostolate, seminary and school. When he had no means to pay the wages to the labourers, he prayed and the Holy Family came to his aid.

Chavara was concerned not only for the people in Kerala. He collected Rs 32,000/- for the expenses of the First Vatican Council. When the Roccas schism threatened the very existence of Kerala Church and out of 155 parishes, 86 had completely and 30 partially followed Roccas, Chavara, entrusting the Church into the hands of the Holy Family, courageously fought against the schism, at the risk of his life. When he was the parish priest of Southern Pallippuram, he ventured to give Holy Communion to a small pox patient, saying, "This is my duty; the Lord will help me." The formators of the candidates to the religious life should follow the example and exhortation of Chavara in order to form religious community with an entrusting and trust.

4.9. A Community Reigned by the Holy Family

Chavara requests his confreres to permit the Holy Family to exercise authority in their hearts. Jesus, Mary and Joseph allowed Yahweh (One who be-comes) to become Yahweh in their hearts. They gave total freedom to God to live, to think, to speak and to act in them. Thus the Lord could guide, direct and rule over the members of the Holy Family. Because of it God could become the overlord, leader, guide and everything in their life.

Jesus gave complete freedom to his Father to rule over Him. He always said Amen to the desires of his Father. Also it was the longing of Jesus to reign in human hearts. For this he thirsts: "If anyone is thirsty, let him/her come to me and drink" (Jn 7:37). He wants to make streams of living water (Holy Spirit) flow from within them, so that, through the Spirit, he wants to live in them, for the purpose of saving them. He cried out from the cross: "I am thirsty" (Jn 19:28). He yearns to continue his hour of glory in humans, by showing them the way of cross, and to pour into their hearts the Holy Spirit. Whatever He said and did in His life time had this single intention. He continues His mission of becoming poor in spirit, beings of mourning, of meekness, of suffering hunger and thirst for righteousness, of mercy, of

unblemished heart, of peace and of suffering persecution of righteousness (Mt 5:3-10). He begs them to lend Him their hands, legs, tongues and hearts. The whole gospel may be called the story of Christ's inner thirst. This gets a vivid articulation in His narration on the last judgement, where He speaks of a time when he had appeared as the hungry, thirsty, naked, homeless, sick and imprisoned person (Mt 25:31-40).

Mary and Joseph allowed God to exercise authority in them. Their entire life can be summarized as a wholehearted *fiat* to God's will. Chavara lived this ideal, and exhorted his confreres to allow the Holy Family to reign in their hearts. He exclaimed with Paul: "It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20). Like the Baptist he allowed Jesus to increase in him, by making himself decrease (Jn 3:30). Chavara made a vow to offer up to God every pulse beat of his veins, every winking of his eyes, every breath of his, each little chirping of birds (*Letters*, VII,3). Those who live up to the ideals of St Chavara are his true children.

5. A Vowed Community

Chavara had his own vision about the religious vows. They help the religious to allow God to live as a becoming being in him/her, and give God complete freedom to exercise His authority over the person. The vows make the religious, members of the Holy Family, consecrated persons to Jesus, Mary and Joseph and transform the religious into abiding ones, sitting ones, walking ones and conversing ones. He calls poverty *agathitham*, celibacy *manavattitham*, and obedience *cholvili*.

5.1. *Agatitham*

By poverty one embraces the status of the destitute, who has nothing, and who is nothing. God, calling Abraham, asked him to become an *agati*, who had to cling to Him for survival. Jesus, the Son of Abraham lived the concept of *agati* in its total sense. He, being the richest one (2 Cor 8:9), did not stick to the equality with God, but emptied himself and took the form of a servant (Phil 2:6-7). The Son of Man became the greatest *agati*. He had no place to be born. As a child, this Son of Abraham had to flee for life to Egypt. He was condemned to live in the land of the gentiles, without a proper identity or address. During the public ministry Jesus had no place to lay his head (Lk 9:58). The holiest one was crucified as the most cursed sinner, abandoned even by God, which forced Him to cry out "my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mk 15:34). Even then He confessed his trust in the

Lord with the utterance, "Father into your hands I commit my spirit" (Lk 23:46). After the death He descended into Sheol. Then God exalted this *agati* to the highest place, and gave Him the name that is above every name, at the sound of which every knee will bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God, the Father (Phil 2:9-11).

Jesus, the Son of Abraham shows us how to use the blessings, which God bestows upon us. He had no single minute for himself, for rest (Mk 6:31-34). As Jesus proclaimed, He had come not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mt 20:28). During the day, He served of others (Lk 6:38) and returned to the Father as an *agati*, raising His hands towards the Lord (Mt 14:23; Lk 6:12; 9:28), as slaves look to the hand of their master (Ps 123:1-2). Jesus practised what He had told his disciples: "Freely you have received, freely give" (Mt 10:8). Following the example of the Master, the religious, taking the vow of *agatitham*, are called to make others rich.

Mary was given the grace to live as an *agati* on earth, since she was called to become the Mother of the Son of Man, the perfect *agati*. In her, we see the soul of the sublime grace of Immaculate Conception. From the very beginning of the conception, God granted her the grace to be like Him, one who has everything and yet, as the one who has nothing and is nothing, clinging to God every moment for survival. Mary's *Magnificat* (Lk 1:46-55) is indeed the song of the *agati*. She sings: "He has looked with favour on the lowliness of His servant (the old Malayalam term *adiyāti* is a better word, which means one who is positioned beneath the master). The humble virgin always found her life-realization in living 'under' the Lord.

Mary was fully conscious of the truth that without God she was a nobody, an utter destitute. Indeed such awareness is the essence of humility. In such a light the Mother of God lived, moved and had her being (Acts 17:28). At the same time, she became the *epiphany* of the celestial truth that everything of God belongs to her. Thus Mary became the most blessed human being. Her life was an incessant chanting of the mystery that the Almighty has done great things for her (Lk 1:49). The Lord has exalted the lowly handmaid. The compassionate God filled this hungry person with best things. He extended His helping hand to the beloved of the Holy Spirit and made her the symbol of the new Israel.

The invitation to adorn the status of the Mother of God, was in fact a call to become the living mirror of *agatitham*, namely to live the life of a nobody, who has to cling to God for her existence. How could one

believe that a virgin would conceive a child? According to the Jewish Law Mary has to be stoned to death. An ordinary girl under the circumstances would be drowned in deep waters of despair and distress, whereas the handmaid of the Lord clung to God for survival. God miraculously saved her from disgrace. It was not the end of the story of desolation and destitution. Further on, Mary could not provide a home for the Son of God to be born. Simeon uttered a prophecy that the child was destined to cause the falling of many, and to be a sign of contradiction; a sword would pierce her very soul (Lk 2:34-35). This annunciation made her the Mother of Sorrows. Mary had to flee to Egypt to save the life of the Son of God. The life in Egypt, in the land of the worshippers of pagan deities, and among the people who spoke a different language brought mental and spiritual distress to Mary and Joseph. During these days of suffering, she clung to God. The return journey brought misery to the Holy Family. When the boy Jesus was lost for three days, Mary and Joseph spent day and night in search of him, without food and rest.

As Jesus left Mary for public ministry, she had to bear loneliness and isolation. Her heart was broken as the furious people of Nazareth tried to throw Jesus down the cliff (Lk 4:28-29). When Mary intervened at the wedding of Cana for the hosts, the reaction of Jesus ("Woman what concern is that to you and to me?") was apparently harsh, which would have humiliated her. When Jesus became renowned teacher, Mary went to the place where He was proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom and received a seemingly cold welcome (To the crowd who informed that His mother has come, Jesus said: "Who are my mother and my brothers?" He gave the title of Mother to all those who do God's will. Mk 3:31-34). This incident helped Mary to grow deeper into the status of an *agati*.

At the news that Jesus was condemned to death, she felt unbearable anguish. At the insults and torture during His way of the cross, Mary suffered greatly. At the crucifixion on Calvary, the Mother of Sorrows practically died in spirit. Nobody could console her (Lam 1:12, 16). Through all these bitter experiences, God helped Mary to become the living paradigm of *agatitham*. More and more she learned to trust in the Lord and entrust herself into his hands. The Almighty rewarded her most generously and crowned her the queen of heaven and earth.

Joseph embraced a life of an *agati*. He understood that he was practically a nobody in the presence of Jesus and Mary, and he lived, moved and had his being in this attitude. At all the instances of his life, he blindly clung to God. Throughout his life, Joseph remained a silent

being, *māmuni*. God rewarded him by elevating him to the most sublime status of the foster father of God's only Son.

St Chavara imitated the Holy Family whose name he bore. He liked the word *agati* and used it frequently in his writings (e.g., *Colloquies*, pp. 14, 15, 16, 34; CS VII:162). Often he addressed himself in negative terms (see the subtitle 3.8. "A Relying Community"). He called himself the greatest sinner (CS VI:205). In his *Last Testament* he called himself the servant of priests, novices and lay people. Chavara confessed to the sisters that he had no capacity to practise virtues (*Letters*, VII,3). As he was fully convinced of his *agathiam*, he clung to Lord Jesus, Mary, Joseph and St Teresa of Avila to obtain *gathi*. Like a little child, he adamantly pleaded with St Teresa to teach him by reciting in his heart her deep reflections on the art of contemplation (*Colloquies*, p. 15). Chavara practised the demand of Christ: "Ask and it will be given to you" (Mt 7:7). Indeed, he received "a good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over"; it was poured into his lap (Lk 6:38). Chavara knew the ultimate meaning of the vow of *agathiam*. It was a call to be filled with the riches of God. With this sense of security he dared to undertake new ventures, as he had been liberated from the worries like the birds of the air and lilies of the field (Mt 6:25-34).

5.2. *Manavattitham*

Chavara was blessed with the mystical vision inherent in the vow of chastity. The vision is truly biblical. In the Old Testament Yahweh revealed himself as the bridegroom of Israel (Jer 2:2; Ezek 23; Hos 2:14-16). The covenant people were destined to sit in the shadow of her Beloved and to attain life realization (Hos 14:5-7). In the New Testament, Jesus is presented as the divine bridegroom who loves the Church, the new Israel. He gives himself up for her, to make her holy, cleansing her by washing with water through the word, in order to make her radiant without stain or wrinkle (Eph 5:25-27). Jesus compared the heavenly kingdom to a wedding feast. The text of Rev 19:5-9 describes the nuptial celebration of the Lamb, the bridegroom. By embracing religious life, a person becomes one with the Lord. He/she is called to live in the loving intimacy of the divine bridegroom. Thus the consecrated persons are given the grace to enjoy the pre-taste of the eschatological life.

Mary stands out as the sublime paradigm of *manavattitham*. She became the bride of the Holy Spirit. The Fathers of the Church find a mystical meaning in the wedding at Cana: Jesus was the real

bridegroom, while Mary enjoyed the position of bride. She was always, in the mystical sense, sitting in front of Jesus, walking together with Him, conversing with Him and abiding with Him in love.

In St Joseph the mystical vision of *manavattitham* found its realization. Every soul is called to become the spouse of Christ. The communion with the Mother of God led St Joseph to the sublime milieu of celibacy. He totally consecrated himself to Jesus. Thereby he became a *nivēditan*, *arpitan*, *tadiyan*, *tanmayan* and *niyatan*. The foster father lived in the same world of Jesus, enjoying *sālōkkyam*, and attained *sāyujyam*.

For Chavara, his room was the nuptial chamber (*Letters*, VII,2). He abided in love with Jesus, sat always in the divine presence and conversed with Him always. This made him an illumined person (*buddha*). Chavara frequently uses the term *thelivu*, which has a celestial sense. God is the one who enjoys *thelivu* always. His face is ever beaming with exultation and delight. By the intimate communication with the Son of God, Mary and Joseph became the children of *thelivu*.

Chavara thus wrote to sisters, his spiritual daughters: "How sweet is the voice of your loving Bridegroom! He is watching to find out whether you have any other love. He is constantly taking care to meet your needs (*Letters*, VII,7). Here he was giving articulation to his own loving relationship with Christ. During meditation, he shed loving tears. He exhorts the sisters to meditate deeply on the love of Jesus for them and after receiving Holy Communion remember his love (*Letters*, VII,6), to strive hard to attain high degree of union with God, of which St Teresa of Avila describes in her work *Interior Castle*.

Chavara holds that all the Carmelites, both men and women, should develop the reading habit.

When they find joy in reading spiritual books, they will naturally cherish solitude. When a soul embraces solitude, Jesus Christ will come to converse with it in solitude and begin communing with it. At first one may not understand well His language and words. Then He will lead his bride to the wine-cellar and pour out some wine for her - a little at first. As she enjoys the wine, she could slowly understand the language of the Bridegroom. When He sees it He will speak more and more distinctly and show her the magnitude of His love. Then the bride will love more, and the Bridegroom will rejoice over it, and adorn her with ornaments. Thus commences the divine union. Henceforth there will be nothing to fear. 1. Reading, 2. Solitude, 3. Meditative prayer

(prostration) (*namaskāram*), 4. Contemplation. For us it is enough to attain up to this fourth degree of prayer. Our Mother Teresa attained the seventh stage. Some of her sisters reached up to the fifth and the sixth. We must reach at least the fourth. (*Letters*, VII,8). Chavara was speaking from his personal experience of prayer. For him "the religious state is the one in which a person ascends the stages of virtue and becomes united with Jesus, the Lord" (*Letters*, VII,10). He marvels at the state of life: "How sublime and praiseworthy is the religious state, which you have embraced!" (*Letters*, VII,2). They enjoy both material and spiritual comforts (*Letters*, VII/2). Since the heavenly Bridegroom cares for them, there is no need for worry in their life. The mystical vision of *manavattitham* is part of the works of Chavara. According to him, the journey to Calvary is the solemn procession to the marriage pavilion (CS VII:70-105; *Colloquies*, pp. 22-23). The Bridegroom was yearning for that event throughout his life (CS VII:13-34). The religious profession is the means to accompany the divine Spouse to the wedding festival. On Calvary, a religious is invited to enter the bridal chamber, which is the cross. There one can spend time in loving conversation with the Bridegroom.

5.3. *Cholvili*

St Chavara prefers to entitle the vow of obedience *cholvili*, which has profound biblical meaning. *Cholvili* literally means calling one by name. Christ the good shepherd calls us, his sheep (Jn 10:3) by name. The religious have to be all ears for the voice of the Lord, immediately recognize Him, promptly say 'amen' and follow Him. They should not give ear to any other voice (Jn 10:5). This is the essence of the vow of obedience.

Abraham is the OT paradigm of *cholvili*. His life can be summarized as saying 'amen' or "here I am" (in Hebrew *hinnēni*) to God's calling him by name (Gen 12:4; 13:18; 15:2-21; 17:1-27; 21:33; 22:1-19). Jesus, his Son lived this call in its perfect sense. God, the Father was always calling him by name, and the Son responded each time by saying *hinnēni*. He began His earthly life by proclaiming, "Here I am, I have come to do your will" (Heb 10:7-9).

The meaning of the term Word is voice. The Son of God is the voice of the Father. Hence, He claimed: "My food was to do the will of Him who sent me and do finish His work" (Jn 4:34). When the hour to drink the bitter chalice came, He could say: "Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say, 'Father, save me from this hour?' No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!" (Jn 12:27-

28). At Gethsemane Jesus was deeply distressed: "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death... Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will but what you will" (Mk 14:33-36). Luke depicts the scene more poignantly: "And being in anguish, He prayed more earnestly, and His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground" (Lk 22:44). When the Son of God felt that even His Father had forsaken Him, He turned to the Father crying out in a loud voice: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mk 15:34). According to Lk 23:46, Jesus died uttering the words: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." The Son of Man came to the world, lived, moved and died as the living and loving *hinnēni* of *cholvoli*.

Mary was the best human model for *cholvoli*. When she was addressed by name by the envoy of God (Lk 1:28, 30), she heard in the message the very voice of the heavenly Father and responded: "I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be to me (*fiat*) as you have said" (Lk 1:38). In the life of Mary, we see the continuation of the act of *fiat*. She stands firm in her trust in the Lord in the face of all the challenging circumstances that we saw above. On all such occasions, Mary continued to utter *hinnēni* to the divine *cholvoli*.

Joseph stands out as the ideal biblical person of the divine *cholvoli*. He practised *cholvoli* in all the vicissitudes and challenges of life. As he was very much distressed in finding Mary with child, the angel of the Lord called him by name and instructed him to undertake the role of the foster father of the Son of God. Promptly he obeyed it (Mt 1:20-21, 24-25). Joseph said 'amen' to the divine command to flee to Egypt (Mt 2:13-15). As he was slowly accommodating himself there, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and commanded him to return to the land of Israel. Without uttering a word of protest Joseph went to the land of Israel (Mt 2:19-21). Once more, he heard the divine instruction, and accordingly went and lived in Nazareth (Mt 2:22-23). As the boy Jesus disappeared during the return journey from Jerusalem, the dismayed Joseph searched for Him three days, uttering repeatedly in his heart *hinnēni*.

Chavara excelled himself in practising *cholvoli*. He felt the voice of the divine Bridegroom sweet (*Letters*, VII,7). He held that the total negation self-will and the practice of blind and deaf *cholvoli* is the single mark of a religious (*Letters*, VI,4). In his letter to the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of Faith, he called himself "your most humble and loyal son" (*Letters*, II,5). Again, he wrote to Bishop Ludovic: "I now wait for your gracious command." Chavara

addressed himself in the letters to the Ecclesiastical authorities: "I, the one prepared for the service of *cholvoli*" (*Letters*, III,1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9). Here he looked at *cholvoli* as a holy service. Some of the words of his letter to the Procurator General of the Order of the Discalced Carmelites of Rome are worth citing: "We promise to obey with love all the commands which you give us" (*Letter*, IV,2). Obedience has to be given in love.

The contemporaries attest to Chavara's love for the Church and his obedience to the Church authorities. According to Fr Louis Manjummel, he loved the Church as his Mother and looked at the Church as the earthly paradise given to us; he tried his best to engrave this conviction in the members of the congregation. Leopold Missionary wrote in this regard: "His works during his life time attest to his foremost and earnest desire to conduct the rituals of the Holy Church in a proper and dignified way..., motivated by *cholvoli* towards the Bishops and for benefit of the souls, he never refrained from exertions and troubles for the uplift of the Church... All were convinced of his special virtues of humility, modesty, charity and the total obedience and *cholvoli* towards the Bishops." In a letter Archbishop Bernardine wrote to Rome on 8 June 1861, he calls Chavara "a priest ... a true Christian who maintains close relationship to the Catholic Church and to the Holy See."

During the Roccas schism he appealed to Pope Pius IX: "Holy Father, we, in all humility, with tear-filled eyes entreat Your Holiness to let us know whom we should obey... kneeling before your august throne and kissing your sacred feet, we pray, bestow on us your paternal blessing in abundance, so that we can obey you and conduct ourselves as faithful sons." (*Letters*, I,1). In *Letters*, V,16 Chavara wrote: "I am at present in Koonammavu under the order of our Archbishop, and in obedience to his wish I reside here now." In the same letter he asserted that "the religious have the obligation and necessity to obey the will of the superiors." These words stress three aspects: a religious is obliged to obey; he should make it his need; one has to practise obedience without making any excuse. As the stay at Koonammavu was negatively affecting his health, when his confreres compelled him to come to Mannanam, Chavara replied: "My conscience does not allow me to come to Mannanam, since the Archbishop and the Fr Leopold had asked me to stay here." When he became very tired and was exhausted because of sickness, he walked with great difficulty to the room of Fr Leopold and asked for his permission to go to bed!

Chavara never ceased reminding both men and women religious to strive hard to practise *cholwili*, humility and charity (*Letters*, VII,5). "One has to consider the superior as Jesus Christ and accept his voice as the holy word of Jesus Christ" (*Letters*, VI,1) because the "one who practises *cholwili*, will certainly enjoy the peace of heaven in the monastery, which is the little heaven." (*Letters*, VI,4).

The special charism of the religious community of Mannanam was their love for the Church. When Msgr Stabilini requested the Malpans Palackal and Porukkara to found a monastery, they promptly subscribed to that suggestion, as they were convinced of the need of the Church in Kerala. All the pastoral, liturgical, educational, social and press apostolate were undertaken by the religious community for the uplift of the people of Kerala. It was the love for the Church that prompted Chavara to approach the Pope at a time when the Roccas Schism rocked the Church (*Letters*, I,1, 2; II,1, 3). His motto was: "Be in the sanctuary of the Church of Rome; that is our blessed and beloved mother" (*Chronicles*, pp. 183-184). He wrote to Fr Kuriakose Eliseus, Vicar of the Monastery at Mannanam: "pray for the Holy Church." (*Letters*, V,8). In the Circular to the members of the Congregation Chavara asked them to pray fervently in a special way so that the persecution of the Catholic Church may cease, and joy and peace may prevail all over the world. He asked them to recite the following prayer: "Eternal Father, in reparation for my sins and through the merits of the holy Catholic Church, I offer up to you the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ" (*Letters*, VI,3). His contemporaries attest that Chavara rejoiced greatly at the success of the Church and wept at her difficulties and persecutions. It is the ecclesial vision of Chavara that prompted him to find refuge in the *tapasbhavanam* and *darsanavîdu* and subsequently, hundreds found refuge there and served the Mother Church.

SAINT CHAVARA IN THE ROLE OF SUPERIOR

Fr Thomas Kochumuttom CMI

Abstract: This article presents Saint Chavara in the role of an exemplary superior. Chavara was almost all his life in the role of a superior. After the death of the *Malpāns* he became the undisputed leader of the monastery project and he spontaneously took charge as their superior and led the community to their profession of religious vows in 1855. As a humble and selfless man filled with the Holy Spirit, his credibility was his credential; hence, he was respected even by his opponents foreign and native alike. His prudence, practical wisdom, love of the Church, independent thinking, broadminded and farsighted nature, and accountability were outstanding. Since he had his clear positions but imposed them on no one, he is considered to be a role model. However, in his own eyes, Chavara was full of failures. He practised the advice of the Lord: "When you have done all that is commanded you, say, 'We are just unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty'" (Lk 17:10).

Keywords: Superior, seminarian, community, Palackal, priest, Mannanam, Kaniyanthara, monastery, vows, prior, congregation, profession, obedience, Carmelite, clergy, jurisdiction, credibility, testimony, Manjummel, Church, Roccas, Rite, parish, schism, consecration, bishop, patriarch, Chaldeans, obedience, Abdisho, Plasanal, Kurillos, Denha, Propaganda, Koonammavu, Syrian, convent, religious, discipline, hierarchy, provincial, Church, Carmelites, Eliswa, Leopold, Syriac, prudence, wisdom, Elthuruth, founder, providence, solitude, malaria, bishops, missionaries, Jacobites, confraternity, retreat, disciplinarian, transparency, accountability, documentation, chronicle, obedience, constitutions.

1. Life-Long Superior

As a matter of fact St Kuriakose Elias Chavara was almost all his life in the role of a superior. Even as a seminarian he was the leader of the student community and a trusted assistant to *Malpān* Thomas Palackal in running the seminary. As soon as the construction work of the monastery in Mannanam started in 1831 the young priest Chavara, as

directed by Palackal, took up its supervision. The senior priest Thomas Porukara who too was a resident in Mannanam was most of the time going about for collecting funds and matters related to government offices. Therefore, for all practical purposes Chavara, assisted by Brother Jacob Kaniyanthara, was in charge of the affairs in Mannanam. This situation continued even after the formation of the community with all the regular religious practices and ministries. After the death of *Malpāns* Palackal and Porukara in 1841 and 1846 respectively, nobody had any doubt regarding who was the next leader of the monastery project. As a natural course of events without any formality all recognized Chavara as their superior and he, too, spontaneously took charge as their superior.¹

Chavara then guided and led the community to the supreme moment of their profession of religious vows in 1855. With that he was canonically acknowledged as the prior of Mannanam Monastery, and later, when more monasteries were established, as the common prior

¹Guide to the Footnotes in this article: (1) *Ālocana*: (Record of the local synaxis of Mannanam Monastery). (2) AMSJ: Archives of the Monastery of St Joseph, Mannanam. (3) Beccaro 2003: *A Short Biography of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara* by Fr Leopold Beccaro OCD. (4) Bernard 1989: *Malayālattille Ka. Ni. Mū. Sa. Sabhayuṭe Caritra-saṃkṣepam (A Short History of TOCD in Kerala)* by Fr Bernard TOCD. (5) CKC: *The Chronicles of Koonammavu Convent* (2002). (6) CSK: *Cāvāra-accante-sampūrṇa-kṛtikal*, 4 vols. (7) CWC: *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara*, 4 vols. (8) Kanyianthara: "History of the Foundation of Mannanam Monastery" by Jacob Kaniyanthara (Malayalam MS in AMSJ). (9) KMN: *Koonammavu Maṭham Nālāgamam (1866-1870) (The Chronicles of Koonammavu Convent)*: 2009. (10) Kochumuttom 2014: *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara* by Fr Thomas Kochumuttom CMI. (11) Louis (Aloysius) 1923: "A Short History of the Last Years (1869-'71) of the First Prior Very Rev Fr Kuriakose Elias Chavara," (Malayalam MS) kept in the archives of CMI Generalate, Chavara Hills, Kakkanad. (12) Mundadan 1995: *The Syro-Malabar Church: an Over View* by Mathias Mundadan CMI. (13) Mundadan 2008: *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara* by Mathias Mundadan CMI, (14) NKM: *Nālāgamankal Koonammavu Maṭham (1870-1909) II (Chronicles of Koonammavu Convent [1870-1909]) II*: 2008. (15) Parappuram: *Diary [Nālāgamam] of Fr Varkey Parappuram CMI*, (Malayalam MS in ASJM). (16) *Positio*: "Positio super Introductione Cause et super Virtutibus ex Officio Concinnata," Vatican: 1977. (17) SP: *Sthāpaka Pitākanmār (Founding Fathers)*, Mannanam: 1995. (18) Valerian 1939: *Malankara Sabhā Mātāvinṭe Oru Vīra Santānam athavā Vandya Divyā Śrī Cāvāra Kuriakos Eliās Accan CMI (Very Rev. Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara)*, by Fr Valerian Plathottam CMI: 1939. (19) Valerian 1953: *The Servant of God Cyriac Elias Chavara* by Valerian Plathottam CMI: 1953.

(*potu-śreṣṭhan*, which means the same as prior general) of all monasteries. People then onwards fondly called him *valia-prioraccan* (great prior).

However, when in 1860 the general council of the Order of Carmelites Discalced (OCD) with the connivance of the Vicar Apostolic Archbishop Bernardine Baccinelli highhandedly affiliated the new congregation as one of their third order institutes (TOCD) Chavara legally lost his position as the common prior. But, nobody, not even the vicar apostolic and missionaries, stopped addressing and respecting him by that title. On his part, too, he continued and went on doing his duties as the common prior. In other words, the legal loss of title did not affect his role as the common prior of the congregation. Till death he was the beloved *valia-prioraccan* for the entire people of Malabar and the undisputed common prior for formal matters.

It is interesting that Chavara was never given a letter of appointment as the superior of the congregation. It was rather always taken for granted that he was so. Even on the occasion of the profession of vows the vicar apostolic did not issue an order stating that Chavara was appointed prior. Instead we read that 'after his profession all others pronounced their vows before him [Chavara] whom the archbishop, who was the highest superior, had appointed their prior. After 4 pm they assembled in the sacristy when the prior made the solemn profession of faith.'² If at all the appointment was rather implicitly made by the prelate by the wording of the introductory sentence of the rules he had given the community: "We [Frere] Bernardine Baccinelli, by the grace of God, to the beloved sons *Kuiakose Elias and other brethren under obedience to him in the monastery at Mannanam*, greetings in the Lord Jesus and blessings of the Holy Spirit..." This is how Patriarch Albert, too, did in early 13th century. He recognized St Brocard to be the prior of the first Carmelite Community not by a patent letter but by the way he introduced the *First Rules*: "Albert,... to *B[rocard] and other hermits under obedience to him*, who live near the spring on Mt Carmel."³

There are, however, two instances of Chavara receiving patent letters of appointment to responsible positions in the Church. One was his appointment in 1844 by Vicar Apostolic Xavier Pescetto as "master [*mestre* in Portuguese, *malpān* in Syriac] of ecclesiastical sciences and

²CWC I (1990): 67-68; CSK I (1981): 78.

³Mundadan 2008: 149.

examiner of clergy of the Syrian Rite of our vicariate apostolic.”⁴ The second letter dated 8 June 1861 by Vicar Apostolic Baccinelli was to “nominate you [Chavara] vicar general so that you may administer, as regards the spiritual matters, the priests and laity of the Syro-Malabar Church under our jurisdiction...”⁵ In these two capacities Chavara was an ideal superior in the Syro-Malabar Church.

2. Credibility as Credential

The Jews questioned Jesus’ authority: “Where have you got this authority from?” (Mk 11:28). Jesus’ answer in effect was that he had it from his oneness with the Father. His authority was his authenticity based on his rootedness in his Father. This was the case with Chavara as well. His authority was his authenticity as a committed religious priest, always seeking God’s will and the good of the fellow humans. What qualified Chavara for the various posts of superior was not so much the academic qualifications or patent letters as his credibility. All his contemporaries are unanimous in this regard. We may recall the testimonies of some of them.⁶

A senior priest Fr Jacob Palakunnel says: “The Prior Chavara looked like an angel.” The same priest further says that to find the prior one had to “look either in front of the Bl. Sacrament in the church, or in the cemetery!” In the context of a quarrel between two rival groups in the parish of Anackal, the parish chiefs approached the ailing prior in Koonammavu and said: “It is enough that you just come, and peace shall be restored!” He went with them and peace was restored!

Mani Kurian, a very elderly parishioner of Muttuchira, says: “I have seen Fr Prior... He was indeed a man filled with the Holy Spirit!” Bp Mathew Athanasius, the founder of the Reformed Mar Thoma Church, was an intimate friend of St Chavara. His words have become proverbial: “In this country who else than Fr Prior is likely to go to heaven? Holding on to his leather belt I, too, shall endeavour to reach there!”

Fr Louis (Aloysius) of the monastery of Manjummel says: “Fr Prior was my spiritual director for several years. Among the virtues that were conspicuous in him were: insistence on the observance of the

⁴Its original in Portuguese, dated 16 November 1844 in preserved AMSJ. Fr Porukara also was appointed *malpān* on the same date.

⁵Its original in Malayalam is preserved in AMSJ.

⁶For most of them, see Valerian 1939: 229-243.

rules of the congregation, constant union with God, and commitment to the religious vows and so on. The whole one hour of evening meditation he would be on his knees shedding tears... He was very concerned about the priests' behaviour, dress etc. The priests in turn respected him as a god. When he arrives in Mannanam seminary the scholastics [out of respect] would invariably keep quiet! The Syrian priests not only respected him as a god but also paid him as much homage as they would to the archbishop."

Fr Leopold in his short biography of St Chavara writes: "Fr Prior fulfilled his priestly and religious duties more by his good conduct and virtuous practices than his words and deeds. All are impressed by his deep humility, unparalleled charity and spirit of submission to authority. Therefore, they not only respect and love him, but also unquestioningly trust his words. Among his virtues the most notable ones are the devotion to and the love for the Mother Church and Holy Father."

A Hindu judge having dismissed a case against Chavara as a fraud, and after a personal conversation with him remarked: "Fr Prior indeed is a man of God. Those who complain against so great a man should be grossly wicked and deserves God's anger!"

The intruder Bp Thomas Roccas arrived in Kochi on 9 May 1861. Many laity and clergy went to meet him and some even joined him. Chavara thought that with the vicar apostolic's permission he should visit him personally and check his credentials and then give the people authentic information and correct instructions. Before doing so, however, he had to preach an already arranged retreat to the priests of the vicariate. In the course of preaching Chavara clearly explained the issue of Roccas so that the participants might do the retreat quietly. But they continued to be agitated, and used to assemble and discuss the matter during the intervals. So going out of his way the prior boldly declared that "he was ready to swear with his hand on the crucifix on the altar that this bishop had come without any order from the Pope, and that anyone who submitted to him would fall under the excommunication announced by the archbishop." This convinced most of the listeners because *they knew that he would not assert it so strongly unless he was sure of it.*⁷

As Roccas landed in Kochi, the Syrians, mostly misguided by some of their own leaders and out of their enthusiasm for getting a bishop of their own Rite, welcomed him. They refused to believe the vicar

⁷CWC I: 162-63; CSK I: 193.

apostolic when he said that Bishop Roccas had come without the Pope's permission. Instead, they blindly mistook the intruder for their lawful hierarch and declared allegiance to him. Very soon the Syrian parishes one after another went to his side. Out of the total 154 parishes 86 fully and 30 partially followed him! The vicar apostolic and the missionaries could only remain helplessly watching the situation going out of hand and leading to a disastrous schism. *The only solution they could think of was to appoint a Syrian Rite priest as the vicar general whom the Syrian community would trust and respect. Chavara was the person that they found able to meet the need of the hour.* Archbishop Baccinelli immediately made him the vicar general for the Syrians in his vicariate.⁸ Within nine months, in early March 1862, the prior assisted by his community in a truly Christian manner sent back Bp Roccas to his patriarch, and persuaded most of the strayed parishes to return home. "Holy Father Pope Pius IX, gloriously reigning, on hearing about the stability of Chavara's faith and about his zeal for saving the Christians from schism, wrote to him a letter of high praise and satisfaction."⁹

The same vicar apostolic recommended the consecration of Chavara as co-adjutor bishop. In his letter dated 15 June 1861, informing the Propaganda Congregation of the prior's appointment as vicar general, he wrote:

In these difficult and critical times, with the consent of my councillors, I have constituted as my vicar general the senior-most among the Tertiaries, the Prior of the principal monastery, and the head of the entire congregation, a man truly Christian, virtuous, most prudent, well-versed in Sacred Scripture, expert in Syriac language, who in the present circumstances has proved by facts most attached to the Catholic religion, and to the Holy See. Though the rebel group and the intruder bishop attempted by several ways to win over Fr Chavara to their side, even by offering him episcopacy, he did not succumb to any such temptations. Had he accepted their offer, no doubt, the whole Church would have followed him, because he enjoyed among all the people great esteem, respect and authority. Now I have an idea and I request Your Eminence to give serious consideration to it. In case the dignity of vicar general alone will not be enough to keep away the

⁸The original of the patent letter in Malayalam is kept in ASJM, and its Latin version is given in *Positio*: 216f.

⁹ Beccaro 2003: 11.

people from the intruder and from the Chaldean patriarch, will it not be better to consecrate the said prior as coadjutor bishop for the Syrians?¹⁰

The archbishop then reassures that with the support of the vicar apostolic and missionaries, Chavara will produce much more fruits than the Chaldeans because he is a good, prudent, and obedient person and a captivating preacher. He further says that having made a simple vow of humility Chavara would not accept the position unless commanded under obedience, as it was the case when he was appointed as vicar general.

When Roccas was sent back, the rebel leader Fr Antony Thondanat defiantly went to Babylon and got consecrated as Mar Abdisho by the Nestorian Patriarch Simon Ruben. But when he returned to Kerala nobody cared for him. Calling himself as "Archbishop of Malankara," for some time he stayed in Plasanal monastery, which was by then an abandoned building. With the little help from the Jacobite Bishop Kurillos and his people he just survived. In 1864 he was down with fever that was spreading there. One of his sisters, poor as she was, took care of him in her house. He was almost cured. Now what to do? He felt desperate! Fr Paulose Parampil advised him to get reconciled with the archbishop. But he was afraid to approach the latter. As a way out, Fr Paulose asked him to write to the prior who would certainly help him. Indeed, their trust in Chavara's mediation was not in vain. Thondanat wrote to him, and he responded sympathetically and eventually put things right.

3. Respected by Opponents

It is worth noting that Chavara's credibility was such that even the rebels counted much on his support. A little before the Roccas episode another Chaldean priest called Denha Bar Jona had without his patriarch's permission come to Kerala to collect funds. He pretended to be a bishop, and gathered some followers. He promised them that, if all the churches would sign a petition, he would take it to Rome and have their request for a Syrian bishop granted by the Pope. But they realized that for the success of the scheme, the support of Chavara and his community was necessary. Denha wrote to Mannanam that at least the prior Chavara should come and meet him. But Chavara and his community ignored it and did not deem it necessary to reply. But Denha and his group continued their efforts to influence the prior and

¹⁰Quoted in Mundadan 2008: 229.

community. Finally Denha personally paid a visit to Mannanam where the prior and community received him well and treated courteously. As it was too late to send him away they accommodated him overnight. But the prior refused to oblige him with his and his community's support for his wicked plan. He also denied him permission to offer Mass in the monastery chapel as he did not have the local ordinary's patent letter!

Roccas and his followers too were eager to secure Chavara's cooperation. Even before Roccas arrived in Kerala they wrote a letter to the prior offering him episcopacy. It was taken to him by Deacon Mekkattil. Having gone through it the prior said: "My child, I would rather save my soul than be made a bishop!" When Roccas arrived in Kochi Chavara was not among the people who had enthusiastically gathered to receive him, which worried Roccas and the entire rebel group. In a few days' time the rebel leader Fr Antony Thondanat sent a letter to the prior expressing concern about his and his community's indifference to Roccas, and pleading for cooperation. Still later *Malpān* Aipe with three others came to meet the prior in Mannanam and made a vain effort to win him to the Roccasian side.

4. Humble, Selfless Servant

It is obvious that Chavara never aspired to be a superior, but was ever content to be a humble servant of God and his people. It was his spirit of obedience and submission to God's wills that motivated him to accept higher positions. In order to make Chavara accept the appointment as vicar general Archbishop Baccinelli had to command him under obedience. The same archbishop, therefore, warns the Propaganda congregation that the prior, if considered for episcopacy, will not accept it unless commanded under obedience.

While recording his achievements, Chavara takes care to attribute them to God, and then to keep his co-workers in the limelight and himself almost in oblivion. This is clear in the case of the foundation of the convent in Koonammavu. Obviously the convent was the realization of the inspiration that Chavara had shared with Frs Palackal and Porukara. Regretting that the centuries old Syrian Community in Malabar did not yet have consecrated men and women, they wanted to found a religious congregation, first for men and then for women. Thus the women's congregation was part of the original inspiration, and Chavara assisted by Fr Leopold Beccaro realized it with the establishment of the first convent in 1866-1867. The prior then recorded that it was a blessing that the Almighty God showered on

them¹¹ in response to his prayers for a long time,¹² making him more indebted to the same God.¹³

Thus, for Chavara the convent was God's work. However, God did not do it himself directly but through his human agents. Among them Chavara, who had inherited the original inspiration, is certainly the most important one. Fr Leopold then coming to know about the inspiration wholeheartedly approved it and played an important role in its execution.¹⁴ Chavara, however, gives the credit to Leopold to whom he just plays the second fiddle:

Having lost the hope of starting a convent [in Puthanpally] we plunged into the same sad state of helplessness. Then the missionary, our present provincial delegate, Very Rev. Fr Leopold Maria of St Joseph, by his work and assistance brought this convent into existence. When we look back we can rightly think that God sent him here solely for the purpose of putting up these monasteries and convents...¹⁵

Again, while inaugurating the new convent building in 1867, the prior wrote: "Thus by the honesty and sagacity of Fr Delegate everything was completed."¹⁶ Thus it has been characteristic of the humble and selfless Chavara to underline others' role in his undertakings while making little mention of his own contributions. In the last analysis he would always say that all his achievements were nothing but the realization of God's will through him. In his good old age he made a self-evaluation:

Are all these things that God made me do within my power? How have you arrived so far? Who made you leave your family? How come you were ordained a priest? How did you join the monastery? Where did the religious congregation come from? Who appointed you as prior? How have you reached here? Are you worthy of anything of these? Not, certainly not! So what? God's will is done. It will always be done!¹⁷

¹¹CWC I (1990): 115; CSK I (1981): 138.

¹²CWC I (1990): 104; CSK I (1981): 126.

¹³CWC I (1990): 117; CSK I (1981): 139.

¹⁴See Kochumttom 2014: 333-334.

¹⁵CWC I (1990): 194; CSK I (1981): 232; CKC: 22; KMN: 2.

¹⁶CWC I (1990): 116; CSK I (1981): 138.

¹⁷*Colloquies* in CWC III (1990): 1 and CSK III (1981): 1.

5. Role Model

Perhaps the most important factor that made Chavara an ideal superior was that he was a role model for his subjects. Jesus while instructing the disciples would frequently point to himself as the model: "Learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart" (Mt 11:29); "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet..." (Jn 13:14-15); "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another" (Jn 13:34). For the religious under Chavara, too, it was enough to look at him to learn how they should live and behave. In religious discipline including the practice of evangelical counsels, community life, prayer and meditation, and apostolic and priestly ministries their prior Chavara was a perfect model. Fr Louis, who was under Chavara's spiritual direction for many years, says:

He [Chavara] was very keen on observing the spirit of obedience, love of God and devotion to the rules of the congregation. He spent the whole time of meditation in the evenings on his knees, in tears and overpowered by emotions. He had to be reminded by others that the allotted time was over. Other priests held him in high esteem even as a superman; "the prior general appears as an angel," they used to say.¹⁸

From the very beginning till the very end Fr Chavara subjected himself to the Order with the interest and enthusiasm of a novice. He regarded the Order in such esteem as though it was his own mother. It was to him the paradise on earth, and he encouraged his disciples to hold it in similar high esteem. He would never willingly absolve any one including himself of the responsibility of conforming to the Order. Travel, old age, weakness and even infirmity hardly succeeded in making him relax much. He would relax when absolutely necessary, but only after taking permission from the spiritual director. He was ever anxious to have his meals with the community, frugal and austere as they were. Even while sick and laid up, he tried to manage with just the common meals.¹⁹

In superior-subject relationship the focal point generally is obedience. Chavara's understanding of it is radical, which he has clearly stated in his testament:

¹⁸Quoted by Fr Valerian 1953: 38.

¹⁹Quoted by Fr Valerian 1953: 51.

The only mark of a religious is total surrender of one's will and obedience as if one does not have one's own eyes and ears. One who practises it is a true religious. This is not a difficult task. Still we must admit that we have not yet practised it to perfection, and make a strenuous effort in this regard.²⁰

Whom should they obey? Chavara's unequivocal answer is that they should obey the ecclesiastical and religious superiors, as well as one another. Those days the former included the vicar apostolic who was on the one hand the representative of the Supreme Pontiff and on the other the provincial superior. The religious were to obey also the missionary appointed as the vicar apostolic's delegate and known as the provincial delegate. They owed obedience to other missionaries as well, because they were sent by the Holy See and as such were called missionaries apostolic. The subordinate superiors like the common prior and his vicars also were to be obeyed, and finally the members were to practise obedience to one another. In today's context it would mean that the religious should obey:

- a) the hierarchy (including the local ordinary and the parish priest), and the major superiors in the congregation,
- b) the local superiors, and
- c) one another.

Chavara, then, concludes: "He who practises obedience in all these three levels will enjoy heavenly peace already while in the monastery which is a miniature heaven. This is certain!"²¹

In this presentation, Chavara is obviously advocating *total surrender of one's will and obedience as if one does not have one's own eyes and ears*. The present-day readers may not find it quite palatable, for in practice it is a plea for what we traditionally called *blind obedience* that is no more appreciated but considered outdated. But Chavara would still say it holds good for all times! He would challenge us, invoking a life-time experience of his own. It is on the basis of his own practice of obedience, that just five months before his death he noted it down as his parting message. He wants his followers to obey as he did!

6. He Obeyed, God Exalted

'Christ Jesus obeyed unto death... Therefore, God highly exalted him so that every knee bowed before him' (Phil 2:8-9). This is the secret of

²⁰CWC IV (1990): 70; CSK IV (1986): 99-100.

²¹CWC IV (1990): 71; CSK IV (1986): 100.

Chavara's success in the role of superior: he was obedient unto death, therefore, being exalted as superior he succeeded in commanding everybody's obedience. We may recall some instances of Chavara's obedience.

In Chavara's own words, "from his early age he was resolved to live in accordance with the mind of his *malpān* Thomas Palackal."²² Immediately after his ordination and first Mass, *surrendering his interest* to go about doing pastoral ministries like retreat preaching, he obeyed his *malpān* Palackal's instruction to go to Mannanam. He writes: "Never again did I ever aimlessly roam about. Then onwards I was determined to be subject in all matters to the *malpān's* mind and views. He directed me to go and stay in Mannanam to look after the construction of monastery."²³ A little later the vicar apostolic Francis Xavier very unexpectedly appointed him as parish priest in Pallipuram, although his presence in Mannanam was badly required for the supervision of the work. There was reason to suspect that the archbishop's move was to stop the work. The senior priests instructed Chavara: 'You may represent the matter before His Grace and make a request not to insist on the transfer order; if he accepts it, well and good; otherwise unconditionally obey the order!' So Chavara went to the archbishop and humbly explained the situation. His Grace sternly said that the order should be obeyed. Chavara at once went and took charge as vicar of Pallipuram Parish.²⁴ There was still worse to come. Soon afterwards the archbishop appointed Fr Porukara as the vicar of some parishes like Kayamkulam and Pallithope in the diocese of Kollam. On receipt of the order he rushed to the *malpān*. After discussing the matter in detail Porukara concluded that the archbishop's order, even if it is issued to test their spirit of obedience, should be considered God's will, and, therefore, be obeyed forthwith without complaint. The *malpān* agreed, and Porukara left for Kollam in tears!²⁵

Pleased with the Fathers' spirit and practice of obedience the vicar apostolic before long permitted them to go back to Mannanam. Indeed, their obedience was tested and proved as that of Abraham in the Old Testament, and they 'learned obedience through suffering' as Jesus did (Heb 5:8). But it was only the beginning of their life of

²²CWC I (1990): 22; CSK I (1981): 25.

²³CWC I (1990): 22; CSK I (1981): 25.

²⁴CWC I (1990): 24; CSK I (1981): 28-29.

²⁵CWC I (1990): 24-25; CSK I (1981): 29.

obedience. Gradually a very well organized community took shape with a good number of members who were prayerful, zealous and disciplined, committed to the pastoral ministries and other apostolic activities. All including the vicars apostolic, priests and the laity were happy about them, and highly appreciated their presence and service. Even the society at large admired their way of life and ideals. In short there was all that was required for consecrated life in the tradition of the Church.

But the most crucial factor, namely, the canonical approval was indefinitely delayed. The Fathers made repeated requests for it to the vicars apostolic that came and went one after another: Maurilius Stabilini, Francis Xavier, Ludovic Martini, and Bernardine Baccinelli. They all were happy with the community. But they would not readily give the canonical approval, probably because they were prejudiced against the Syrian Rite people's rootedness in matters related to faith and morals. It could certainly hurt the feelings of the community, and they could rightly feel that their basic rights as equal members of the Church were denied. But trusting in God's providence and in a spirit of obedience to and respect for the ecclesiastical authorities they patiently waited for God's time to come for their rights to be granted and dreams to be realized. It must be underlined that during this long period of uncertainty and a considerable amount of strain and stress they never refused to cooperate with and obey the hierarchy. There was never indeed even a trace of defiance of or protest against the authority. In the meantime two of the elders, Frs Palackal and Porukara, died, the former in 1841 and the latter in 1846, without seeing the fruition of their hard work just as Moses and Aaron were not permitted to enter the Promised Land!²⁶

Finally, it was in 1855, after almost a quarter of a century long waiting on the part of the Fathers, that Archbishop Baccinelli granted them permission to make the profession of religious vows. But subsequently many things occurred that tested further and proved beyond doubt the Fathers' spirit of faith in God's providence and submission to the authority. For example the archbishop imposed on them the rule of the contemplative Order of the Carmelites Discalced (OCD). He rejected the Fathers' request to adjust the rule to *their Syrian traditions, the local conditions and needs, and the original spirit and charism of the new congregation that combined the contemplative and apostolic dimensions of religious life*. This was again a denial of their basic rights

²⁶SP: 26-27.

and disregard of their ecclesial identity. But they under the guidance of St Chavara tolerated, forgave and generously cooperated. Eleven out of the twenty-two candidates fearing that they might not be able to stand the demands of the unduly strict rule at the last minute decided against making the profession. Chavara informed the archbishop of this unfortunate development, but his response was disgustingly cold: "Only those of good will and determination need to be admitted. Don't worry about the dropouts. I shall pray for the remaining few!" Fr Chavara gracefully bore the pain of the loss of so many members and the lack of understanding on the part of the ordinary!²⁷

Still later the OCD Superior General, most probably with the connivance of Vicar Apostolic Baccinelli, highhandedly affiliated the new congregation as their Third Order. Thereby the congregation lost its identity as an autonomous indigenous institute, and Fr Chavara stopped being its prior general, to say the least! It was clearly an unjust interference of the missionaries and a questionable appropriation of what did not belong to them. There must have been many of the members of the congregation who rightly objected to the entire episode. But Chavara, trusting that in the course of time God will put things right, kept his calm and cool, and pacified the disturbed members. He was tolerant, forgiving, obedient and generous!²⁸

7. Clear Positions but No Imposition²⁹

For Chavara even old age was not an excuse from obeying. Instead, his spirit of obedience was still more conspicuous and graceful in his advanced age. In his old age the way he accepted the archbishop's order of transfer from Mannanam to Koonammavu is an example. Ever since his ordination in 1829 he was in Mannanam for 35 years, deeply involved in and personally contributing to all the wonderful developments that took place there in the meantime. He had indeed become part of the landscape there. Remaining there in his good old age he could relish recalling with a sense of satisfaction the many past experiences of agonies and ecstasies. It would be quite understandable if he, therefore, wished to spend there the rest of his life, and finally be buried in that sacred soil! But no such natural aspirations would occur

²⁷Bernard 1989: 41-42; Valerian 1939: 104.

²⁸Kochumuttom 2014: 159-165.

²⁹This section and the section no. 10 below have been verbatim reproduced from my forthcoming book *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara* (Bangalore: 2017): 204-208 and 199-201 respectively.

to the *karma-yogi* in Chavara. His ideal was selfless service (*niṣkāma-karma*) of God and people, which in the words of his *Guru* Jesus Christ means: "So you also, when you have done all that is commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty'" (Lk 17:10). This is testified by the most edifying manner in which Chavara accepted the transfer to Koonammavu. We have it recorded by his successor in Mannanam Fr Kuriakose Porukara:

Mannanam is the place where Fr Prior lived from his younger age. There he worked hard to put up the monastery and then as the superior took good care of the community for all these years. In the meantime he also accomplished many good things there for the people. However, in 1864 most willingly obeying the order of the local ordinary he left Mannanam and went to stay in Koonammavu.³⁰

In Chavara's own words, "Under the order of Very Reverend Archbishop and in obedience to his mind at present I am staying in Koonammavu."³¹The prelate must have been well-intentioned in ordering this transfer. He probably thought it would be helpful if Chavara, who was not only the common prior of the new congregation but also his vicar general (for the Syrians), stayed closer to the archbishop's house in Varapuzha. For the prior, however, it could not have been a pleasant experience except in the light of faith!

There is still another incident. February 13, 1866 was fixed for the inauguration of the first community of Sisters in Koonammavu. As directed by Chavara a widow called Eliswa (later her name was changed as Clara), aged 37, from the parish of Vaikom with all the necessary preparations and accompanied by her uncle arrived on 11 February to join them. But Fr Leopold said that he would not accept her without first interviewing and personally getting to know her. Thus being asked to wait, she and her uncle stayed in a house outside. The young priest Leopold certainly could have trusted the experience of the prior and respected his judgement. But he would not! "This caused much sorrow and disturbance. Yet they stayed and waited holding firmly on to obedience,"³² writes Chavara. It was obviously a humiliating experience for him; but he accepted it without any complaint and in a spirit of dignified obedience. The day after the

³⁰SP: 29.

³¹CWC IV (1990): 55; CSK IV (1986): 83. This is the opening statement of a letter that the prior wrote on 13 December 1864.

³²CWC I (1990): 107; CSK I (1981): 237; CKC: 26-27.

inauguration of the convent Fr Leopold called the lady to the confessional, interviewed and heard her confession, and then admitted her to the community.

In late December 1869 or early 1870, Chavara developed eye complaint and other complications. Physicians like Varkey and Eapen Muttathupadath tried their best to heal him, but they could not. The Fathers in Mannanam then suggested that he be shifted to Mannanam in view of cooler weather and Physician Eapen's easier accessibility. Vicar General Fr Philip and acting Provincial Delegate Fr Gerard in Koonammavu also consented.³³ The prior got ready to go to Mannanam and, God willing, to die there at the feet of his dearest patron St Joseph.³⁴ Then one of those days while visiting the Sisters in the convent he disclosed the plan to go to Mannanam. Sad at the thought of missing him they requested him not to go. His characteristic answer was:

Have I my own will? I desire neither to go there, nor to stay here. I am ready to do as I am told. I don't wish to do my will. I am ready to do whatever I am commanded to do.³⁵

As the prior returned to the monastery Fr Gerard inquired how he felt about going to Mannanam. His response again was:

Father, is my will different from yours? I am prepared to do whatever you wish me to do. I've no will of mine own to go there or not!³⁶

However, a little later, may be on second thoughts, he said to the Fathers that 'as he had come to Koonammavu at the command of the archbishop, it would not be proper that he returns to Mannanam when His Grace and the Provincial Delegate Fr Leopold were away in Rome, and that his conscience does not permit him to do so.'³⁷ Dr Guenther from Ernakulam had already warned them that Fr Prior's death would be at any unexpected moment. Further, they felt that at Mannanam the atmosphere would not be as healthy as that at Koonammavu, and that the European doctors or even good native physicians might not be

³³Louis (or Aloysius) 1823: 5-6.

³⁴He has expressed this desire in a letter he wrote to Fr Kuriakose Porukara. See fn 8 in Mundadan 2008: 384; *Positio*: 345.

³⁵NKM: 11; CKC: 203-204.

³⁶NKM: 12; CKC: 204.

³⁷Louis (Aloysius) 1823: 6.

readily available. Anyway in the end the Fathers gave up the plan to take him to Mannanam, and the Saint gladly accepted their decision.³⁸

On 2 January 1871 as desired by the prior they were getting ready to administer him the anointing of the sick. The Fathers asked him: "Whom do you like to administer the last sacraments?" There are different versions of his response.³⁹ Basically he was open as to who administers them and in which Rite. If at all his personal choice seems to have been between his spiritual director and vicar provincial Fr Leopold⁴⁰ and the vicar of Koonammavu Monastery Fr Joseph John of the Cross. The latter had the advantage of the knowledge of Syriac.⁴¹ Finally the prior said:

As you all will. If it is in my own [liturgical] language [i.e., Syriac], then I too can join in giving responses to the prayers. But I shall be quite satisfied with whatever you decide.⁴²

How amazing indeed was his spirit of resignation even in such innocent and Ritual matters! Fr Leopold was so overcome with sorrow that he could not even stand on his legs.⁴³ Therefore, Fr Gerard started administering the sacraments while Fr Joseph John conducted their main part in Syriac.⁴⁴

Nearer the end of his life, saying to Fr Gerard that he then had much peace and joy, a little scrupulously he added, "Father, I did not go to Mass last Sunday." Fr Gerard consoled him saying that it was not by his own will but in obedience to the superior's command that he had not gone to Mass, and that as such it should not worry him. That instantly settled his doubt, and he responded, "Yes, it is true. It is in obedience that I did not go to Mass. That is enough for me." Since then he was ever calm and serene. Noting down this incident the chronicler of the convent shares her reflections:

Ah! My dear Sisters, we have just now heard how our Father Prior was perfectly obedient during his lifetime, and that its thought brought him great peace and joy at the time of his death. If we

³⁸Mundadan 2008: 384; NKM: 12; *Positio*: 459.

³⁹For details see Mundadan 2008: 391-392.

⁴⁰Referring to the chronicle of St Philomena's Monastery, Koonammavu, *Positio*: 459 (see Mundadan 2008:391); also NKM: 18; CKC: 209.

⁴¹Moolayil in *Positio*: 548 (see Mundadan 2008: 391).

⁴²NKM: 18; CKC: 209.

⁴³Referring to the chronicle of St Philomena's Monastery, Koonammavu, *Positio*: 459 (see Mundadan 2008: 391).

⁴⁴NKM: 18 along with Mundadan 2008: 392; CKC: 209.

desire to experience such peace and joy at the time of our death, let us now try to be persons of blind obedience.⁴⁵

8. Prudence and Practical Wisdom

Chavara was a superior with *prudence and practical wisdom*. As Frs Palackal and Porukara died, "our young Fr Kuriakose [Chavara] who was among the pioneers in the new enterprise [of founding the religious congregation] was left alone. Fr Kuriakose, however, made up for his lack of age with prudence and exemplary conduct,"⁴⁶ says Fr Leopold. For example: i) In the events leading to the first group of members' profession of vows in 1855, for Chavara it was a matter extraordinary prudence to mediate between his community and the vicar apostolic regarding the nature of their constitutions. Again, when in 1860 the congregation was highhandedly affiliated as Third Order of Carmelites Discalced, it must have been his prudent leadership and words of practical wisdom that kept the community united and pacified. ii) When the Chaldean priest Denha under the guise of a bishop came to Mannanam seeking support of the prior and community, they on the one hand welcomed and treated him with courtesy, but, on the other, clearly refused him support for his dishonest plans and permission to say Mass in the monastery chapel. iii) When the intruder Bishop Roccas arrived in Kerala, Chavara, in order to give the people correct information and guidance, wanted to go to meet him personally. But he would not do so without first getting the vicar apostolic's permission. iv) Later on, when a meeting with Bishop Roccas was being arranged, the prior informed him that he preferred to meet him within closed doors, because he would not be kissing his ring which was a symbol of authority he had illegally gained. Kissing it would mean that he was party to his wrongdoings which would scandalize his people. Therefore, as an act of humility he would rather kiss his hand or foot, but not ever the ring. All the same, the prior did not want to humiliate him by refusing in public to kiss his ring! v) It was Chavara's prudent and pastorally concerned dealings that within just nine months persuaded Roccas to leave the country, and his supporters to give up the agitation. vi) Vicar Apostolic Baccinelli in his letter to Propaganda, dated 15 June 1861, with the information about Chavara's appointment as vicar general, qualifies him as "a man truly Christian, virtuous, most prudent..." vii)

⁴⁵For this quotation and the whole incident see NKM: 20; CKC: 210.

⁴⁶Beccaro 2003: 8-9.

The prudent superior in Chavara in his testament advises his followers: "Particular care should be taken not to interfere in the affairs of the convent and boarding house unless you are officially assigned to the work."⁴⁷

The prior personally was not in favour of admitting to the congregation candidates from the Latin Rite and Southist⁴⁸ communities, not because of any uncharitable feelings but for fear of the possible disturbances arising from their different perceptions and practices. However, he left the matter to the decision of the superiors and remained fully resigned to God's will. In 1864 at the instance of the archbishop two Latin Rite candidates were received and accommodated in Elthuruth monastery. In that context Chavara wrote:

I feel it is not advisable to admit candidates from the Latin Rite and Southist faithful. In saying so I am afraid of being uncharitable. But my intention is merely to avoid the possible disturbances in the community arising from their different way of doing things. I do not at all mean to deny them the benefit of being with us. Anyway, I leave the matter to the superiors; let them decide it according to their discretion and as God inspires them. It is our duty always to submit ourselves to the will of our superiors. They will guide everything for our good.⁴⁹

As he says elsewhere,⁵⁰ he was convinced that the cause of the centuries old restlessness and dissatisfaction among the Syrians was that they did not have bishops and pastors of their own Rite and language. The missionary bishops and priests who were looking after them did not know the local language and do the liturgical ceremonies in the people's Syrian Rite. This caused lack of mutual understanding and trust between the pastors and faithful, resulting in disunion, schismatic movements and weakening of faith. The prior did not want such a situation to arise in his congregation. Hence as a matter of

⁴⁷CWC IV (1990): 73; CSK IV (1986): 102.

⁴⁸Southists or *Knanites* are an endogamous community among the St Thomas Christians. They claim to be the descendants of the East-Syrian (Chaldean) Christians who migrated from Persia (the present Iran and Iraq) along with Knai Thomman (Thomas of Cana) in 345AD. In contrast, the descendants of the original community of St Thomas Christians are called Northists. Pope Pius X in 1911 erected the vicariate (the present diocese) of Kottayam for the Southists.' Mundadan 1995: 31-32.

⁴⁹CWC IV (1990): 56; CSK IV (1986): 84.

⁵⁰CWC IV (1990): 57-59; CSK IV (1986): 85-87. See also the section below entitled "Independent Thinking."

practical wisdom he was apprehensive of admitting candidates from other communities.

9. The Love of the Church and Cooperation with the Hierarchy

The prior in all his undertakings was motivated by the *love of the Church and cooperation with the hierarchy*.

During his time he carried out a number of projects under the orders of the bishop. Never did he hold himself back from any work, nor fight shy of any difficulty, as he was always prompted by two motives: obedience to the bishop and salvation of souls... Those who came to know him were convinced of his... unqualified obedience and submissiveness to the ordinary... Among his virtues the most outstanding one was his ardent faith in and devotion to the holy Catholic Church and the Holy Father...⁵¹

Even in starting the religious congregations the founders' primary objective was to make available for the members of their Syro-Malabar Church the blessing of consecrated life, which till then they were denied. They hoped that with the establishment of a religious congregation they would be able to do the many good things that were otherwise left undone. They also welcomed the then vicar apostolic bishop Maurilius Stabilini's advice that their religious life should be such that from it not only a few of them but the entire Church and society should benefit.

The founding fathers always acted in subordination and submission to the vicar apostolic and his delegate. Obedience to the ecclesiastical superiors that Chavara emphasises in his testament was a praiseworthy practice right from the beginning of the congregation. They clearly understood and acknowledged that the religious are not outside or above the Church. They are very much part of the Church and subject to the hierarchy through whom her divine authority is exercised. There may be differences of opinions between the religious and the hierarchy, and the members of the hierarchy may have human frailties, make mistakes and adopt unacceptable policies. But that is no reason for the religious not to obey and cooperate with them. As prophets in the New Testament the religious through sharing of ideas, positive suggestions and creative criticism, and in a spirit of faith in God's providence should tolerate and assist them. This was Chavara's and other founders' way of dealing with the hierarchy. In all matters they would consult the authorities, make their positions clear, share

⁵¹Beccaro 2003: 12-13.

their feelings, and clearly express their opinions, but always accept the superiors' decisions; they would then keep their cool, leaving the rest of the matter to God's providence. Their approach was reconciliatory, and never confrontational. If ever they had any complaint or difference of opinion, they would take it directly to the vicar apostolic or his delegate, explain their views, and would in all submission ask for changes, and then accept their final decision. We have already mentioned many such instances. We may presently mention a few more of them.

As Frs Palackal and Porukara approached the bishop for permission "to live somewhere in solitude" he suggested that instead of totally withdrawing from the society "you may establish a monastery so that all may benefit from it." Although the idea was acceptable, they expressed their helplessness that they did not have the means for it. However, they readily obeyed the bishop's instruction to go to the people and seek their contributions, and proceeded.⁵² When they had to make a choice between the two sites - Pullarikunnu and Mannanam - for the monastery they sought the bishop's advice.⁵³ Once the government permission for building the monastery on mount Mannanam was obtained, the bishop directed the Fathers immediately to erect there a wooden cross in the presence of the public in order to avoid any further dispute. They obeyed without delay.⁵⁴ While the construction work was going on, the Fathers desired to put up a temporary tent on the site in which they could say Mass and stay, and thus save themselves the trouble of daily going up and down the mountain. But the bishop refused permission saying that it would not be proper to say Mass in a make-shift tent, and asked them immediately to construct a well-built chapel. They did so.⁵⁵

The monastery in Plasanal started by the rebel Fr Antony Kudakkachira was eventually abandoned by his followers. Then in 1858 Vicar Apostolic Bernardine asked Chavara to go to Plasanal with two or three members and take over the house as a monastery of the congregation. But the prior first personally went and made a study of its condition. He found the place to be malaria-infected and the building not fit for living. The prelate was not happy when he came to know that Chavara, instead of immediately starting the community,

⁵²Kaniyanthara: 6-7.

⁵³CWC I (1990): 13; CSK I (1981): 17.

⁵⁴CWC I (1990): 19; CSK I (1981): 23.

⁵⁵CWC I (1990): 17-18; CSK I (1981): 21-22.

first went to inspect the place. He, therefore, sent a stricter order that the community be immediately started. The prior then personally went to the archbishop in Varapuzha and explained the situation in detail. Still the latter insisted on taking over the place. Chavara obeyed, and sent a few members to Plasanal to form the first community. Within two years the superior Mathew Kalapurackal died of malaria on 22 June 1860. The vicar apostolic then permitted the winding up of the house.⁵⁶

Similarly, in 1857, Fr Prior readily obliged when Vicar Apostolic Bernardine asked him to accept as a house of the congregation St Philomena's Monastery at Koonammavu, which was originally meant for a Latin Rite religious community.⁵⁷

Once the missionary Fr Marceline, who perhaps was the provincial delegate then, got the wrong impression that there was some indiscipline in Mannanam. He, therefore, called the prior to Koonammavu and scolded him. The latter, however, calmly explained the truth and pacified the missionary.⁵⁸

Once being invited the prior went to Lalam to preach a sermon on the occasion of the parish feast. On arriving there he learned that the vicar apostolic had stayed the celebration of feast until the parish settled certain pending money matters. Chavara refused to preach and left the place. Only later when the parish complied or agreed to comply with the prelate's order Chavara participated in the celebrations.⁵⁹

10. Independent Thinking

The Fathers thus were obedient servants of the Church. But it is already pretty clear that in all matters they had independent thinking and stand which they would appropriately and in a spirit of charity make known to the right persons and at the right time. It was evident with regard to the policy matters and administrative set-up in the Church. Regarding the people's cry for Syrian bishops of their own, the Fathers would always caution them not to be carried away by passions and emotions, but to be reasonable. They should avoid

⁵⁶CWC I (1990): 74-76, 78-79; CSK I (1981): 86-88, 91-92.

⁵⁷CWC I (1990): 73; CSK I (1981): 84-85.

⁵⁸Parappuram: 241-247.

⁵⁹Mundadan 2008: 155, referring to CSK IV (1982): 44f. See also Fr Thomas Panthaplackal CMI and Sr Jossy CMC (Eds), *Cāvāra-accante Kattukal [Letters of Fr Chavara]*, (Kakkanad, Kochi: 2011), 79-80.

excessive dependence on the Chaldeans. Fr Palackal's wise advice to his disciples was: "Do not use opium, do not consume toddy, and do not bring Syrian bishops!"⁶⁰ According to him Paremakal's *Varttamāna-pustakam* is too emotionally charged a work that its indiscriminate and unguided reading can destructively arouse your passions and make you blind regarding the right course of action. "It is, therefore, not to be read but burned!"⁶¹ he said.

True to the teaching of his *malpān*, Chavara wrote that the obsession for Syrian bishops had led his people in Kerala to break away from the communion of the Holy Church and endangered their salvation.⁶² Their liking for these bishops is understandable because they share with them the same Ritual practices and liturgical language while they do not experience such an affinity with the European missionaries. But they fail to see that the Syrians are weak in faith, greedy for money, and practise simony.⁶³ European missionaries on the contrary have the power of endurance, generosity, devotion, readiness to work for the glory of God and other virtues. But of course they are handicapped in matters of language and Ritual practices which alienates them from the people and stands in the way of unity. The sad thing is that most of them never care to learn the local language and do the liturgical ministry in the Syrian Rite!⁶⁴

According to Chavara, the only remedy was that the European missionaries learn the local language or at least the Syriac language and adopt the Syro-Malabar Rite for the liturgical services. They would then have a combination of learning, spirituality as well as familiarity with the local or/and Syriac language and Syrian Rite. The next bishops and their vicars in the parishes should be from such missionaries. This would also facilitate the reunion of the Jacobites who often complain that the Syrian Catholics do not have bishops of their own Rite.⁶⁵

The prior later on thought out a still more lasting solution that he hoped would not only prevent future dissensions but also hasten the

⁶⁰This is the testimony of one of Palackal's disciples and a close relative Fr Geevarghese Konnankara as recorded in Parappuram: 704f.

⁶¹CWC I (1990): 149; CSK I (1981): 176.

⁶²CWC I (1990): 146; CSK I (1981): 173.

⁶³CWC IV (1990): 57; CSK IV (1986): 85.

⁶⁴CWC IV (1990): 57-59; CSK IV (1986): 85-87.

⁶⁵For these thoughts of Chavara, including the two quotations above, see CWC IV: 57-59 and CSK IV (1986): 85-87.

reunion of Jacobites. In a letter to Barnabo, Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda, he warns that the “calm” that followed the Roccas episode might not last for long as any little provocation would again prompt his people to resort to Babel to get a bishop of their own Rite. To avoid it he suggested that there be two bishops here: one for the Latin community and another for the Syrian one. Then the Syrians’ longing to have a bishop of their own will cease, and gradually their relationship with Babylon, too, will end. This would encourage the Jacobites to renounce the schism and return to the unity of the Catholic fold.⁶⁶ It is believed that this letter influenced the Sacred Congregation later on to appoint native bishops for the Syrians.

11. Concerned and Paternal

Chavara was a *concerned and paternal superior*. In a letter to Kuriakose Porukara, the then vicar of Mannanam Monastery,⁶⁷ he says that the superior of the community is called to be a partner with God in tending His sheep, and that as such he should love the sheep and be concerned about their wellbeing.⁶⁸

Chavara was himself a very concerned, understanding and paternal superior, loved and respected by all. Fr Scaria Kalathil’s uncle priest while on his deathbed wanted to see him. Fr Leopold’s opinion was that Fr Scaria should not make a visit to his dying uncle. Fr Prior, however, felt the other way round. It was the time when all the superiors were having a gathering at Koonammavu. Fr Leopold suggested that they might take a decision by secret vote. Accordingly they met and were about to cast votes. Then Fr Leopold held a black (negative) pellet between his fingers and raised it for all to see. Fr Prior then held between his fingers a white (positive) pellet and showed it up. The superiors were in a predicament! They pleaded that the two major superiors – Leopold and Chavara – take an appropriate decision in the matter. But Fr Leopold was insistent on voting. Reluctantly all obliged. Alas! When the ballot box was opened, all pellets except one were white! Fr Leopold’s displeasure reflected on his face.⁶⁹

Chavara was full of respect and consideration for the opinions and suggestions of all the members of his community, and even obeyed

⁶⁶CWC IV (1990): 14; CSK IV (1986): 35.

⁶⁷Valerian (1939): 373-374.

⁶⁸For the relevant part of this letter see below section 17 entitled “Chavara’s Portrait of an Ideal Superior.”

⁶⁹Parappuram: 1430-1432.

them, practising what he preached: 'obey one another.' At the initiative of Fr Porukara the seminarians in Mannanam were divided into two groups: candidates for religious priesthood and others for diocesan priesthood. While the former were accommodated upstairs, the latter were left downstairs as before. Some of the diocesan candidates under the leadership of Antony Kudakkachira resented and going to Pallipuram complained to *Malpān* Palackal that being kept downstairs they felt humiliated and discriminated against! A little later Chavara also happened to meet Palackal, and during the conversation he got the impression that the *malpān* was not quite happy about the new arrangement in the seminary. Therefore, making up his mind to restore the original system he returned to Mannanam. Fr Porukara had gone on a long journey. Chavara was then prudent and humble enough to discuss the matter with Fr Geevarghese Thoppil and Br Jacob Kaniyanthara. They expressed concern and advised him: 'The new set-up is Fr Porukara's innovation, and to change it without consulting him would rightly offend him. You must, therefore, wait till he returns.' They were words of wisdom which Fr Chavara readily accepted. Quite characteristically he blamed himself: "Fool that I was! Only when they said it, reason dawned on me."⁷⁰ Indeed, he respected and obeyed everybody: the superior Palackal, senior priest Porukara, younger members Thoppil and Kaniyanthara, and even the trainees!

Once a candidate, as it was discerned that he did not have vocation, was sent back home. His parents naturally were annoyed and felt offended. Coming to know of it the prior personally went to meet them and explained the matter. Realizing the truth they were consoled and pacified.⁷¹

Chavara's long letter, known as *The Testament of a Loving Father*, to the Kainakari parishioners is famous. Given below are few relevant clauses:

A day that you pass without doing some good work for others will not be counted in your book of life. Desire that others should love you rather than fear. Do not allow beggars to leave your house empty-handed. Whenever possible make sure that you give as much as you can by way of charity.⁷²

Never fail to pay just wages to the labourers or delay their payment, because that is an offence crying to God for justice. Do not

⁷⁰CWC I: 31; CSK I: 36-37. For details see Kochumuttom 2014: 97-100.

⁷¹Quoted from *Ālocana*: 91 by Valerian 1939: 290.

⁷²CWC IV (1990): 108; CSK IV (1986): 139.

insult the poor or harass them, because God, if he sees them weeping, will surely wreak vengeance on you.⁷³

These are the rules of life that the prior himself followed. It is said that there was hardly any poor person who had not received one or another help from him. It was his instruction that every monastery within its means should help the poor around it. Once while visiting the Mannanam community he directed them to purchase and distribute clothe worth 1000 *cakrams* to the poor women and children in the locality. Writing to his rich friends he used get donations in order to help the poor, and the rich would as well readily oblige him with generous contributions.⁷⁴ His initiatives to open catechetical and other regular schools for poor children are well known. In them he also provided the students with *kaññi* (rice gruel) for lunch, and dress. He also used to distribute Marian rosaries and scapulars among them. The regular source of funds for them was the system of *piṭiyari*.⁷⁵ For more money he would contact the parishes and other benefactors.⁷⁶

We have already mentioned how before taking over the Plasanal Monastery the prior out of his concern for the health and wellbeing of its would be inhabitants personally went and studied the situation there. Once when he received a special kind of deliciously sweet mangoes, he sent them to the monasteries with the instruction that their seedlings be planted in every monastery compound. This variety of mangoes eventually came to be called *pioru-mānga* (prior-mango).⁷⁷ Another time he sent to the Sisters some mangoes of two different varieties that he had received from Parayi Tharakan, and some small chillies from a plant that he had grown.⁷⁸ He thoughtfully used to send to them other things like spiritual books, some of which he himself had copied for them; it is interesting that once he sent to them some tobacco powder in a bottle which was perhaps meant especially for the

⁷³CWC IV (1990): 109; CSK IV (1986): 140.

⁷⁴Referring to *Ālocana* : 44, Valerian 1939: 288.

⁷⁵*Piṭiyari* means 'a handful of rice.' Each family every time they take rice to cook a meal, put away a handful of it as a means of raising funds for a special purpose.

⁷⁶Quoting Parappuram, Valerian 1939: 288-89.

⁷⁷CWC IV (1990): 45; CSK IV (1986): 72-73: The prior adds a spiritual thought here: "These trees besides yielding sweet fruits will live longer than I. Hence they remind us of human weakness and unsteadiness. Therefore, let us name them *Dukrān* [a Syriac word meaning 'memorial']".

⁷⁸CWC IV (1990): 84; CSK IV (1986): 113-114.

use of the mother superior.⁷⁹ He was generous in appreciating the good examples and achievements of the members. For example, he praises the good works of Fr Jacob Valiyara,⁸⁰ and the virtuous life and acceptance of sufferings of Fr Thomas Nellissery.⁸¹

Chavara's compassionate heart comes out in his care and concern for the poor, sick, suffering and dying. His letter to the Kainakari parishioners, dated 15 October 1869, asking them to start a Confraternity of Happy Death and a House of Charity to take care of the destitute, aged and the street beggars, speak volumes about his compassionate love.⁸² In it he cites the example of saints and others including his confrere Fr Valiyara. The latter, the prior says, previously was not leading an edifying life for which he had corrected him several times. Then there was in Mannanam Monastery a domestic helper called Geevarghese from Koyilmukku who was suffering from very loathsome piles. Valiyara rendered him heroic service and saw him dying a happy death. This led to a spiritual change in him. He became a good retreat preacher, and never again he needed any correction! "See how pleasing to God is caring for the sick," the prior concludes.⁸³

In his letter dated 2 September 1870 to the vicar of Mannanam Monastery Fr Kuriakose Eliseus the prior writes:

I feel concerned about a monastery in which no one is sick. St Teresa of Avila believed that God showers more blessings on monasteries in which there are always some sick members. Thomman [*perhaps a servant appointed to look after the sick and the aged*] says that you do not show enough interest in caring for the *vallyaccan* [elderly priest], and that you do not provide him with enough bread and milk. Is it not the reason why he is so weak? Don't you feel sorry about it? Let me know.⁸⁴

As a pastor the prior was a good shepherd after the model of Jesus Christ who laid down his life for the sheep.

One day when Fr Kuriakose [Chavara] was getting ready to visit a parishioner, severely affected by small pox, the people tried to dissuade him for fear of contagion. But he said: "This is my duty,

⁷⁹CWC IV (1990): 73-74; CSK IV (1986): 105-106.

⁸⁰CWC I (1990): 68-69; CSK I (1081): 78-79.

⁸¹CWC I (1990): 71-72; CSK I (1081): 82-84.

⁸²CWC IV (1990): 117-127; CSK IV (1986): 150-161.

⁸³CWC IV (1990): 125-126; CSK IV (1986): 158.

⁸⁴CWC IV (1990): 46; CSK IV (1986): 74.

and God will be at my side," and boldly went to the sick man's house. Not only did he administer the sacrament to the sick man, but also, with appropriate counsels, helped him to die a peaceful death.⁸⁵

To the offenders he was like the father of the prodigal son (Lk 15:11-32). We have already mentioned how in his desperate condition the rebel Fr Antony Thondanat took refuge in Fr Prior.⁸⁶ As soon as he received Thondanat's letter showing signs of repentance and pleading for reconciliation, Chavara, with the archbishop's permission, arranged for a meeting with him in a church in Fort Kochi. On the appointed day the prior reached there at 11 am and patiently waited till 5 pm when the man arrived rather stealthily! The prior went forward and bade him peace! Sitting on the veranda of the church they talked. Fr Prior assured the poor man that mediating with the archbishop he would have him reinstated as a priest in the vicariate. In the meantime Chavara accommodated him in Mannanam monastery, helped him to make a good retreat and confession. Eventually with all the formalities completed the archbishop received him.⁸⁷

The steward of Mannanam Monastery called Mathan unjustly appropriated some property of the monastery for which he was punished by the civil court. Later he filed a complaint against Chavara in the criminal court of Alapuzha. The case was dismissed as fraud. Chavara sincerely forgave Mathan, and made vain efforts to have him reconciled with the monastery. Still he continued generously to help Mathan in his financial needs. He then justly wants his followers also to emulate his example. So he exhorts them through his testament: "The monastery of Mannanam must render as much help as possible to the family of Mathan Manjooran Kalapurackal of the parish of Muttuchira. In so doing you will be imitating the disciples of Christ and setting a model."⁸⁸

Chavara's love and concern for the community of Sisters in Koonammavu was obvious. Fr Kuriakose Porukara says: "Just as Patriarch Jacob had a greater love for his younger son Benjamin, so he [Chavara] loved them [the Sisters] most deeply, and brought them up most carefully, providing for all their needs, even as a mother takes

⁸⁵Beccaro 2003: 8; SP: 26.

⁸⁶See above under the section entitled "Credibility as Credential."

⁸⁷For details see Kochumuttom 2014: 199-203.

⁸⁸CWC IV (1990): 79; CSK IV (1986): 102.

care of her children."⁸⁹ His love for them indeed was both paternal and maternal, the former symbolized by the love of Patriarch Jacob and the latter by that of a mother. In fact especially as he advanced in age his parental feelings were deeper and deeper. "Thus in all things, small or big, spiritual or temporal, our prior, by the grace of God, did [for us] all that was necessary in spite of the old age and ill health."⁹⁰ His usual way of addressing his confreres was *sahodarankal* or *kūṭappirappukal* (those born of the same womb/mother). But in his testament he calls them *priyamulla-kunṅunkal* (beloved little children)!⁹¹ In many of his letters to the Sisters he addresses them, too, likewise.⁹² In the letter to his parishioners of Kainakari he fondly calls them as *sahodarankal* (those born of the same womb) and *makkal* (children)!⁹³

12. Broadminded and Farsighted

It is needless to say that the superior is the point of unity in the community. In this regard, according to Chavara, a superior – major or local – should be concerned not merely about those under his care and about matters during his term of office. He should take interest also in matters related to other communities and to times ahead of his term. Let him be broadminded and farsighted as Chavara himself was. This is the ideal he sets forth in his testament:

It is the duty of the vicars of monasteries to foster genuine love and bond among all members of the congregation. No matter how numerous the monasteries are, all the members should be like children of the same family, born of the same mother and grown up by drinking her milk. Such sincere love should never diminish but keep ever increasing. Consider it to be my most important advice. In order that this love may never lose its fervour, the vicars should show more care in granting the requests of the vicars of other monasteries than in looking after the needs of their own respective monasteries. When they meet to discuss various issues they must remember to settle all the pending accounts. The vicars should ensure that the warmth of fraternal love is ever maintained. For it,

⁸⁹SP: 29.

⁹⁰CKC: 170-171; KMN: 175. This is an entry of April 1870. For more details see Kochumuttom 2014: 340-345.

⁹¹CWC IV (1990): 70; CSK IV (1986): 99.

⁹²For example, Letters VII,2; VII,6; VII,7; and VII,11 in CWC IV 1990) and CSK IV (1986).

⁹³ Letter IX,7 in CWC IV (1990): 117 and CSK IV (1986): 150.

even if there is nothing special to communicate, they should frequently correspond and keep mutually informed of the community matters and help in meeting the needs of one another.⁹⁴ The superiors should similarly be farsighted so that in their planning of matters they should take into account not only the present but also the future needs of the congregation and monasteries. The prior obviously was such a farsighted superior, and he has clearly stated his concerns about the future:

It is for the salvation of our Christian brethren that Almighty God has willed to found this congregation. However, due to the shortage of members we are not able to render the help they need in this regard. In order to remedy this situation you must request our archbishop for permission to establish yet another novitiate at Mannanam and to have missionary Fr Gerard as another novice master. If so, the two novice masters—Leopold and his brother Gerard—can do everything with mutual accord. That is, during the year they can by turn according to their convenience stay and look after the affairs in Mannanam and Koonammavu. Thus Koonammavu will be the novitiate for the monasteries to the north of Koonammavu, and Mannanam for those to the south of Koonammavu. God willing these two regions may be eventually developed as two provinces.

It is necessary that more monasteries and convents be opened in the south, that is, one monastery each to the east and west of Mannanam and some convents with boarding houses. All these could be easily achieved and managed if one of these missionaries is put in charge of the novitiate at Mannanam. There could be a monastery at Thathampally and another at Mavelikara and two others to the east and west of them. This will help us very much to render necessary and useful spiritual ministry to the faithful of the two vicariates of Varapuzha and Kollam. It is equally necessary to have two convents of Sisters, one at Mutholy and another at Mannanam, with boarding houses attached. A little effort and diligence on your part would suffice to accomplish all these things.⁹⁵

Chavara's farsightedness makes him look back to the past as well, and he wants his followers also to do so. He gratefully recalls the many people, especially the missionaries as well as the locals, who have

⁹⁴CWC IV (1990): 71; CSK IV (1986): 100.

⁹⁵CWC IV (1990): 71-72; CSK IV (1986): 100-101.

contributed to the foundation and growth of the congregation, and commends them to the prayer of the present and future generations.

13. Disciplined and Disciplinarian

The prior was *disciplined as well as a disciplinarian*. It is already obvious that he was a well-disciplined person so that his life was a silent exhortation for all. He also took care to enforce the rules among the community members, and not to tolerate laxity and indiscipline. He dutifully used to correct the erring members. For example, several times he sternly warned and corrected Fr Jacob Valiyara who in his early life was not leading an edifying life.⁹⁶ In his circulars to the members of the congregation⁹⁷ the prior strongly corrects them in matters related to religious discipline, practice of humility, obedience, charity, religious modesty, genuine piety, community life, poverty, penance, silence and recollection, familiarity with lay persons, and duties of religious vocation.

After mentioning the lapses in the communities he deplores: "A thing that is most saddening and ruining our monasteries is that now-a-days in our communities the members tend to see the superior as their subordinate, and themselves as his superiors...The superiors on their part feel compelled to give orders not in accordance with God's will and our rules, but considering the liking and interests of the members."⁹⁸ He then reminds the superiors of their serious responsibility to give the members timely corrections and directions, and not to relax the religious discipline. He further observes:

I feel the root of all the above mentioned evils is undue indulgence on the part of the superiors. They neither endeavour to root out the evil tendencies in the subordinates, nor to correct their mistakes and give punishments when necessary; instead, for reasons that are not honest before God they allow them to have their way; and when there are differences of opinion they allow the youngsters to carry on with their points of view. The youngsters, on their part, are not keen to have recourse to the superior even when they are not sure of their course of action. Let the superiors remember that they shall be responsible before God for the endless evils that result from their negligence. So let all the superiors take care that they shall not

⁹⁶CWC IV (1990): 125; CSK IV (1986): 158.

⁹⁷There are three such circulars published in CWC IV (1990): 60-69; CSK IV (1986): 88-98.

⁹⁸CWC IV (1990): 63; CSK IV (1986): 92.

be punished for the misbehaviour of the subordinates; that they shall not be found guilty of having ruined our congregation, which is the work of God, through their indulgence leading to lax practices and their reluctance in giving timely corrections. Therefore, let it be known to all that the indiscipline and evil tendencies shall not be tolerated, and that those who through their scandalous practices bring disgrace and disturbance to the community shall be duly and according to the rules punished.⁹⁹

14. Expertise and Care in Temporalities

Obviously the founding fathers had pretty good expertise in temporalities like real estate, agriculture, construction works, and money matters. Palackal first as secretary to the vicar apostolic and then as consultant to him was a great help in the administration of the vicariate's temporalities.¹⁰⁰ In the context of the search for the site for and the building of Mannanam monastery their insights about landed property and construction works were amazing. While selecting the land they insisted on certain criteria: it should be large, reasonably elevated, open and fertile, having a good source of water, and accessible by land and river.¹⁰¹ It was mostly Chavara who supervised the construction works in Mannanam. His practical wisdom and engineering skill were marvellous in the work of the press, the convent in Koonammavu and so on. While discussing the proposal for the monastery at Chethipuzha the prior gave in writing the specification that the land should have:

1. The land should be registered in the name of the common prior of the monasteries of Mannanam and other places.
2. The place should be sufficiently distant so that the noise of the market may not disturb the life in the monastery.
3. There should be a source of good water. There should be a river close by so that people can conveniently reach the place by boat.
4. The place should be sufficiently large with big trees around in order to moderate the heat. Besides the space for the construction of the monastery, there should be place also for gardens and leisurely walk.¹⁰²

⁹⁹CWC IV (1990): 65; CSK IV (1986): 94.

¹⁰⁰CWC I (1990): 62-63; CSK I (1986): 70-71.

¹⁰¹For details see CWC I (1990): 5ff.; CSK I (1986): 8ff.

¹⁰²The letter is reproduced in CWC IV: 89-90 and CSK IV (1986): 119-120.

The prior used to give instructions to the vicars of monasteries about property transactions, farming and so on.¹⁰³ In one of his letters to the Sisters he gives detailed directions regarding construction works and farming:

Make an earnest request to the mason to come on Friday, too, and complete the work. Let the Sister-procurator speak to them. Both the [wooden] granaries, the large one and the smaller one, have to be set on pillars built on a granite foundation so that termites may not eat [the wood and grains]. There should be a veranda [around the granaries]. Its floor should be beaten hard and plastered with cow-dung so that on it paddy or other grains can be collected and measured.

The soil at the ground around the coconut saplings inside and outside [the enclosure walls] must be tilled and the fibre-roots must be removed. Channels should be dug around them and packed with compost. Experts must be employed to clear the top of the young coconut-trees of dry leaves etc. Only when the base and the top of the coconut-trees are thus cleaned, they will yield abundant fruit. On the one hand it will be good for the trees, and on the other you will get plenty of firewood as well. Ask the procurator to do all this. Let her not worry about the money to pay the workers. Our task is only to arrange for the work to be done. God will give us money. The property is not ours, but God's. Our competence here is only to work.¹⁰⁴

15. Transparency and Accountability

In money matters the prior and other founders were utterly transparent and honest, and he kept detailed accounts. We have still with us the detailed records of almost all the money received and spent right from the day when the permission for setting up the monastery was obtained. On 18 June 1840, when they began living as a community in *bes-rauma* (Mannanam), they opened a common account as well of all incomes and expenses in detail.¹⁰⁵ The prior through his letters used to remind the local superiors of the duty of keeping proper

¹⁰³For example, see his letter to Fr Kuriakose Porukara in CWC IV (1990): 34-35; CSK (1986): 61-62.

¹⁰⁴CWC IV (1990): 81; CSK IV (1986): 111.

¹⁰⁵As statement to this effect in Chavara's hand, found in the diary of Fr Kuriakose Eliseus Porukara, is reproduced in CWC I (1990): 175-76; CSK I (1981): 208-209.

accounts. In his testament he says: "When you the superiors assemble periodically to discuss different matters, take care to settle your mutual financial accounts till that date."¹⁰⁶ He taught and strongly advised the Sisters, too, to maintain proper accounts. "You must be very accurate in writing the accounts," he writes to them, and then gives a set of model entries of items as well.¹⁰⁷

Chavara's moral sensitivity regarding money matters was remarkably deep. While the construction works of the convent in Koonammavu were going on, once they ran out of money. In order to meet an urgent need Chavara sent Fr Geevarghese Thoppil to parishes to appeal to the people for help. He returned with Rs 400 that he received as donations from different persons. With just half of that amount the need was met. "What could we do with the remaining Rs 200?" they enquired of the prior. With no hesitation he replied: "Return it immediately to the donors!"

There is still another incident that similarly bears testimony to the Fathers' sense of honesty in handling money. This too is related to the money they spent for the construction of the convent in Koonammavu. Chavara writes:

As we planned to construct the convent we had no money with us. But God inspired good people to contribute money. Thus we received as donations Rs 8000/- with which the work was completed. Apart from it, there was an amount of Rs 100/- which according to the conscience of the missionary Fr Leopold was not honest money. Hence we refused to use it for the construction works. Instead, with the archbishop's permission we distributed it among the poor as alms.¹⁰⁸

The accurate accounts that they maintained later on proved to be very helpful. For example, when eventually the Latin Rite and Syrian Rite Sisters were separated to form respectively the CTC and CMC Congregations, a dispute arose with regard to whose property was the convent in Koonammavu. It was resolved in favour of the Syrian CMC group because the accounts clearly showed that the amount Rs 8000/- that was spent for the construction works was contributed by the Syrian people and parishes.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶CWC IV (1990): 71; CSK IV (1986): 100.

¹⁰⁷CWC IV (1990): 83-84; CSK IV (1986): 113-114.

¹⁰⁸CWC I (1990): 115-116; CSK I (1981): 138.

¹⁰⁹CKC: 297.

16. Documentation

Chavara's insistence on making and keeping detailed records of everything is admirable. As a result we have got an almost exhaustive collection of reliable documents about his life and contributions, and the beginnings of the two congregations. When we consider the climatic hazards and poor storage facilities of those days, it is next to a miracle that most of the records have come down to us in a pretty good shape. We must really appreciate and be grateful to the past generations for the pains they have taken to preserve them. Ultimately the credit of course goes to the founder Chavara. He not only regularly noted down everything but also trained and instructed the members of both the congregations to do so. He wrote to the Sisters: "You must urge [the chronicler] Sr Anna to note down every detail. Overcoming laziness she must without fail record even things that may appear insignificant. After some time you will yourselves enjoy reading it."¹¹⁰ It is a matter of legitimate pride that all the local houses have kept up the practice of chronicle-writing and maintenance of documents, which certainly should be continued in a more scientific manner.

Chavara's *Nālāgamangal/The Chronicles*¹¹¹ is an excellent case of responsible and conscientious recording of events. The author is particular "to write only what I have personally seen and heard from credible persons."¹¹² While beginning to write about the rebel Kudakkachira he says:

I must write something about him [Kudakkachira] so that people may be aware of his character. He has especially been the cause of what I am going to describe. But here my heart and the hand that holds the quill tremble. For, though I will be writing only what I have heard and seen, it would affect his reputation. Some people may even read into my words more than what I intend. Still I feel obliged to write about him, because his mischievous work has caused spiritual harm to many people and is likely to cause more. My only intention is to warn my brethren against the great danger of being deprived of the protection of our blessed and beloved Mother, the Church of Rome. So I pray to my guardian angel to

¹¹⁰CWC IV (1990): 76; CSK IV (1986): 106.

¹¹¹This is published as the first volume of *Cāvara Accaṅṅe Saṃpūṇa Kṛtikal* (CSK) / *Complete Works of Chavara* (CWC).

¹¹²CWC I (1990): 53; CSK I (1981): 60.

keep me from committing the mistake of slipping to the left or right out of human weakness.¹¹³

The Chronicles has turned out to be a rare document of the history of the Church and society of the 19th century Kerala for which we should ever feel indebted to St Chavara. Let me repeat an observation I made elsewhere:

The events described [in *The Chronicles*] are not merely those pertaining to the new religious congregations but to the Church of Kerala at large, and are presented as well in the wider ecclesial perspective and that too with details concerning dates, places and persons. Therefore, the book is of unique value for the students of history. It gives a lot of information about the history of that period that is not available elsewhere... The author also quotes original documents which add to the authenticity of the book. Chavara's own personality, too, is clearly reflected in it: his sense of obedience and humility, zeal for the orthodox faith and unity of the Church, loyalty and attachment to the Holy See, prudence in judging persons and situations, ability in taking practical decisions, popularity and influence in the society, etc.¹¹⁴

17. Chavara's Portrait of an Ideal Superior

Chavara, even as he is uncompromising about the practice of obedience, expects the superiors to be humble and democratic in the manner of functioning while making decisions related to the community and individual members. Far from being authoritarian and unilateral they must involve the subjects in the process of decision making and thus promote among them responsible and creative obedience. Chavara has clearly spelt out a code of conduct for the superiors:

1. A good superior should consider himself as a servant of all others in the community. He must have as his model Jesus Christ who having washed His disciples' feet said: "So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet" (Jn 13:14).

The monastery and the community are not for the sake of the superior, but he is for their sake. Therefore, he must love them as his own children. As a loving mother is, so he must be more concerned about meeting their spiritual and bodily needs than

¹¹³CWC I: 154-155; CSK I (1981): 183-184.

¹¹⁴Kochumuttom 2014: 260.

his own. He should not let any of his religious to be sad even for a moment. God is not pleased with a service rendered in sadness. During the allotted times all must together recreate with religious moderation.

2. The superior is appointed by God to observe the rules as well as to enforce them among the members. He should not relax them. Many great religious congregations have perished because of the superiors' carelessness in this regard. On the contrary, the continuance of a congregation in its spiritual vigour and vitality will invariably depend on its superiors' care and vigilance.
3. The superior should not wait for the members to approach him with their needs. Instead, he should anticipate their needs and meet them. If so, they will be ever so happy and seek permission only for genuine needs.
4. While giving an order to the subjects, the superior must do it as if he is lovingly making a request of them. However, in case they refuse to respect such sweet and gentle words, he should not hesitate sternly to exercise his authority.
5. As the rules demand, the superior should be an example for others in all matters. His task is not a pleasant one, indeed. However, when he does it in a spirit of charity in accordance with God's will, He will render it a matter of delight.¹¹⁵

These are indeed the rules the Saint himself as a concerned superior faithfully observed so that his subjects considered it a privilege to live under him. As a matter of fact there is hardly any instance of people complaining about his way of functioning as a superior.

18. Chavara in His Own Eyes

Anybody going through the biography of Chavara will say that he was an ideal superior. One should be a pessimist to find any serious fault in him in the role of superior. But Chavara in his own eyes is full of failures! That is of course characteristic of the penitent saint that he honestly was. For example, in 1869 during the days when the 40-hour adoration of the Blessed Sacrament was going on in the Monastery Chapel, Koonammavu, he wrote to the Sisters, begging pardon for his lapses:

¹¹⁵Chavara gave these instructions in a letter he wrote to Fr Kuriakose Porukara who was the then vicar of Mannanam Monastery, and are reproduced in Valerian 1939: 373-374.

My dear children,... I am afraid my days are coming to an end. So I request you to pray for me to God the Father, especially during these days of the 40-hour adoration. Please pardon me for my bad examples, scandalous words, and disorderly behaviour. By my negligence I have caused scandals for the innocent little souls [in the boarding house] who are entrusted to my care, and also for you the brides of the Lord. Please pray to God that He may kindly forgive them and spare me the terrible punishment I justly deserve. Intercede with Him that I may spend the rest of my life doing always His will in all things and finally die a happy death.¹¹⁶

Another clear instance is the words of apology included in his testament, written in August 1870, just six months before his death:

Finally, I beg pardon of the Very Rev. Vicar Apostolic, the Very Rev. Provincial Delegate and the Very Rev. Missionary Fathers, and all the members of the monasteries. I beg of them before God to pardon me for all my shortcomings in fulfilling the duties and services that I owed each of them. Again, I entreat my confreres to pray for me. I professed my religious vows as the first member of our congregation; and I was made the first prior. But I have not fulfilled to satisfaction my obligation in observing our *Constitutions* and enforcing the same. I did not give you good example. You must kindly forgive the scandals I have given you. Instead of following my bad example, by living still more zealously you must make reparation for my failures, too.¹¹⁷

We may rightly conclude that Saint Chavara practised in spirit and letter the advice of the Lord: "When you have done all that is commanded you, say, 'We are just unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty'" (Lk 17:10). Still more, he in all sincerity sang and continues to sing with Mother Mary: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden... he who is mighty has done great things in me, and holy is his name" (Lk 1:47-49).

¹¹⁶CWC IV (1990): 77; CSK (1986): 107.

¹¹⁷CWC IV (1990): 74; CSK (1986): 103.

ĀTMĀNUTĀPAM

A Staurological Understanding of 'Tattvamasi'

Jojo Parecattil CMI

Abstract: Jojo Parecattil CMI makes an Indian reading of ĀTMĀNUTĀPAM and in the lines of Chavara, he discovers a staurological understanding of 'Tattvamasi'. *Tattvamasi* is one of the greatest Upaniṣadic sayings found in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (6.8.7). The undivided supreme unity is the whole message of the precept. It is a vedāntic articulation of harmony. Parallels of the same vedāntic teaching can be seen in Christianity as well. Similar teachings are found in the book of Wisdom (Wis 7:25-27). In the staurological understanding of 'Tattvamasi', the cross of Jesus represents both the 'tat' and 'tvam' parts of 'Tattvamasi'. In the crucifix, Chavara read his own true and authentic autobiography. The self-criticism, before the crucifix led him to the self-realization of *tattvamasi*-consciousness. In *Ātmānutāpam* we see a *Tattvamasi*-consciousness, which is completely Christological and staurological. In *Ātmānutāpam*, Chavara is growing from the literal meaning of 'Tattvamasi' to its intended meaning. Before the crucified Lord, the Bible enlightens us to shed the limitations of humanity and grow into the self-realization. There, Chavara realizes this staurological dimension of *tattvamasi*.

Keywords: *Tattvamasi*, *Upaniṣad*, spirituality, *chāṇḍāla*, Advaita, philosophy, scripture, Śaṅkara, Wisdom, society, *Tattvamasi*, inclusivism, Sanskrit, revolution, Brahmin, school, Mannanam, philosophy, spirituality, religion, caste, religious, students, sacrifice, marginalised, Dalits, Vivekananda, dualism, non-dualism, Brahman, Hinduism, contemplation, meditation, ignorance, Confucius, Rāvaṇa, Joshua, Jericho, Bethel, Canaan, Bible, *Ātmānutāpam*, consciousness, Pilate, disciple, Sanskrit, testament, David, law, Nathan,, Israel, transgressions, prayers, compassion, crucifix, Gospels, priests, Pharisees, compunction, self-realization, Promised Land, Calvary.

1. Introduction

Tattvamasi (you are that) that resonates from the sixth chapter of *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (6.8.7) is one of the greatest Upaniṣadic sayings. The undivided supreme unity is the whole message of the precept. It is

the singular nucleus and essence of all Indian thoughts and spirituality. The maxim originates in the depth of the soul of India, proclaiming for all time that all beings are the makeover of the one and the same divine spirit. It is this same blissful word that taught humanity to see the divinity in human beings and respect them accordingly. But the malaise of the caste and class systems divided Indians and has left the unifying foundations of basic humanness neglected, ignored and abandoned. This is the sad plight of the glorious spiritual heritage of India.

2. *Tattvamasi*: A Vedāntic Articulation of Harmony

One day, Śri Śaṅkara on a summer noon after a dip in the holy Ganges in Vāraṇāsi, was proceeding towards the Temple of Lord Viswanāth. His disciples went along with him. The Great *āchārya* saw an outcaste, a *chaṇḍāla*, coming along with his dogs in his way. According to the caste practices prevailing in the society, he told the *chaṇḍāla*, “move away, move away!” But to his great surprise, the *chaṇḍāla* responded with an unexpected question: “Move away, Move away! Do you wish to move matter from matter or you mean to separate spirit from the Spirit? You have established that the Absolute is everywhere - in you and me and yet you want me to get away from you, as if I were different. Is it this body, built up of food that you wish to keep at a distance from that body which is also built up of food? Or do you wish to separate Pure Awareness which is present here from the same awareness present there?”¹

Even for Śaṅkara it was indeed a painful undertaking to bring the great ideals of the philosophy of Advaita especially like that of *Tattvamasi*, to the practical situations of daily affairs. That is why though he was a teacher of Advaita (Non-Dualism) who propagated the principle of one Infinite Self in all, he asked the *chaṇḍāla* to move away from his path. The fact was, in asking the outcast to move out of his path, he was disrespecting the indwelling divine spirit within him. It is one thing to proclaim the great gospel of indivisibility of the spirit and it is totally another thing to practice an attitude of accepting and

¹annamay;dannamayamathav; caitanyam£va caitanyit
yativara dĀr\$karttu~ v;²Āchasi k\$~ brĀhi gaccha gacch£ti.
pratyagvastuni nistara~ gasahaj;nand;budhi~ budha
vipruya~ ¼vapacµÉyamityapi mah;in kµÉya~ vibh£dabhrama;?
ki~ ga~ gj;buni bi~ bit£Ébarama³a ca³ç;lav\$th\$payai
pĀr£v;intaramasti k;²canagha¿\$, m»taku~ bhayµrv;~ bar£?

acknowledging the same spirit in all human beings especially in India. Any conception and practice that is opposite to it, is not appropriate for the one who adheres to the doctrine of *Tattovamasi* or to the philosophy of Advaita. According to the ruling of the scripture, there should be always consistency between the thoughts, words and deeds.² Hence, in order to instruct Śaṅkara, Lord Śiva appeared to him in the guise of a *chāṇḍāla* and taught him how to practice his own Vedānta philosophy. It was only when he saw God in the form of a *chāṇḍāla* that he could actually succeed in living the great Vedāntic philosophy of solidarity and harmony.

Parallels of the same Vedāntic teaching can be seen in Christianity as well. According to the noble teachings of the Bible, impurity has no place in true knowledge: “She is a breath of God’s power - a pure and radiant stream of glory from the Almighty. Nothing that is defiled can ever steal its way into Wisdom. She is a reflection of eternal light, a perfect mirror of God’s activity and goodness. [...] She makes everything new, although she herself never changes. From generation to generation, she enters the souls of holy people, and makes them God’s friends and prophets” (Wis 7:25-27). In the same way, impurity and divisive attitude are not proper for the pure and sacred wisdom of *Tattovamasi*. Apparently this understanding cleansed the caste based isolations and impurity of thoughts of Śaṅkara. This eventually made him a great prophet and proponent of unity and companionship between various castes of the society.

3. Saint Chavara’s Innovation of an Inclusive Approach

Tattovamasi is basically the deep conviction of the *Rṣis* about the divinity that is rooted at the core of human existence by which God and man become one. This vision of unity and harmony teaches one to see everything as one, undivided reality, which is ultimately divine in nature. The evil thoughts of division and disharmony separate people of God by isolating matter from matter and spirit from the Spirit; caste from caste country from country etc., just because of mere human considerations and calculations. This is undeniably an offence to humanity. By practising the great wisdom of *Tattovamasi* in various

²yathā cittaṁ tathā vācāḥ yathā vācāstathā kriyāḥ |
cittā vācā kriyāyāṁ ca sādhanīmākarāpatāḥ ||

The subject of thinking, speaking and working must be same and similar in human life. In the life of saints and great persons, we do not find the difference among the objects of thinking, talking as well, as working.

spheres of life, one should be able to go beyond all the dividing factors of caste and creed.

It is significant here to note that Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara initiated a social and cultural revolution in the Kerala society, which introduced a new era of inclusivism. O. N. V. Kurupp, a prominent poet of the South who was awarded '*Patmabhūṣaṇ*,' testifies to it as follows: "In this great land of Advaita (Non-Dualism), Saint Chavara is one who by his holy deeds has written in golden letters the truth that the Christian faith is not indifferent from that."³ Saint Chavara was a great apostle of *Dalit* movements. On the Mannanam hill, attached to the mother house of the CMI Congregation, he opened a Sanskrit school for children from all castes at a time when Sanskrit was considered to be the language of the Brahmin elite. He also collected funds from various parishes and beneficiaries to buy a plot of wet rice field nearby and ordered that the monastery must cultivate it in order to meet the expense of the school.

Saint Chavara believed that great ideals - like *Tattvamasi*, which is the summit of the Advaita philosophy - are the common heritage of Indians irrespective of their religion and spirituality. By opening a Sanskrit school, where students from both the high class and low class could sit together as children of God and learn the sacred language, he showed how this common heritage can be made available to all Indians. O. N. V. Kuruppu admires this initiative of St Chavara as follows: "He opened an institution for those who were condemned as having no right to learn Sanskrit. Noteworthy is the fact that it was done by a Christian who was a religious priest; it was made possible in that caste ridden society, only because of his great determination."⁴ There is a beautiful logic that Saint Chavara placed before the teacher who came from Thrissur to teach Sanskrit when the teacher had some reservations to teach the students of low cast people in the beginning: "If the religion does not have any stipulation, for the rice that is to be used for the most sacred sacrifice, which is prepared by the trampling of a low cast person's feet, then why there is such stroppy reservations only for studying Sanskrit, sitting together with him?" Definitely people who are close to God are also close to the poor and the least ones who are treated as outcast and are marginalised by the society.

Being a great apostle of Dalits, perhaps Saint Chavara is among those who realised the lessons of *Tattvamasi* and practised it in his life.

³*Karmalakusumam*, 9 January 2014.

⁴O. N. V. Kurupp, "Adānapradānaḥḥaḥḥe Suviḥḥakan," 38.

According to Swami Vivekananda, the love and mercy that *Tattvamasi* contains is the basis of all Indian moralities.⁵ Paul Doyens also considers it as the foundation of one's love for the neighbour: "It is highly impossible to love one's neighbour as oneself, without the base of *Tattvamasi*."⁶ When man started to love man as God his love became divine as "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8).

4. God and Man Become One in *Tattvamasi*

St Chavara is one, who avoided any form of split mentalities and realized the essence of *Tattvamasi* in himself, in the socio-historical context of his time. This revolution initiated by Saint Chavara caused rapid socio-cultural changes. Those changes in turn resulted significantly in creating conducive atmosphere for the overall growth and development of the state. There is also a transpersonal and Christological or better a staurological implication for that realization of *Tattvamasi* in his life, which is very well reflected in the lines of *Ātmānutāpam*. This poem, which is the essence of his spiritual realization, can be viewed as a compunctional pilgrimage from *dvaitam* (dualism) to *advaitam* (non-dualism), i.e., his sinful nature of dualism (*dvaitam* - where God and one's soul are two realities) to that perfect state of non-dualism (*advaitam* - where God and one's soul become one reality). When he recognized his own divine and human nature in its wholeness in the naked form of the crucifix, the great Indian saying "You are that" echoed also in his soul. *Ātmānutāpam* is the poetic expression of that spiritual tension of St Chavara, which he had to undergo as he identified himself with the crucified Christ.

5. The Literal and Intentional Meaning of *Tattvamasi*

Upaniṣad is the peak of Indian philosophical and theological thinking. Sukumar Azhikod regarded it as the spiritual Himālaya of India. The relation between *Ātman* (Individual soul) and *Brahman* (Supreme Soul) is the main theme of all the Upaniṣads. Śaṅkara has summarised the entire teachings of Upaniṣads into four great sayings, and they are generally known as *mahā-vākyas* (great-sayings). They are "*prajñānam brahmaṁ*" (Brahman is consciousness - Ita. Up. 3.5.3), "*ayaṁ ātma brahma*" (This soul is Brahman, Braha. Up. 2.5.19), "*ahaṁ brahmāsmi*" (I am God, Braha. Up. 1.4.10), and "*Tattvamasi*" (You are that, Chāndo. Up. 6.8.7).

⁵Azhikod, *Tattvamasi*, 128-129.

⁶Azhikod, *Tattvamasi*, 141.

Tattvamasi is composed of three parts, i.e., 'tat' + 'tvam' + 'asi' (that + you + are), respectively. The word 'tat' (that) in *Tattvamasi* indicates Brahman, who is the Supreme Soul; 'tvam' (you) signifies Ātman (Individual soul); the last part 'asi' means 'to be' and here it is translated into 'are.' Literally, thus, *Tattvamasi* means "You are that." When we critically analyse this literal meaning, the identity between Ātman and Brahman is something, which is impossible, as the Ātman who is the individual soul is having many limitations in himself in contrast to Brahman, who is beyond all kinds of limitations. Hence, it is through the intentional meaning that identity between them is established. The Supreme Soul, who is pure, infinite and beyond all limitations, guides and controls everything. Ātman, who resides in each individual, is bound to limitations and always is in bondage of ignorance and sin. By the saying "You are that," the identity of the individual soul with the Supreme Soul is established by the Upaniṣads. That they are not two ('*dvaitam*' - dualism) but one ('*advaitam*' - non-dualism), is the essence of *Tattvamasi*.

Tattvamasi is a *mahā-vākya* of realization; the human search for self-realization and God-realization culminates in *Tattvamasi*. The first *mahā-vākya*, i.e., "*prajñānam brahmaṁ*" is an answer to the question of the disciple, 'who is God?' The answer is "Brahman is consciousness," as it is the level of God-realization, it is only a theoretical knowledge about God. In the second level, the guru, who takes his knowledge into realization, tells the disciple that this God is the soul within the soul, "*ayaṁ ātma brahma*" (this soul is Brahman). The third *mahā-vākya* represents a deeper level of the guru's God-realization, in which he concludes that he is that God as the divine spirit is indwelling in him, "*ahaṁ brahmāsmi*" (I am God). And in the last *mahā-vākya*, the guru invites the disciple to become God; *Tattvamasi* (you are that). Among these four great sayings, *Tattvamasi* is regarded as the greatest among the four great sayings.

6. Ātmānutāpam: A Staurological Understanding of *Tattvamasi*

Hinduism is a religion that gives utmost importance to experience, and the ultimate purpose of any intellectual discussion on religion here is to take one eventually to the realization of God. But in the case of *Tattvamasi*, to realize it, no practical steps are seen in any of the Upaniṣads. In the opinion of Sukumar Azhikod, it may be because of the fact that they might not have been recorded.⁷ Nevertheless,

⁷Azhikkod, *Tattvamasi*, 129.

regarding its realization, there are differences of opinions among the scholars. According to one version, the great sayings provide only intellectual knowledge and only through deep contemplation one can realize them. There is an opposite view that just by listening to the great sayings, one gets experiential knowledge.⁸ As the great sayings are only the advice of the guru, there should be some practical steps to realize them. Mediating them through signs and symbols are against the Upaniṣads.⁹ Seeing that in *Tattvamasi*, what is contemplated on is neither sign nor symbol, rather God Himself, even the great *Praṇava Mantra* (*Oṃkāra*) has got its own limitations.

7. *Ātmānutāpam: An Avidya-dhyānam* (Meditation on Acts of Ignorance)

All the books of Hindu revelation teach that knowledge liberates one. But, in the *Kena Upaniṣad* we see a view that contradicts this general perception: "One, who thinks that he does not know, indeed knows, and one, who thinks that he knows, actually does not know it."¹⁰ That is to say, both *vidya* (knowledge) and *avidya* (ignorance) blind and delude the person keep him from true Reality. Therefore, both should be transcended to reach the highest state of Knowledge. For Confucius, "the greatest knowledge of life is the knowledge of one's own ignorance."¹¹ In the *Bṛhadāraṇya Upaniṣad*, we see a similar teaching, which leads human minds into shade of misunderstandings: "One who ponders on ignorance plunges into darkness, and one who ponders on knowledge, plunges into still greater darkness, and hence by ignorance, one should overcome death and experience eternity by knowledge." The implication of such sayings is that together with

⁸Azhikkod, *Tattvamasi*, 162.

⁹"na pratṣkṣṭvā itmadṛṣṭi kriyatṣ."

¹⁰"avijṛṣṭa vijṛṣṭi vijṛṣṭa avijṛṣṭi" (Kena Up. 2:3).

I do not imagine 'I know him well', and yet I cannot say 'I know him not'. Who of us knows this, knows him; and not who says 'I know him not'. And what of us who say 'I know not whether I know him well, little, or at all'?

¹¹yastu sarvviṣṭi bhāṭṭiṇi itmanyṅvṛṇu paṣṭyati
sarvabhāṭṭiṇi cṛṣṭiṇa tatṣ na vijugup satṣ.
yasmin sarvviṣṭi bhāṭṭiṇi itmaivṛṣṭiṇa
tatra kṣ mṣhaṭ kaṭ ṣṭkaṭ ṣṭkatvamanupaṣṭyati (Isa Up. 6-7)

A *sādhaka* (spiritual aspirant), who sees all beings in the Self, and the Self in all beings, feels no hatred by virtue of such realization. There is neither sorrow nor delusion for that seer of Oneness.

contemplating on God and virtue, he should also contemplate on himself and his limitations.

The concept of *Tattoamasi* is given a divine interpretation in the Upaniṣads, and accordingly it means, 'You are God.' But a human interpretation of the ideal is found in the *Ātmānutāpam* of St Chavara. In the poem, Chavara beautifully combines these two meditations, as they mutually enrich each other. As captured in the refrain of its lines, Chavara meditate on both God and His virtues, as well as on himself and his limitations.

O Lord of all, sinless, pure
Behold your slave, a miscreant
It makes me wholly heavy and sad,
As on your and virtue I muse! (V.143-146)

You my father, you my maker,
And ever changeless, I know, is your love
But when of my heavy sins I think
How could I stand thus before you! (V.147-150)

O furnace of love, ardently I thirst
For the treasure of your mercy even though
Hindered by sin; when your eyes benign
Oft I've felt, chasing my doubt (V.159-162)

When your bright visage I see
My gloom effaced, love glows
In your look of mercy I behold
A gentle saviour, not a judge (V.163-166)

The great Hindu epic *Rāmāyaṇa* is written so that one may become like god Rāma, and not like Rāvaṇa; *Rāmādivad varttitavyam na Rāvaṇādivat*, is the declaration of the scripture. Then, why does it contain the story of Rāvaṇa? It contains Rāvaṇa so that listening to it one can identify, one's evil deeds in it. As the story of Rāvaṇa helps one to become aware of one's own true state, so also, the story of Rāma helps one to become conscious of the state he or she is supposed to be in. It is only when one gives up one's own ways and permits God to dwell in that, *Tattoamasi* becomes a reality in life. Therefore, it is only when *Tattoamasi* is interpreted taking into consideration both the positive and negative elements of human life that it can lead one to realisation. When *Tattvamasi* is interpreted positively or divinely, only the idyllic

'*tat*' part, which one supposed to become, is realized. The '*toam*' part of *Tattoamasi* actually indicates one's true nature at the present moment. For this reason, the great saying *Tattoamasi*, requires, a holistic interpretation, taking into consideration both the human and divine elements of an individual. The Crucifix of Jesus represents both the '*tat*' and '*toam*' parts of *Tattoamasi*, i.e., the human state in which one is, and the divine state that one is supposed to achieve.

In the Book of Joshua, we see Joshua sending two men from Jericho to Ai, "which is beside Beth-aven, on the east side of Bethel," as part of his strategy to conquer Canaan. According to the scriptural interpretation, these two names - "Beth-aven" and "Bethel" have a deeper significance: "Beth-aven" means, "house of vanity," or "house of idols"; "Bethel" means, "house of God." For a long time, the Bible scholars considered them as two different names of the same place, but later they realized that they were two distinct places. The tussle between good and evil is always going on in the human soul from the time immemorial, and these two biblical names indicate this great fight between good and evil. Man is both Beth-aven, 'the house of vanity,' and Bethel, 'the house of God' at the same time. On one side man is kind, gracious, trustful, benevolent; and yet often he comes upon a vein of the purest selfishness that ever perverted a character. And this we find throughout history. Contrarities face us every day, and make us wonder why they should be. If we look at human person only from one of these perspectives, we get only a partial view. When both these aspects of human life are taken into consideration, we get a complete picture.

In this connection, it is also good to reflect on other two names that we find in Joshua 7:24, i.e., "Achan" and "Zerah." "Achan" means *trouble*; "Zerah" means *the rising of light*. These are two names of the same family. And we see the beauty of conjunction in Hosea 2:15, where God says, "And I will give her the valley of Achor for a door of hope." IT implies that God would make the valley of trouble the door of hope. Certainly, the message of Bible touches life at every point and in the pages of the Bible we find our own history, a mirror in which we see ourselves.

8. Crucifix: An Autogenic Self-Image of St. Chavara

In the crucifix, St Chavara read his own true and authentic autobiography. The self-criticism, which he made by standing before the crucifix led him to the self-realization of *tattoamasi-consciousness*. It is from that awareness, he confessed before Jesus: "I, the cause of your

death," (VIII.108). As he recognized his own self-image in the crucifix, it gave him a deep conviction about his true identity. While spending long hours before the crucifix, a surge of memories about the sinful deeds of his past life flooded to his mind. In that process of looking back, he realized the true picture of his own feeble nature, which was identical with that of the crucifix. Gradually, the cross, which was folly for the gentiles became the cause of self-knowledge and *tattvamasi-consciousness*, for him. The crucified Jesus, the artist, sketched his image on the canvas of St Chavara's soul, with the brush of nails that fastened his body to the cross and with the paint of the blood of his wounds. From the crucifix, he learned the truth of all theologies - 'Jesus has died for my sins.'

My soul in perdition sends forth a foul stink!
 Say but the word with your sacred tongue
 And my renewed spirit shall its virtue win back
 Cleansed in the blood, from your body streaming
 My sins and sorrows shall be cleansed
 Alas! I see before me huge crowd (VII.289-294)

The '*tattvamasi-consciousness*' is always echoed in lines of *Ātmānutāpam*.

"Let it fall on us and our off-spring!"
 Alas, why do I elaborate their vice,
 Their ingratitude, I describe?
 In sinful pride haughtily you behaved.

Rue your own wicked passions, my soul
 True it was my sins that caused you to blood
 O woeful, it was I, who sorely
 Through my hearing and looks caused your heart.

Long sharp thorns I rudely pressed on you
 Had I my eyes and ears held bridled
 The pricks less sharp and painful had been
 Loving Father, me with eyes you gifted.

(VII.522-532)

In *Ātmānutāpam* we see a *Tattvamasi-consciousness*, which is completely Christological and staurological. Of the three parts of *Tattvamasi*, the word '*tat*' indicates God and for Chavara, the crucified Christ is that God. It is in that crucified form of Christ, in which each human person is supposed to find himself, that Chavara too found his original identity. By self-kenosis he transcended his individuality into that of

Crucifix. He was blessed with the consciousness of "Tattoamasi" as he gave up his ego consciousness. In order to give force to that truth, Chavara has employed the Syriac term *Hāgourā*¹² ('Behold the Man') to point out Jesus who was presented before Pilate.

Pontius on this throne seated Him in pomp
And showed Him to those gathered the sight to see
And said "Ecce Homo" - 'Behold the man'!
Like angry blood hounds the crowd screamed.

(VII.505-508)

Pointing to Jesus, when Pilate declared 'Behold the man,' actually, he was confessing a truth for the entire humanity that it is in that humanized divine form, each person should find his individuality as he is the humanized divine form for our sins. When Chavara knelt down before that crucified divine form, he was enlightened with the *Tattoamasi-consciousness*.

9. *Tattoamasi*: The Divinity That Man Is Yet to Become

Man by his existential nature, is in the process of becoming. 'Eksīstre' is the Greek work used to indicate human existence, and it literally means 'to go out.' It is only when a human being comes out of the self, his existence gets its true meaning and worth. The intention of the "Tattoamasi" advice given by the guru is that the disciple gradually imbibing the spirit of this great teaching, should become 'that' namely, the disciple should get identified with God through daily *sādhana*. Even though, in the phrase "Tattoamasi," as the verb 'asi' is in the present tense form, and accordingly has the meaning that 'the disciple is already a god,' in reality, it implies a future reality, that is to say, the disciple by his attempt eventually should realize that he is a god. The disciple, however, is never a god, but tries to become one. Hence, when an apprentice who is in the pursuit of learning self-knowledge, listens to this great advice, has to understand its meaning not in the present tense, but in the future sense, since according to the grammatical rule of Sanskrit, a present tense verb has also a future connotation.¹³

¹²bha⁻ giyil si⁻ hjsan£yiruttipontiyusu⁻
mñniccamjna⁻ k³mjn mñhicca janattine
kk³iccucolliyavan 'h¹ga⁰j' k³min ni^{±±}ta©
kruddharjy janamuḡan krudhicca³vjkka© yathj (VII.505-508).

¹³Dattaswami, "God Incarnates in the Human Form for the Sake of Humanity" [Online].

Among the parables of Jesus, at least few of them are his own autobiographies. The audience recognised them as their own stories. This is a characteristic feature of Jesus' teachings. In the parable of the wicked tenants, he is speaking about himself, as he is the son of the owner of the vineyard. The audience heard it as their own story: "When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew, he was talking about them" (Mt 23:45). And that was indeed the purpose of Jesus. They recognized themselves as the wicked tenants: "But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him" (Mt 21:38-39). Instead of repentance, it was a negative response that was given by the chief priests and the Pharisees who were the listeners of the story. "They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet" (Mt 21:46).

We see a precedence of this in the Old Testament in prophet Nathan. He tells David a story that is the story of the king: "There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him. Now a traveller came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveller who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him. David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan: "As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this must die! He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity" (2 Sam 12:1-7).

David's verdict of death penalty was in fact exceeding what is stated in the law: "Whoever steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters it or sells it must pay back five head of cattle for the ox and four sheep for the sheep" (Ex 22:1). "Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man! This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul (2 Sam 12:9). That 'right verdict' (Ps 51:4) of Nathan penetrated into the heart of David. He recognized 'his own transgressions, and sins' (Ps 51:3). Pained by that dreadful reality, descending from his throne and kneeling down before the Lord, he prayed, "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my

sin... Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight... Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me... Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow... let the bones you have crushed rejoice" (Ps 51:1-19). Listening to those prayers, the Lord redeemed his life from the pit and crowned him with love and compassion ... and renewed his youth like that of eagle's" (Ps 103:1-22).

The demand of the crucifix is that we judge ourselves instead of judging. The story that Nathan told David is indeed a story that God tells each individual. The Gospels are written not to cry out against others to crucify them, but to realize the salvific *tattovasi* truth that "You are the man!" or "You are that!" As modern listeners of Gospels, when we listen to the stories of how the chief priests and Pharisees responded to Jesus, we are invited to identify ourselves with them and examine how we are responding to Jesus in day today affairs.

The Gospel is also an invitation is to see the log that is there in one's own eye before spotting the speck in other's eye (Mt 7:3). In such words of the Bible, we recognize the literal meaning of the '*tvam*' of *Tattovasi*, i.e., "You are that." It takes self-criticism and self-purification in order to grow into the intended of meaning of *Tattovasi*.

In *Ātmānutāpam*, by the compunction (*atmānutāpam*) of his soul, St Chavara achieved this target of growing from the literal meaning of "*Tattovasi*" to its intended meaning. Before the crucified Lord, the Bible enlightens us to shed the limitations of humanity and grow into the self-realization. The ideal of *tattovasi* also invites us to the same realization; to grow from "Beth-aven" to "Bethel"; from the "house of vanity" to the "house of God"; from "Achan" to "Zerah"; from "trouble" to "the rising of light."¹⁴ Human life is a salvific-exodus from 'what is' to 'what is supposed to be.' It is a holy journey from the slavery of Egypt to the freedom of the Promised Land, a journey to Calvary. On the way the traveller meet the human face of God and his divine face. Both these aspects are united in Christ on the cross in Calvary, and in the lines of *Ātmānutāpam*, St Chavara realizes this staurological dimension of *tattovasi*.

¹⁴ See Joseph Parker, *Joshua*, in People's Bible Series, London: The City Temple Pulpit, 1883, pp. 162-170.

COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNION IN RELIGIOUS LIFE

Challenges and Prospects of Religious Life in an Era of Communication Revolution

James Thayil CMI

Abstract: The world of communications has travelled a long distance from Chavara's rudimentary press at Mannanam to the app of the liturgical calendar on your smartphone. The author explores communication and communion in religious life and reflects on the challenges and prospects of religious life in an era of communication revolution. A good religious is a good communicator. However, the 'media-religious' encounter and experience modern phenomenon. Cultured communication technologies are at the service of the community and since it is a powerful tool for evangelization, the Church calls for an active engagement of the media through spiritual network and worship-space. However, the encounter is full of challenges such as culture of instant gratification, culture of graphics, culture of uncentered pluralism, culture of individualism and culture of virtual reality. The study also explores some special issues for deeper reflection such as the old mind-set and new technologies of communication, the loss and gain of enclosures and the vows in the light of the cultured communication technologies. The study concludes with a call to pause, look, reflect, act and to address the existential challenges of life and mission, now!

Keywords: Religious, mission, communication, community, revolution, technology, formation, monastery, internet, computer, relationships, machines, information, productivity, virtualization, smartphones, tablets, Church, religious, globalization, Pope, media, culture, apostolate, modernity, women, television, entertainment, monastery, manuscripts, monks, scriptoria, tradition, medieval, Bible, apostolate, abbeys, cloister, internet, monasticism, culture, cyberspace, Dharmaram, Facebook, formation, intimacy, abstinence, mortification, fidelity, renunciation, postmodernism, graphics, postmodernism, sensuality, multi-tasking, interiority, YouTube, individualism, compassion, connectedness, tenderness, enclosures, vows.

1. Introduction

A good religious is a good communicator. His/her call and mission are rooted in the four relational communications – with God, self, community and the environment (John Paul II, 1985). Indeed, we live in a privileged age of communication revolution, wherein communication-technologies shape and re-shape the way we live, move and have our being. Today, communication technologies are also defining the quality of religious life. These technologies, which are still evolving, challenge the meaning of the religious call and effect the life-style within the formation houses, monasteries, communities and outside.

The world is utterly and irreversibly changing right now thanks to the exponential growth of the Internet, a new global communications tool linking humans together in real time as never before. This sort of massive computer networking changes human relationships with time and space in a fundamental way. It is not an exaggeration to remark that much of the world is experiencing an important shift in the way in which it works. This shift is being experienced also in the religious life. Today, the natural world is being transformed not only by using matter and energy, but also by information, leading to a new explosion of productivity. In one way, virtualization is the increased substitution of matter by information. This substitution has profound consequences for the relations of humankind to nature, between humans and other humans, and between humans and machines. This new layer of information is becoming increasingly prominent as virtualization intensifies. This study attempts to explore the changing communication landscape and culture as it affects and impacts the communication, communion and community experiences of religious life. Our focus mainly is on the technology-mediated communication and its impact on religious experiences, expressions and lifestyle.

2. Media-Religious Encounters and Experiences

Of people in the young age group (18 to 24 year olds), those whom religious communities recruit, smart phone use is almost 70 percent, internet use is 55 percent. While for those who are between 40 and 50 years of age, mobile phones, smart-phones, tablets and internet are machines/technologies that have come up into the market, slowly as fads of the rich and powerful, for the younger ones of our communities, and for the children of our families who are born into the digital culture, these are but essential elements of life. They

communicate, play with, and make sense of their daily experiences, in and through the digital machines. These marvellous mini machines such as smart phones are convenient and practical, combining thousands of functions from a flashlight or calculator to a car starter or heart rate monitor. They promise ease and efficiency, and are modifying or replacing every aspect of life, including matters of faith. Indeed, we cannot live without communication. It is equally true that we cannot communicate properly with the digital generation kids without the language and technologies of communication.

Whether you articulate it or not, you probably already have ideas about media and culture that affect your opinions about smartphones and the Church. This study does not argue about opinions, but seeks to uncover an interrelationship – to explore where and how, or if at all, the dots connect – between the new media technologies and consecrated life. While the digital technologies do not change religious life, they do change the way it is perceived. Changes in the media communication in the world have had ripple effects in religious communities and congregations.

Today we are living in a world that is growing ever ‘smaller’ and where, as a result, it would seem to be easier for all of us to be neighbours. Developments in travel and communications technology are bringing us closer together and making us more connected, even as globalization makes us increasingly interdependent. Nonetheless, divisions, which are sometimes quite deep, continue to exist within our human family (Pope Francis, 2014).

In a world like this, media can help us feel closer to one another, creating a sense of unity of the human family, which can in turn inspire solidarity and serious efforts to ensure a more dignified life for all. Good communication helps us grow closer, to know one another better, and ultimately, to grow in unity. The walls which divide us can be broken down only if we are prepared to listen to and learn from one another.

A culture of encounter demands that we be ready not only to give, but also to receive. Media can help us greatly in this, especially nowadays, when the networks of human communication have made unprecedented advances. The internet, in particular, offers immense possibilities for encounter and solidarity. This is something truly good, a gift from God.

3. Religious Attitude towards Communication Technologies

The choices of religious users about technology are negotiated through different ways than those within other social groups. Among the religious congregations and groups, there exists, yet different ways in which they encounter, engage and negotiate with new media technologies. Such attitudes vary from the extreme pessimistic to the extreme optimistic ones. This is because choices within religious groups are guided not just by needs and desires, but occur within the framework of a distinct worldview laden with spiritual meanings and values. This structure guides how they interpret the world. Traditional religious groups often see the world as composed of that which is sacred and that which is profane or secular. Their desire is to engage and interact with the sacred and shun, or at least distance themselves from the secular. Progressive religious orders, on the other hand, view the world as a sacred place and consider technology as “neutral medium” which could be engaged in and made use of for spiritual uplift and to strengthen community experiences of their members even as to aid their apostolate of reaching out to the people of God with the Good News that is Jesus Christ.

For many conservative religious groups religious practice and lifestyle are shaped by a rejection of modernity, which is seen as secular. For others, modernity and post modernity are God-given opportunities for the positive encounter of the Divine Spirit with the given human realities.

For the Church in general, and the consecrated men and women in particular, technology becomes a problematic area, as it is often equated with modernity and post modernity. If technology is not rejected outright for this reason, it must undergo negotiation within the community so it can become acceptable for use or shaped in ways that allow it to be included within the sacred part of life. The process of this negotiation depends on the traditions and narratives of the religious community. It can include conducting certain rituals to ‘sanctify’ or set-apart the technology for religious use, or issuing official statements that present the technology in acceptable ways to the group. For groups that in general consider the use of technology as less problematic or compatible with a religious lifestyle, this negotiation may simply result in members modelling appropriate use within the community and leaders praising certain forms of practice while discouraging other uses.

Technology is often seen as a symbol of modernity and secular values, which they consciously distance themselves from. Thus use of technology is a point of great debate and law making within the community. Discussions on the use of technology are often framed in terms of possibilities and dangers, from discussing the boundaries of how the Church may engage in media ministry, to forbidding televisions, Internet and mobile phones in formation houses as the epitome of secular values and entertainment. If the use of television in religious houses was a point of debate up until few years ago, now the use of mobile phones among the members have come up as an issue of contention in religious community gatherings to chapters among most of the religious congregations. Many of them have drafted laws regulating and restricting its use among the members. Others are still negotiating it. In many of such avenues, a digital divide is visibly seen, in as much as a generational-cultural gap. Wherever such discussions arise, it would be proper to keep this in mind that the digital technology belongs to the younger generation of our time. As they are born into it, the youngsters have come to live on with such technological environment – the new media revolution – as natural as they breathe the air. As for the older generation, they carry a different mind-set, for they are children of the analogue, not of the digital sphere.

4. The Church's Call for an Active Engagement of the Media

The Church, from its part, has slowly opened up herself to the new media technologies. This openness is vividly seen from time of the ground-breaking ecclesial document *Inter Mirifica* in 1963. From that time on, every Pope spoke clearly on the necessity and manner of the Church's engagement with the media of social communication. Pope Francis, in his message on the 2014 World Day of Communications made this ardent call:

Let us boldly become citizens of the digital world. The Church needs to be concerned for, and present in, the world of communication, in order to dialogue with people today and to help them encounter Christ. She needs to be a Church at the side of others, capable of accompanying everyone along the way... The revolution taking place in communications media and in information technologies represents a great and thrilling challenge; may we respond to that challenge with fresh energy and imagination as we seek to share with others the beauty of God (Pope Francis, 2014).

5. Religious' Historic Take on Communication Technologies

Religious communities, especially the monastic tradition has contributed much to the development of communication technology. In ancient times the monasteries undertook cave painting and copying of the scripture and other manuscripts. When the Benedictine monk, at the monastery of Christ in the Desert, created a website, they claimed to be reviving a tradition that began when monastic scribes created the first illuminated manuscripts. One of the monks told a reporter for *The New York Times* that their work "goes back to the ancient tradition of the scribes, taking information and making it beautiful, into art." But, as Edward Mendelson (1996) has shown, the relation between modern Web sites and medieval scriptoria, or writing rooms, is even closer than these monks may have guessed. The technology that connects all the millions of pages on the World Wide Web derives ultimately from techniques invented by the scribes and scholars who copied out the Bible more than a thousand years ago.

Such historical connection between communication technologies and monastic life would explain why there is a growing awareness and initiative from many religious congregations to enter into the arena of communication media as an apostolate and part of adaption to the signs of the times. In recent times, most of the monasteries, abbeys, cloistered convents and religious houses have registered themselves on the cyber-space. The global Catholic media network, Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN), that operates in 68 countries was founded and is run by Mother Angelica, a cloistered nun, initially at the garage of her convent in Alabama. The Alabama nuns are a familiar sight on the programmes of EWTN.

6. Whither Communication Technologies within the Cloister?

Recently, there was news that a cloistered abbey known for its orthodoxy and traditional practices, located in a remote village in Israel has opened its doors to the web and internet, placed its life and mission on the cyber-sphere. When one of the monks was asked how the traditional monastery feels when it received the internet, he said, "the net belongs to consecrated persons. By this medium now we can reach out to the people where they really are, for prayer and spiritual support." When the reporter asked another monk, who was not as enthusiastic as others to have the internet in the cloister if it is not wonderful that they could save a lot of time and energy by the help of these new medium of communication, he said, "Indeed, it is good to

save time. But, on the final judgment the Lord God will ask, “what did you do with the time you saved making use of these expensive technology”!

Two different attitudes and ways of thought are given above. Both characterize the dynamism of a religious’ engagement and adoption of the new communication technologies. The ultimate question is, “should the monastic traditions and spirit be changed when adapting to the culture and benefits of the new media technologies, or should the new media technologies be transformed to suit the monastic traditions and practices? My humble opinion is to take a middle path.

The traditional and age-old practices and values of monasticism and religious lifestyle have lasting significance. They represent a distinct culture. When the religious engage in and make use of the communication technologies, it should be for the benefit of the world, and for their own growth and the advancement of the works of the Church. The glory of God should be the ultimate aim. If the specific engagement of a monk on the net would further the glory of God and the good of the Church, then so be it. If it is just for the conformity with the world, then let him abstain from it. The new generation children, youth and the people at large speak a new language – that of the new media. The monk cannot afford to be ignorant of this language. Let him communicate His spirituality and mission with the world, in a language that they understand. Here there is the need of framing the public use and satisfying cognitive dissonance within many members about the danger of this technology. Language becomes a powerful tool for making a technology that is considered secular, acceptable within certain boundaries (Heidi Campbell, 2005).

7. Cultured Technology at the Service of the Community

Barzilai’s and Barzilai-Nahon’s idea of “cultured technology” proves helpful in moving towards a religious-communication-media approach. It recognizes that technology is shaped as it is domesticated to fit into users daily lives, and that use and design processes can be shaped by the values of the community. A religious community’s recognition of their ability to ‘culture’ the Internet allows them to more easily incorporate it into the life of the group. This points to the fact that adoption of a technology by a user group, especially a religious one, can enable them to construct or affirm certain cherished values. It recognizes that technology use reshapes public and private boundaries, as technology serves to perform a particular role within the community that can promote or sustain certain values.

8. Spiritualizing Communication Technology

The linguistic legitimization and pro-active culturing of communication technologies by religious groups may be termed as the “spiritualizing of technology”. This involves speaking and conceiving of technology in ways that allows it to be used in religious activities and spiritual life practices. Spiritualizing technology involves creating and maintaining certain rhetoric about the technology that presents it as a space suitable for religious use and engagement. If, for instance, the technology is described as “created by God” or “part of God’s world” it can be seen as part of creation which humanity is called to steward. Thus engaging with technology becomes not only permissible, but also a mandate. Spiritualizing the Internet involves making religious value judgments and presenting them in language, which is accessible and acceptable to the community. It involves endowing the Internet with a particular narrative of meaning, which contextualizes the purpose of the Internet and how it could or should serve religious users. Campbell (2005) has identified four common discourse strategies that the religious use in order to frame Internet technology. These include describing the Internet as: a spiritual medium facilitating religious experience, a sacramental space suitable for religious use, a tool promoting religion or religious practice and a technology for affirming religious life.

8.1. Spiritual Network

As a *spiritual network*, the Internet is seen as a space where the Divine resides and can be experienced. Internet use becomes simply one expression of one’s pursuit of a spiritual life or experience. The Internet as a spiritual medium frames the Internet as a technology possessing, within the hardware and wires, an unseen realm where humanity can encounter the transcendent and spiritual experience. This discourse emphasizes that the Internet is a technological tool, and that how it is used is dependent on the motives and desires of its users and designers. As a tool it is seen as a neutral artefact. Thus it can be used for religious pursuits, as easily as it is used for informational or work related activities.

8.2. Worship-Space

This narrative argues the Internet is a sacramental space, a space or forum that can be shaped for conducting traditional or new religious rituals. This can begin with a ritual or act of consecration that is seen to

prepare the Internet as a space to conduct a specific religious service or practice.

As a worship space, the Internet becomes a place for worship. Many religious groups are consciously designing online worship spaces that attempt to re-create traditional religious worship experiences in a digital environment. A common example in the Christian tradition is the *cyberchurch*, which have been referred to as churches without walls.

8.3. Missionary Tool

The Internet becomes a dynamic resource for encouraging certain practices among religious followers or seeking to convert spiritual seekers to a particular religious belief or tradition. A growing use of the Internet is online proselytising, often referred to as “e-vangelism”. Vatican and many religious orders such as the St Paul’s and Daughters of St Paul have made “new-evangelization” a priority programme online.

Online witnessing focuses on presenting a purposeful religious presence in cyberspace through a variety of means, through websites, chat rooms and email lists. The Internet as a missionary tool encourages religious users to incorporate the Internet into their proselytising strategies.

Pope Benedict XVI, in his message on the 44th World Day of Communication has termed the web as *a temple of prayer*. Therein he urged the religious and the all the Catholic faithful to be active ministers of the Word of God in the web-temple of prayer. He said:

With the Gospels in our hands and in our hearts, we must reaffirm the need to continue preparing ways that lead to the Word of God, while being at the same time constantly attentive to those who continue to seek; indeed, we should encourage their seeking as a first step of evangelization. A pastoral presence in the world of digital communications, precisely because it brings us into contact with the followers of other religions, non-believers and people of every culture, requires sensitivity to those who do not believe, the disheartened and those who have a deep, unarticulated desire for enduring truth and the absolute. Just as the prophet Isaiah envisioned a house of prayer for all peoples (cf. Is 56:7), can we not see the web as also offering a space – like the “Court of the Gentiles” of the Temple of Jerusalem – for those who have not yet come to know God? (Benedict XVI, 2010).

Similarly, the present Pope, Francis, also has anointed the new media technologies for their potential for mission: "Communication is a means of expressing the missionary vocation of the entire Church; today the social networks are one way to experience this call to discover the beauty of faith, the beauty of encountering Christ. In the area of communications too, we need a Church capable of bringing warmth and of stirring hearts" (Pope Francis, 2014).

9. Fostering Religious Identity

Internet as a technology that can affirm religious lifestyle, empowers users to see the Internet as a place to also affirm their religious identity. A common motivation for religious Internet use often is to connect with members of a particular religious background, tradition or theology. Here the Internet serves to affirm or build communal identity and cohesion. Having a shared religious identity means individuals subscribe to common beliefs based on a specific religious tradition lived out through public rituals. Identity comes from reinforcing a particular set of convictions or values that are transported online. Through forming a network of religious identity, users affirm these beliefs through their discussions and common practices. The Carmel Soul (www.carmelsoul.com), The Castle Mountain (www.castlemountain.com), and The Regnum Christi (www.regnumchristi.org) are some dominant religious sites that invite members to reinforce, practice and propagate the charism, spirituality and lifestyle of the specific communities. The Internet is also seen as a place that enables individuals to connect with a larger community of shared faith online. Members encourage one another in their shared convictions and support this unifying narrative through supportive discussion on their choice of religious identification.

The *i-communities* are a growing phenomenon among the religious groups as they foster online community activities among their members and associates. The email communities, social network communities such as Facebook communities (CMIconnect, Franscanfriars, Dharmaram, etc.) keep growing in great proportion. The religious identity narrative demonstrates that individuals can see their online involvement as an opportunity to be interconnected with others from a similar religious tradition. Affirming one's religious lifestyle often means surrounding oneself with like-minded people. The Internet becomes an important resource for many people who do this.

Digital Monasticism is of a recent origin. Prayerbyddy.org describes itself as “ubiquitously digital spiritual community in which daily contact and familiarity are the rule.” It seeks to create the sociological resemblance of monastic community in a networked form. Prayerbuddy helps member become part of a small online community (of about 8 members) that seek to follow a simple rule of life in which they engage in classical practices (including daily prayer, *lectio divina*, spiritual journaling and spiritual direction) supported by technology. This digital monastic life also encourages new forms of interconnection such as “Perpetual, Wireless, Semantically Rich Presence to One Another” and “Semi Monthly Spiritual Conference Centred around a Meal.” Those who have always desired to fulfil their monastic inner calling of live as a contemplative, but cannot live without their wireless no worries, prayerbuddy can help them marry the two!

The emerging types of monasticism meeting, praying and communicating in virtual space has the power and the potential to connect, train, form and empower Church leaders of the 21st century. Some of today’s most vibrant spiritual communities affecting positive spiritual change exist solely on social media. Other temporary communities work, gather, pray and play together while volunteering with progressive stewardship efforts to save the planet earth and its people. Digital Monastics brings together a network of spiritual sojourners, continually establishing intentional, ad-hoc monastic communities.

10. Challenges of Communication Technologies on Religious Life

Although communication and media technologies in themselves are just technologies, neutral in nature, they are invented and marketed in the capitalist mindset aimed at gaining maximum profit for the market forces. These forces thrive in the post-modernist mega-culture. Postmodernism as a philosophy includes sceptical interpretation of history, culture, traditional practices and value systems (Lule Jack, 2001). Deconstruction of reality and re-orientation of life are part of post-modernist tendencies.

10.1. Culture of Instant Gratification

Speed and instant reach-out are characteristic of the digital age. On the digital super highway, data travels above sonic proportions. People get connected instantly, relationships are built up on the click of a

button and messages are conveyed impulsively. The communication revolution has changed the concepts of time and distance of space. Night and day are submerged. There is no more a demarcation of time for rest and work, worship and leisure. One can do all these at once, and even more. Along with it comes the culture of fast food, instant relationships, instant messaging. The ideology that characterizes this age is one of instant gratification that proposes "I want to have it, I want it right now, and I want it without wanting to struggle for it" (Moore, 2012). The greatest casualty herein is "patience". People do not have the patience to wait for anything. Waiting becomes intolerable and a waste of time. The mark of success is seen as gratification within the least period of time. People seek quick fixes and fall into escapism from the pain of pursuit. Indeed, in this age there is a greater demand for what is spiritual. But, what is sought is more of instant gratification in spiritual pursuits.

However, anything beautiful in this passing world happens with patient waiting. True relationships need time and patience to develop and mature. In religious life, patience and waiting are important virtues on the path to holiness and perfection. Formation in religious vocation, in particular, is a time of patient waiting. The long years in formation, spent mostly without the tag of any mundane achievement, offers the formee ample opportunities to form the attitude of Christ in his/her heart. This attitude is one of waiting with patience for the fulfilment of Divine plans and the advent of His time. Intimacy with the Lord and fraternal love in the community are never achieved instantly. A lifelong, conscious pursuit is necessary for the religious to grow in, mature and maintain the gifts of God experience and community love. (*The Consecrated Life and Its Role in the Church and in the World*, 1993).

Moreover, another virtue in religious life is that of mortification and abstinence. By mortification and abstinence, the religious strives to practice detachment from "what is sensual and self-gratifying". As against the culture of instant gratification, mortification directs the religious towards persistence and fidelity to the call of the spirit. There is nothing impulsive about the religious. The triple vows that he takes point to the eschaton. Renunciation marks his lifestyle.

The postmodern culture of instant gratification, thus, throws a great challenge to the formators and the formees as they struggle to inculcate contrary values. In an age where "mortification", "abstinence" and "self-denial" are seen as "old-fashioned" and ridiculous, the religious need to be reminded constantly of the essence

of his/her call, and re-evaluate his/her life-style (Vincenzo, 2006). What makes religious life beautiful and glowing is the self-giving of the person in response to the self-gift of God, which is experienced through patient waiting, faithful service and persistent hope (*Perfectae Caritatis*, 12).

Although religious life is the hardest, most fearsome way to live, it is also the most spiritually secure, most fruitful, and most meritorious. Saint Bernard of Clairvaux tells us that because they renounce property, family, and their own wills, religious “live more purely, they fall more rarely, they rise more speedily, they are aided more powerfully, they live more peacefully, they die more securely, and they are rewarded more abundantly” (*Fraternal Life in Community*, no. 7).

The religious in his engagement with the media and communication technologies does not seek primarily his own interests and gratification, but that of his fellow beings. This involves a new culture of the digital media. The Church understands this clearly well. For instance, Pope Benedict, in his document “New Media at the Service of the Word” (2010) encouraged leaders in the world of communications to promote a culture of respect for the dignity and value of the human person. This is one of the ways in which the religious are called to exercise a “*diaconia* of culture” on today’s “digital continent” (Benedict XVI, 2010).

10.2. Culture of Graphics

The present age is one of colour, graphics, visuals and images. One cannot escape from the over-stimulating effects of graphics vying for attention all over the space. People today speak more through graphics than spoken word. The cyber-sphere, the television screens, laptops, tablets, smart-phones, print-media, flex-boards, billboards and sign-boards invade the private and public space. The new communication technologies have enabled all its users to become potent creators, editors and publishers of graphics. Cameras have become so common and accessible that “picture taking” is an art every child masters.

The Church sees this culture of images as something that the Church appreciates for its closeness to Christianity, which seeks to go from the visible to the invisible through the use of signs and liturgical symbols as instruments of salvation and elevates humanity through the goods of beauty and art (*Consecrated Life and Its Role in the Church and in the World*, no.19).

At the same time, this culture of images, when enters into the areas of religious life, raises several problems. Because, this culture of images is often turned into a culture of fleeting and superficial pleasure. It comes with an ideology of a doctored and edited reality. Graphics are created, edited, touched and morphed. Often, this is not a true representation of the real world, but the imagination of the creator. Real life situations are coloured and romanticized to elicit attention from the viewers. The rich, beautiful and the glamorous ones are idolized in the culture of graphics. In this culture, the slogan is, "what I see is what I want to become."

Postmodernism says that all the world is an image – it is real as long as it *looks* real. Nobody's going to question it if it looks like what we think it is supposed to look. That is why health and beauty organizations have launched campaigns against airbrushing and Photoshopping of images, so that those kinds of images will have a phrase on them like "This image has been digitally altered" so people are not confused. In a postmodern culture, the surface of appearance is all there is because it is the only thing we have to believe (Moore, 2012). "Sensuality" and sense images are the high points of such a culture. Reality is plain visuals. What you see makes sense, what is not seen does not exist. This is why advertising and marketing has become the soul mate of the media where every media consumer is tricked into believing the worth glory of the media products.

The "exteriority" of the graphic culture stands against the "interiority" of the consecrated person. The beauty of religious life lies in the "mystery" aspect of life that it celebrates in contemplation and meditation (*Vita Consecrata*, no. 9). As the *lineamenta* for the ninth synod of Bishops in Rome on *Consecrated Life and Its Role in the Church and in the World* has made it clear,

However, those who have chosen God cannot lose the interior quality of a life which is nourished by contemplation of what cannot be seen with human eyes. Consecrated persons, in love with God, the All-Beautiful, are called to bear witness to the beauty which can save the world in celebrating the liturgy, in harmonious relationships, in promoting what is true, beautiful, good and just. In the contemplative dimension they can bear witness to and promote the paths that lead to mystery, which is the origin of everything beautiful, and to the interiority, which gives meaning to daily work (no. 9).

The religious is called to be altruistic, self-less and thinking less of oneself. The culture of graphics that celebrates the "primacy of human

body” and considers the supremacy of physical beauty runs counter to the religious spirit of “detachment” and self-denial. The media culture projects the human body as a commodity, saleable and evoking desire for market, whereas a religious considers human body as the temple of the Holy Spirit, consecrated and dedicated. By virtue of his vow of chastity, a consecrated person’s body is consecrated for God’s work (*Perfectae Caritatis*, no. 6). Commoditization of human body and graphitization of human life are tendencies that the religious would fight against (*Perfectae Caritatis*, no. 5). Indeed, one would keep before one’s eyes always the one image, that of Christ, into which one would strive to conform his/her life (*Vita Consecrata*, no. 14). He is not a man of images but a person of vision. A good religious is a good visionary. It is the vision of God, a prophetic vision that characterizes his life. In the postmodern world, this “taking on the image and attitude of Christ” requires specific attention in the initial and ongoing formation programmes. *Vita Consecrata* makes it clear:

If, in fact, consecrated life is in itself a progressive taking on of the attitude of Christ, it seems evident that such a path must endure for a lifetime and involve the whole person, heart, mind and strength... reshaping the person in the likeness of the Son who gives himself to the Father for the good of humanity.

Thus understood, formation is no longer only a teaching period in preparation for vows but also represents a theological way of thinking of consecrated life which is in itself a never-ending formation, “sharing in the work of the Father who, through the Spirit, fashions in the heart the inner attitudes of the Son” (*Vita Consecrata*, no.15).

10.3. Culture of Uncentered Pluralism

The new media technologies offer us with too many choices in content and form. Indeed, there is an overload of information, entertainment, platforms and devices available. One is easily confused as to which one is to be chosen. Each content and platform claims to be the best, the truth, and the ultimate. Communication devices are being invented, re-invented and modified almost each day. Newer technologies and versions come up in the market every other day. Social networking groups and sites are mushrooming. People navigate from one channel to the other, from one network to the other (Orkut, Twitter, Facebook, Vimo, YouTube...). Since the technology and content are market driven, truth is fabricated. It comes with the ideology that “there is no absolute truth”, truth is subjective. Hence,

what suits and fascinates you this moment is the truth and value for you. Permanency is a myth in the postmodern world. Relationships are started, nurtured and broken with the click of a button. The “like” and “unlike”, “accept” and “reject” tags on the social networks rule the nature of relationships these days.

However, religious life is built on the culture of a single choice made after a long period of reflection and contemplation. The vows are taken “for life”, and the religious commitment is based on the Absolute Truth, that is Jesus Christ (Jn 14:6). Against the constantly and fast changing world, the religious remains as a sign pointing to the permanency of life and love (*Perfectae Caritatis*, 13). Their life is centred – on Christ. And their eyes, minds and hearts are fixed on Him (*Vita Consecrata*, 15). A religious who is influenced by the culture of “uncentred pluralism” would easily be discouraged, disillusioned and depressed at the routine rhythm of religious life. Either he/she will find consolation in social media networks and swim on in the busy schedules of his/her apostolate, or he will remain a ‘complaint box’, mastering the art of criticism, blaming the members of his community for anything and everything.

‘Multi-tasking’ is a specific feature promoted by the modern communication technology. ‘Convergence’ of technologies and features make the digital devices exciting and engaging. The new media technologies are packed with too many features and apps that are easy to use. It is marvellous indeed, that a small digital device is capable of doing the functions of so many devices. As mentioned earlier, a smart phone, for example, can function as a radio, television, camera, computer, telephone, remote control, sound recorder, editing machine, calculator, music machine, multi-media projector, flash light, play station, and many more. The modern man surrounds himself with such machines that would let him do several tasks at the same time. Multi-tasking has become the life style of the modern man that he cannot concentrate on one thing alone. While watching television, people can read the news, play with the mobile phone, ‘text’ his friends, ‘chat’ with the social network friends, listen to the music, click a ‘picture’, write notes, cook his food, and do many such things! What a marvel the new technologies have brought us! You don’t waste your time. You accomplish so many things at the same time!

But there is a pitfall to the “culture of multi-tasking” mediated by the digital technologies. People get easily distracted. They cannot concentrate on a thing for a long time. The quality of work suffers. Real life, interpersonal communication is deteriorated. The quality of

community experience is diminished. For a religious, meditation is his life-blood. One who is easily distracted cannot enjoy or grow in contemplation. 'Listening', an essential element of spiritual, community and apostolate experiences is a casualty of the "distracting culture of multitasking." Community life, sharing at the triple tables of "the Eucharist, dining and recreation" define the health of his vocation. Machine mediated communication cannot guarantee the vitality of person-to-person direct communication that is essential part of religious life.

10.4. The Culture of Individualism

The new media technologies do empower and enable us to dare do things that one could not even have imagined a decade ago. The children of the digital generation are privileged to travel faster than ever before, communicate and make friends with people of all races and nations, make virtual communities with people at the farthest corners of the universe, learn and earn university degrees online, do business, banking, commerce, and jobs online. Computers, tablets and smart-phones have become the new playgrounds. "Gaming" would be more exciting on the virtual sphere than in the fields. They need not go out to watch a movie, or chat with friends. Television has transformed itself into an ever-exciting device with hundreds and thousands of channels live and generic. Internet has brought the world virtually to your fingertip. To read books you don't have to walk into a library, rather, all the books and information materials rush into your living room, online.

Along with such comforts and exciting life-style, the digital technologies foster a culture of individualism. The digital environment seems to make the individual stronger and powerful, but real-life, person-to-person relationship weaker. The 2006 annual issue (December 25, 2006/January 1, 2007) of *Time* magazine said it well when it chose "You", meaning each and every human individual living on the planet earth, as the person of the year 2006, thanks to the power and liberty vested on 'the individual' by the new communication technologies. What prompted the *Time* magazine to make history in anointing 'you' as the most powerful person on earth with the proclamation "you control the media now, and the world will never be the same" was the perception of the immense potential placed in the human hand in the form of new media technologies, that can break all barriers of the human world.

The digital technology engages the individual and not so much the community. Its appeal is personal. We are witnessing a new generation of our children and the youth, who delights in the virtual world and hesitates to enter into the real world of realities. A recent study in Australia found that people between 12 and 24 years old spent an average of 4 hours and forty-eight minutes on the net (<http://raisingchildren.net.au>). They hang out in the social network sites such as Facebook, Flickr, engage in video/online games, and watch movies and hear music. The interaction is mediated through the net and apps. Personal, face-to-face communication does not excite them in as much as online communication does. Here, the individual is the norm and the community is the victim. Social network sites have mushroomed with many platforms of “online communities.” The online communities, however, cannot substitute the real communities. Online community experiences and real community experiences vary substantially. Children who spend more time with computers and other digital devices grow up lacking ‘social skills’ and are prone to depression and frequent mood swings (www.raisingchildren.net.au).

10.5. The Joy of Community

Common life in a house of the institute is essential for religious life (*Fraternal Life in Community*, no. 12). In *Vita Consecrata*, no. 92, John Paul II had stressed that consecrated persons are called to be true experts of communion and to practice its spirituality in and through their community. In his address to the Plenary Session of Bishops who gathered to deliberate and reflect on the life and issues of religious life, Pope John Paul II highlighted the “primacy of community experience” in religious life. He said: “The effectiveness of religious life depends on the quality of the fraternal life in common. Even more so, the current renewal in the Church and in religious life is characterized by a search for communion and community” (John Paul II, 1994, no. 3).

Community life cannot exist without proper communication among its members. Without communication, communion of heart is not possible either. The traditions, practices, vows and personal witnessing of a religious is tested and manifested in and through the quality of communication that he/she maintains in the community (*Fraternal Life in Community*, no. 66). However, the new world situations, augmented by the demands of the apostolate, the dwindling number of vocations, global mission and other such thrusts, many a religious communities have chosen to be small in size with two or three members, or the members are forced to live and work

alone. Communication technologies can be made use of, for such members and “small communities” for fostering fraternity and common life. Although, it could not be considered a substitute for the real-time community experience, the new-media technology platforms and applications such as skype, social network groups, group-mail communities and the like would facilitate a virtual experience of community feelings among members who live in isolated conditions, and geographical distance. Through video conferencing they may join community meetings and prayer services. Video chat/call, instant text messaging, tweets, uploading video contents on you-tube, and being active in social network practices would build up unity, develop fellowship and belongingness to the community.

By promoting communion within the community and in the Church at large, the charismatic character of Religious Institutes points out the high road to a future of fraternal life and witness, so that holiness and mission may pass through the community.

Community is at the heart of religious life. Communication, in any form - intrapersonal, inter-personal or Divine-personal - has a reference to the community. For, the purpose of communication is communion. And since it is a communication of the consecrated person, the core of his communication is the “Good News,” Jesus Christ. Hence, he cannot afford to sit in self-absorption but, the love of God impels him to reach out to the digital streets. Pope Francis has paraphrased this so well in his message for the World Day of Communications, 2014. He observed that if a choice has to be made between a bruised Church which goes out to the streets and a Church suffering from self-absorption, he would certainly prefer the first. “Those ‘streets’ are the world where people live and where they can be reached, both effectively and affectively. The digital highway is one of them, a street teeming with people who are often hurting, men and women looking for salvation or hope. By means of the internet, the Christian message can reach to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8) (Pope Francis, 2014).

10.6. The Culture of Virtual Reality

New communication technologies have succeeded in creating a surreal world, where fantasy and fascination meet. In the virtual world, the dreams, desires of human mind find their actualization in some way. The over-stimulating effects of graphics and media content easily distract the postmodern man. It creates a virtual reality of comfort and sensuality. The benefits of virtual realities are manifold. Simulative

programmes and applications of virtual realities are employed in fields such as entertainment, information dissemination, education, social and civil security, sexuality, war and peace efforts, health-care and spirituality. Virtual reality is imaginably more personal than electronic mail or instant messaging, or even a letter or a telephone call (Biocca and Levy, 1995). It is a great social leveller; it may find a common ground across differences in age, culture, and linguistic orientation. Communication would be both challenging and rewarding, more effective and productive, and thus more enjoyable. It offers a tremendous opportunity for every "connected" person to find his or her field and/or discipline (Cartwright, 1994). The web and the digital technology have converged to unfold virtual realities of umpteen kinds. For those who seek online friendship there are virtual communities, for those who would want to engage in sports and games without the physical strain, there are virtual games. What more, there are even spiritual avenues and virtual churches for those who seek spiritual experiences. For every experience you seek, there is a virtual reality that you can enter into on the cyber-space.

Since the virtual reality is doctored and fashioned for the satiation of human senses, devoid of the struggles and pains of the real world, the virtual is more attractive to naïve minds that do not seek permanent commitments and bother taking responsibilities. To them, the virtual seems to be more real than the real. Moreover, the easy accessibility and non-serious engagement that the virtual reality lures the postmodern man constantly to interact with and immerse in technologically defined situations and applications. The limiting factors of virtual reality have implications on the manner we view our world, relationships and experiences. It could lead one to the insensitivity to real life human experiences. An inescapable aspect of social life is the formation and maintenance of interpersonal relationships. Interaction ought not be substituted for community (Mark E. Koltko-Rivera, 2007). Virtual reality provides a communication environment in which the dangers of deception and the benefits of creativity are amplified beyond the levels that humans currently experience in their interpersonal interactions. It could lead the users to low self-esteem, feelings of worthlessness and insignificance, even self-destructive acts.

Religious life in a community exposes one to the hard and harsh realities and experiences of real life situations of common life, apostolate and spiritual pursuit. Unchecked indulgence into virtual realities may keep the members of a community off from the

fundamental experiences and practices of religious life. The culture of religious life runs counter to the culture of virtual realities. It calls the members to imitate more closely the Master who went about doing good (Acts 9:38) and who carried the cross for the salvation of all mankind (Mt 16:24).

10.7. A Culture of Compassion, Connectedness and Tenderness

The 'here and now', and the gift of 'presence' are irreplaceable elements of religious life. There is nothing virtual about spiritual experiences. It is really real. The consecrated person is concerned with real stories and human issues. Pope Francis considers the ministry of the media and communications as a "service of compassion and tenderness. He says: "The world of media also has to be concerned with humanity, it too is called to show tenderness. The digital world can be an environment rich in humanity; a network not of wires but of people" (2014). The Pope sees three essential elements that would help Christians to counter the negative sides of the culture of graphics. These elements are compassion, connectedness and tenderness. In his words, "It is not enough to be passers-by on the digital highways, simply 'connected'; connections need to grow into true encounters. We cannot live apart, closed in on ourselves. We need to love and to be loved. We need tenderness; media strategies do not ensure beauty, goodness and truth in communication" (2014).

10.8. Digital Divide and Communication Gaps

Even as the modern communication technologies have made the world a global village (McLuhan, 1964), connecting people of all races and continents, creating virtual communities world over, the fact remains that these technologies have also effected divisions and communication gaps in the community. There is now a new category of the poor and the famished added to the less privileged humanity. The new category of the poor are the "communication poor, the techno-illiterates, the digital media 'have nots'. The Church is concerned with the new situation of the digital divide as it understands that the world of communications can help us either to expand our knowledge or to lose our bearings. Pope Francis says in this regard: "The desire for digital connectivity can have the effect of isolating us from our neighbours, from those closest to us. We should not overlook the fact that those who, for whatever reason, lack access to social media run the risk of being left behind" (2014). Digital Divide

is a social situation that separates a section of the society from information and communication technologies' access, availability, and use.

11. Personal Witnessing in the Cyber-Sphere

Communication involves the message, the medium, the messenger and the audience. The new media technologies help us more than transmit some impersonal messages or chat with instant friends. The religious enter into "communication technologies" to be the light in the dark alleys of the cyber streets. In the pattern of a religious' communication, the media plays a minor role. He does not stop at the technologically mediated communication. His message of "presence" cannot be communicated through the information technologies alone. For, the impartiality of media is merely an appearance; only those who go out of themselves in their communication can become a true point of reference for others. Personal engagement is the basis of the trustworthiness of a communicator. Christian witness, thanks to the internet, can thereby reach the peripheries of human existence. Hence, the cyber-space offers an avenue and a starting point for the personal witnessing of the religious. Effective Christian witness, as Pope Benedict XVI notes, is not about bombarding people with religious messages, but about our willingness to be available to others "by patiently and respectfully engaging their questions and their doubts as they advance in their search for the truth and the meaning of human existence" (Message for the 47th World Communications Day, 2012).

12. Some Special Issues for Deeper Reflection

Even as human communication is a complex process that involves the whole person and the community, religious communication benefits much from the technology mediated communication. Similarly, the media technologies of communication too gains much from the contributions of the religious in making them spiritual and humane avenues (Pope Francis, 2014). In the concrete level, as the new-media technologies have met the religious sphere, there are some serious practical issues that have emerged that need deeper reflection. These issues include the mind-set, enclosure, detachment, community experience and the religious vows. We shall discuss each of these briefly.

12.1. The Old Mind-Set and New Technologies of Communication

There is a real situation when a newly recruited member comes into the congregation with a communication gadget and those who are responsible for the care of the candidate have no idea of what it is and how it is used.

Similarly, there is the issue of regulating and banning the “keeping and using” of mobile phones and other such gadgets of communication in the seminary and among those who are under formation, or among some members of the house. In many cases, since both the younger generation and the communication device, are “smarter” than the law-enforcing and monitoring mechanism, such devices are kept in secret and used at will. Such rules and mechanisms, thus, make them liars, and guilty of sin.

12.2. The Loss and Gain of Enclosures

One obvious traditional practice of the monasteries and other religious houses until the recent past was that of the “enclosure”, a place that was sacred, where no outsiders were let in, and “silence” was the language of communication therein. When the culture of monastic traditional practices are changing, religious houses have become more open, welcoming and “transparent.” But, along with it, there is the casualty of “silence,” “the mystery” aspect, and a spirit of contemplation and reflection (John Paul II, 1996). Add to it the fact that communication technologies have invaded every space in the religious house. Mobile phones have become the most essential thing that one would not dare to move out of the room without it. Even in the holy of holies, in the chapel, during meditation and prayer, personal study and reflection, meal time and bed time, the mobile phone/smart phone has become the constant and trusted companion (Thomas McMillan, 2013). In such a scenario, there is the loss of “the spirit of religious silence” and an ever increasing digital noise. In the over-stimulating culture of constant mediated communication, it would be good to re-think the return of “enclosures” back into our lives. Can we have special spaces (localities), times, and situations demarcated for the “no entry” of the modern communication devices and technologies?

12.3. Detachment, Anyone?

Devices such as mobile phones, tablets and laptops have become so personal and intimate that one feels insecure when these are not with him. To go out without carrying the mobile phone would be the worst

nightmare one would experience in this digital age. Such devices have become not only extensions of the human body (Mac Luhan, 1964), but also the most essential thing one cannot live without. For the religious “detachment” and “abstinence” are core values of his/her vocation (Regina, 2013). One’s attachment to these devices and their applications might be in various degrees ranging from mere fascination to strong addiction. To get out of the addictive nature of the new media and communication technologies what practical steps would we need to take? Or, would such shades of attachment hinder the real spirit of religious renunciation and self-discipline?

12.4. Communication Yes, but Community?

The individualist culture that the new-media technologies promote might be creeping into the community experiences of the religious. In earlier times, the community used to gather together for prayer, meals and recreation (*Perfectae Caritatis*, 15). Since the community life was well organized, and the members were to follow the time-table, and their communication was limited mostly within the walls of the monastery or religious houses, the spirit of communion was clearly perceptible. The members used to sit around the table for meals and recreation. Television took the centre-stage in the recreation room. The community used to watch news and other programmes together and discoursed on the content. Community prayer used to be sacrosanct for all. However, now, due to the diverse ministries, individual apostolate of the members and the micro communities, the “coming together” of the members are events that rarely happen. Apart from this, they would not feel the “need” to communicate face-to-face with the members of the community, as they are already communicating always, with so many people, in different degrees of relationship, through the new media technologies.

Since the communication devices are their most trusted companions, they are more open towards the ‘out-side’ of the community, than ‘in-side’. Even while they sit together, they would be communicating with those outside through ‘chatting’, ‘texting’, ‘calling’, ‘browsing’, ‘commenting’ or ‘liking’. Added to that, they would not feel like sitting together before the television anymore, because, their laptop/tablet/smart-phone already is loaded with television streaming. They might even have a separate set of television installed in their personal room. Again, another community event was the members going together for a movie. Thanks to the new media technologies, one does not need to go to the cinema houses to watch a

movie, rather, only has to open the laptop, smart-phone or such other devices. The net result is that unless one takes special care, one would isolate oneself from the community and withdraw into the comforts of the personal room and space for the fulfilment of the needs of communication, entertainment and companionship. The comfort-zone of the modern religious would easily be the communication devices that he/she is attached with.

12.5. Vows Re-Visited

The most essential characteristic of a religious is the vows with which he/she is bound to the Lord and the community. In the traditional form of religious life, the vows are non-compromizable and non-negotiable. When new-media technologies enter into the life of a religious, they impact also the arenas of the vows. Since the communication media technologies carry the capitalist ideology of making maximum profits, the companies keep changing the features and models of the devices every other day. The expensive gadgets and software as they are, the vow of poverty does not allow the religious to keep up with the changes in the market. If the devices are not changed according to the trends of the market, the customer would feel outdated and suffer depression and lack of self-esteem (Regina, 2013).

The postmodern culture values a person with the value of the gadgets and toys he/she holds. Where will the money for the acquisition, maintenance, re-modelling, updating, and the endless cycle of buying the new gadgets, recharges and software come from? Either he/she has to beg from the community, which cannot afford to meet the demand, or find resources from other sources. The kind of relationships one might enter into, the type of audio-visual materials one might browse through and consume, the kind of commitments one might make and entertain online and offline (outside the purview of the community) have implications on the chaste-life one has professed. On the other hand, the communication media technologies would help one escape from the 'vicinity' and 'control' of the superiors and the laws of the constitution. The very word "obedience" in its traditional sense does not sit well with the digital media communication technologies and the avenues they open up. A sense of anonymity characterizes such technologies.

In the advent of the new communication technologies, and the types of practices associated with them, how do we still practice our vows meaningfully? Formation houses have a special role in helping the formees in understanding and evaluating the implications of the media

mediated communication. Communication has to be understood holistically in the personal, inter-personal, and mediated forms.

13. Conclusion

Communication is a gift of God without which human life is not meaningful (John Paul II, 1986). Communication stands in union with community and communion. The new winds of change in the larger society brought about on the wheels of "communication revolution" has placed the religious in a dialectical position of engaging the world and the technologies of communication in a proper manner for their own meaningful survival and for the service of human race. Hence, a religious cannot but communicate. He cannot afford to ignore the changes and the changing world, nor can he afford to take in all that the new culture offers in its stride.

The Church, though has been critical of new inventions in the past, in the recent times she has anointed the instruments of social communication as providential means for the accomplishment of its mission to "preach from the housetops" (Lk 12:3), "to all nations" (Mk 16:15), "to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8), the word of salvation. It has concerned itself, moreover, with educating and caring for the human person, the whole person, both as human and as Christian. The Church has, in fact, welcomed with open arms those instruments as "marvellous inventions of today which have a powerful effect on people's minds" and as "wonderful fruits of human work and ingenuity, the gift of God from whom every good comes" (John Paul II, 1996).

Cyberspace presents an important spiritual challenge. One of the fundamental aims of spiritual practice has been to extend human identities, to overcome feelings of separateness with the rest of mankind, nature, and the Cosmos. Some of the techniques of spiritual practices could be used to arrive at a more holistic view of technology. In that sense, the merging of man with technology could be seen as part of a larger mystical task within the context of the universe.

It will be always difficult to decide on the merits of pessimistic and optimistic spiritual interpretations of technology. For every new power and possibility that technology brings, it could be argued that technological progress takes away other components of humanity. For some, to survive in the stressful high-tech world, there may be a great need for the enduring legacies of spiritual practice. The new edge of technology may need the new age of reviving of spiritual practice (John Paul II, 1986). Without them, we may not be able to survive.

What social media and the internet provide are opportunities for a more mature spiritual life. The one who internalizes the meaning of “come follow Me!” is able to make decisions regarding when to be and when not to be in contact with family, to write an email, or to skype a friend. We rejoice in all the great amenities that are made possible through inventions. However, rejoicing does not mean avoiding critical reflection on the deeper ways the diverse world views we are exposed to change our world in positive and negative ways (Vincenzo, 2006). Now is the time, for the religious to take control of the situation and the challenges, lest the challenges and the resultant culture of postmodernism will overtake them. The urgent call is to root for the essential values of religious life such as life-long commitment, detachment, self-denial, mortification, silence, solitude, concentration, contemplation, enclosure, community life, simplicity, love, hope and faith. The religious is in an envious position to redefine the new media and communication technologies in terms of spirituality. It requires, as the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, “a concentration on an intense spirituality in the strongest sense of the word, that is, life according to the Spirit. Consecrated life today needs a spiritual rebirth which will help to concretely bring about the spiritual and evangelical meaning of baptismal consecration and of its new and special consecration” (no. 20).

Pause, look, reflect, and act! Be a contemplative in action or be an active contemplative – it does not matter much. What matters is the ability to address the existential challenges of life and mission, now!

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BOOK REVIEW

Fr Thomas Kochumuttom CMI, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, St Pauls Publications: Mumbai, 2014, pp. 372. ISBN 978-93-5015-204-1. Price: Rs 210.00.

The author, an Acharya who leads a contemplative life in Jeevandhara Ashram at Jaiharikhal in the Himalayas, is the most apt person to write on Kuriakose Elias Chavara (henceforth KEC), a *jñāna-bhakti-karma-yogi*, who was canonized on 23 November 2014. The author has succeeded in unfolding his inspiring personality who co-founded the congregation of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI). As George Thanchan, the former Vicar General of CMI Congregation, says in the "Foreword," "The author has done an extensive study of the writings of KEC and has been trying to relive his spirituality" (p. 15).

Thomas Kochumuttom (henceforth TK) begins the preface by a citation from *The Chronicles of the Koonammavu Convent* in which the Sisters wrote on 3 January 1871, the day of the death of KEC: "This Father of ours was a model and guiding light to all Christians in Kerala. Moreover, he was a pillar that supported the Catholic Church because of the zeal he evinced in its expansion and in the protection of faith." He reproduces some of the testimonies of the contemporaries such as Fr Jacob Palakkunnel, Mariam Powath, Ouseph Ittiyavirah Poriyanvely, both belonging to Kainakari Parish, Mani Kurian Madathikunnel of Muttuchira Parish, Fr Varkey Muttathupadathu, Bp Mathew Athanasius, Abp Bernardine, Fr Louis of Manjummel Monastery and Fr Leopold, his spiritual father. They all have sweet memories of the Saint to cherish.

The author makes clear the purpose of his work: "This book intends to present in some detail the life and work of KEC so that he may continue to be a guide and support for people of all times and places ... it proposes to provide a compact volume, describing the story of the Blessed in a readable as well as scientific manner... The book is a documented history of the Church in Kerala in the 19th century, indeed, a crucial period for the Church" (p. 20).

The book is divided into three parts: "Ascent of Mount Mannanam," "In the Plains with the People," and "Empowerment of Women." The first part has 11 chapters. Chapter 1 is entitled "With the Parents at Home" (pp. 23-29). Chapter 2, "Call and Response" speaks

about Chavara's divine call, life in the seminary and the time of test at the death of his parents and brother (pp. 31-41). Chapter 3, "At the Feet of the Guru," mainly draws a portrait of Malpan Thomas Palackal (pp. 43-55). In chapter 4, "An Ecclesiologist with a Difference," continues to present the unique personality of the Guru in the context of his time (pp. 57-63). The author finds that "while remaining sincerely committed to the Chaldean heritage, he [Malpan Palackal] wanted to adapt it to the needs of his people and make it perfect and relevant by creatively assimilating into it helpful elements from other sources like the Indian and Latin traditions" (p. 63).

Chapter 5, "Monastic Inspiration," begins with the priestly ordination of KEC and his first Mass, in which he prayed for God's blessing to realize the dream of his Guru and Fr Thomas Porukara to start a monastery. They had already got the ecclesiastical permission for it. The religious life, which the founding fathers had in mind, was contemplative and prophetic. Next TK narrates the efforts for constructing a monastery. Mannanam was chosen, which they named *bes-rauma*, a Syriac word meaning "house on hill-top" (pp. 65-75).

Under the title "Chavara Shares the Inspiration" (chapter 6) TK studies the role played by KEC in the construction of the Mannanam Monastery (pp. 77-92). Here the author sheds light on the inner sufferings, which the Saint had to undergo. In chapter 7, titled "The Community Takes Shape" (pp. 93- 105) the author looks at the stages of the construction works, and concludes with the Guru Samadhi, the death of Malpan Palackal on 16 January 1841. However, the spirit lived on, and the work progressed (pp. 107-116). Chapter 9, "Graceful Exit of a Hero," deals with the death of Malpan Porukara on 8 February 1846 (pp. 117-122). Then on Chavara was at the helm (pp. 123-132). Abp Bernardine compelled KEC to accept the strict rules of the Order of the Carmelites Discalced (OCD) with little consideration for the new community's feelings and proposals. Some of them found it too severe and hard to follow, and with a heavy heart left religious life, which broke the heart of the Saint.

Chapter 10, "The First of Its Kind," (pp. 133-141) speaks of the profession of KEC and 10 companions on 8 December 1855, the first anniversary of the declaration of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady. The name of the congregation then was "Society of the Servants of Mary Immaculate of Mount Carmel." Its inclusion in the Carmelite spiritual tradition was a good result of the influence of the missionaries. Then TK takes up the question of the founder of the congregation. According to him "It was a collective

inspiration shared by so many people like Frs Palackal, Porukara and Chavara, Br Kaniyanthara, Fr Paschal, Bp Maurilius Stabilini, Bp Bernardine Baccinelli and many more priests and lay persons" (pp. 138-141).

Part II has 13 chapters. In chapter 12, "In Leaps and Bounds," the author narrates the story of the growth of the congregation, which established monasteries at Koonammavu, Elthuruth, Plasanal and Vazhakulam (pp. 145-157). Under the title, "Affiliation out of the Blue" (chapter 13) TK gives an objective evaluation of the change in the name of the congregation into Third Order of Carmelites Discalced (TOCD). He finds the high-handed interference of the OCD superiors in it. KEC, whose greatest concern was to keep the community united in a spirit of love and trust in divine providence, had to accept that decision. This affiliation had great implications. For example, the OCD Superior General became the supreme head of the congregation and he nominated the vicar apostolic as his vicar provincial with vast faculties.

Chapter 14 looks at KEC as the prudent and unrivalled leader (pp. 169-181). TK focuses on the decisive role played by *Valiya Priyorachan* (Fr Prior of Priors - an affectionate name given by the faithful, which indicates the greatness and nobility of KEC). He makes a very brief survey of the history of the Syrian Church of Kerala, in which the demand for bishops of its own Rite was creating divisions and schisms. Among them the name of Mar Roccas, a Chaldean bishop, stands in the forefront. Most of the parishes followed Mar Roccas. The next two chapters are devoted to the narration of how KEC, who was elevated to the post of the Vicar General of Syrian Catholics, confronted Mar Roccas even at the peril of his life (pp. 183-188, 189-197). At the end the ex-communicated Roccas was forced to leave Kerala. KEC with heroic charity helped him during his last days of stay in Kerala. Still there was some hangover from the Roccas episode left in the Church of Kerala (Chapter 17, pp. 199-203).

KEC was pained at the pitiable situation of Kerala Church. Chapter 18 (pp. 205-215) describes his efforts to sustain the Catholic unity and bring about the reunion of the Jacobite community. The Saint was aware of the people's fondness for the Chaldeans and dislike for the European missionaries. At this juncture, he brought forward a considered solution, which evaluated the problems from every side. He proposed that the European missionaries should study Syriac language and adopt the Syro-Malabar Rite for the liturgical services. He knew that the time was not ripe for native bishops. TK speaks about Rome's proposal to appoint KEC as a bishop without any

personal jurisdiction and fully dependant on Archbishop Baccinelli. The missionaries, however, rejected that suggestion. Still the Propaganda Congregation wrote to Archbishop Mellano on 4 August 1874 recommending KEC for the post of bishop. Rome was then unaware of the Saint's death in 1871. As a conclusion to this chapter, the author presents KEC as an ardent devotee of the Mother Church: "He loved the Church as his mother and shared in her joys and sorrows equally" (pp. 214-215).

In chapter 19, "More Foundations," TK narrates the foundations of new monasteries at Pulinkunnu, Ambazhakadu, Mutholy and Chethipuzha (pp. 217-225). Then the author calls our attention to the pastoral and missionary zeal of the Saint (pp. 227-237). He took radical steps in promoting the ministry of preaching, formation of priests, evangelization of *Dalits* and ecclesiastical management and administration. Chapter 21 is devoted to KEC's efforts for liturgical renewal (pp. 239- 248). In chapter 22 the author depicts the Saint as a socio-religious reformer (pp. 249-257) in the fields of education, uplift of scheduled castes and family apostolate. Chapter 23 presents KEC as a prolific writer (pp. 259-269). "He [Chavara] was a person of intellectual acumen and wide knowledge of life. His powers of discernment and correct judgment were well appreciated" (p. 259). In writing *The Chronicles (Nālāgamankal)*, he proves to be a responsible and objective historian. He wrote the spiritual lyrics: *Ātmānutāpam*, *Anastāsyaṃyute Rakta-sākṣyam* and *Maraṇavittil Pāṭuvānuḷla Pāna*. *Dhyāna-sallāpankal*, *Dhyāna-kurippukal* and *Prārthanakal* also are his writings. His liturgical works include: *Rubrics of Mass*, *Liturgical Calendar*, *Divine Office*, *Office for the Dead*, *Holy Saturday Service*, and *Forty Hour Adoration*. Seventy of his letters have already been published.

In chapter 24, "Parting Message to Confreres" (pp. 271-281) the Saint speaks from the heart to the Congregation, asking the members to make obedience as their identity mark, how a superior has to govern, how to foster the family spirit and disciplined life in community. He spoke about farsighted planning and the sense of indebtedness to the benefactors.

Part III is titled "Empowerment of Women" and has 9 chapters, of which 8 are set aside for the narration of the foundation of the TOCD Congregation for women, the Saint being its founder. The author has beautifully explained the charism that KEC instilled into the first members. In the last chapter of the book, "A Holy and Beautiful Soul" (pp. 355-367) TK draws our attention to the last three months of the life of the Saint on earth. During this period the sick KEC paid three

touching visits to the convent. At his deathbed he bade farewell to the community gathered around him in tears. After receiving the last sacraments *Valiya Priorachan* breathed his last on 3 January 1871. The funeral oration preached by Fr Mathai Kappil began thus: "Today the flag of Kerala has fallen!" The Saint was buried on 4 January 1871 near the sanctuary of the Church of St Philomena, Koonammavu. In the last sub-title, "Guiding Light and Supporting Pillar" TK speaks mainly about the impressions of the Saint's spiritual daughters. At the end of the book the author gives a "Guide to Footnotes and Source Works" (pp. 369-372).

Until now, there was no readable and at the same time a compact English biography of KEC. By means of this work, TK has done a wonderful and commendable service to the global Church, and to the whole humanity. It is well researched and documented. The names given to Part I and Part II reveal to us the mystical and poetic heart of the Acharya who leads a contemplative life in the Himalayas. For him the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* of St. John of the Cross, the Carmelite mystical saint, has become the *Ascent of Mount Mannanam*, which is both Biblical and Indian. The title "In the Plains with the People" reminds us of Luke's version of the mission of Jesus. The designation "Empowerment of Women" testifies that this hermit is well aware of the modern sociological trends. His presentation of Malpan Palackal as guru and the narrative of his life are very attractive. Also, the author's focus on the Catholic unity and Jacobite reunion is very relevant to the present situation.

While recording once more my sincere appreciation about this study, I would like to point out a few of my reservations. In evaluating the issue of the founder of the Congregation for men, TK says that it was a collective inspiration. It seems that he gives equal importance to very many people. Does such a suggestion give justice to the historical facts? This reviewer has nothing against attributing more importance to Malpan Palackal, but he feels that the role of KEC is watered down in the process. He also thinks that too many pages are devoted to the foundation of the TOCD Congregation for women (pp. 235-353). It would have been better if the author had discussed the spirituality of the Saint in a more detailed way, which would have helped the readers to delve deeper into its Biblical, Oriental, and Indian aspects.

Paul Kalluveetil CMI

MEDIA PRODUCTION REVIEW

Anayatha Deepam (Immortal Lamp): St Kuriakose Elias Chavara and St Euphrasia Eluvathingal. Genre: Audio Music CD; Production: Benny Pulparampil; Music: Jerry Amaldev, Pradeep Tom and Sabu Panakkal; Language: Malayalam; Orchestration: Jerry Amaldev, Pradeesh Kothamangalam and Pradeep Tom; Studio: Film City Riyan, Metro Vazhakkala, Marian Digital, Kochi; Price: Rs 95.

The idea of common worship has long been a key element in binding those who come together to seek a deeper knowledge of God and the mysteries of God reflected in his people, especially their saints. There is something beautiful about singing and worshipping together, something catechetical about commemorating the saints in folklore and ballads, knowing that other believers who share their faith have sung these kinds of songs before, be it anywhere from ten minutes to four thousand years ago. There is something beautiful about new contributions to this musical tradition; about the reality that there are scores of lyricists and composers who write and compose hymns and songs which spread like fire throughout dozens of worshipping congregations making the life of the people vibrant. This is a stunning testament to how God is still very much alive today.

When we sing a hymn, we do so in humility for the purpose of drawing near to God and praising him for who he is. When we sing folklore on a saint or a hero/heroine of the Church, it delivers a breath of fresh air and we are inspired to emulate the way they had glorified God.

Sunny Pulparampil CMI is not a novice in the field of spiritual media production. *Anayatha Deepam (Immortal Lamp)*, the album that is being reviewed is his 21st production. His previous projects included devotional music albums, video CDs and retreats, which had brought him to the sitting rooms of the believers in the South and those migrant believers in the North whose life was touched by the Word of God and its interpretations that found expression in these productions. The setting of the retreat centre that he founded and established gave his albums a contemplative aura.

When it comes to today's Christian music world, it is the worship genre that rules. The market is saturated with music bands and individual musicians who release new albums of material every year.

Anayatha Deepam falls into the genre of live album where never-before-released songs find an audience already singing along with some of the artistes. The music bounces back and forth between folk songs and meditative worship fare.

The lyrics are another distinct attribute of the project, with intelligent but straightforward song-writing. The album contains entries on St Kuriakose Elias Chavara and St Euphrasia Eluvathingal. Out of the twelve entries, seven are on Chavara. As a ballad singer, Sunny Pulparampil travels through the alleys of the life of Chavara and Euphrasia, picks up imageries and brings them to life both in poetry and music. Hence, the project is as versatile and varied as the life of the saints. He has brought in a melange of styles that make the project attractive to the children with Christeen rock music, to the youth with the cinematic style, to the adults with his folk style, to the seniors with a contemplative style and to complete the spectrum, the album also showcases an entry for the liturgy. Within some of these, there is plenty of cross-pollination between the various genres which are delightful to the young generation, but brow-raiser for some of the conventionalists.

Over recent years, there has been a shift in worship music. Gone are the days in which sound doctrine and theology were on display at the forefront of worship music, they were pieces of real poetry. Contrary to the trend, since all the lyrics for this album were written by Sunny himself, there is a continuity of language that is saturated in spirituality that the lyricist acquired by means of his higher studies of literature, psychology and theology. From time to time, he moves away from more theological source material, and draws from his own emotions, experiences and metaphors that have their roots in his preaching and counselling ministry. He has left a deep mark as he delivers each song with hopeful encouragement to believers that every moment of your life matters. However, nothing here comes across as cliché; it comes from a place of depth that only experience can inform. The lyrics do tend to stick a little too close to familiarity in terms of messages and metaphors, but the delivery feels authentic.

The in-depth study that Sunny Pulparampil made on the poetical work of Chavara, in turn, turned him to a poet. Sometimes, true to his name, Sunny is setting off for points unknown and transcendental, points that are seldom found on other albums. In some of these, he has invented his own textural language of baby-talk and has proved that he could say much in concise formats. These entries are surprisingly accessible and captivating, that you need not be a Christian or a seeker

of any kind to recognize the power of the poems on these saints and the pull of the music.

The project is Sunny's most compositionally ambitious work yet because the subject matter of the lyrics was limited. The album breaks from the rest of his catalogue in one very important way. Much of his early work featured Jesus and Mary. This is the first time he has ever worked with the lives and activities of two Carmelite Saints and he has stuck to them throughout the presentation.

The entries on the album and the selection of most of the artistes are thoughtfully done. Some artistes come and go, fade from memory almost as quickly as they spring up. Then there are those musicians who stick with you long after their last notes sound. Some of these entries in *Anayatha Deepam* have certainly left their mark in the south Indian world of devotional music, especially because of the voices of some of the well-known vocalists who appear on the back of the sleeve and the musicians behind the various accompanying sounds, who appear nowhere on the sleeve. Then, there are those composers who have given life to the lyrics, which are the literary creation of Sunny Pulparampil. Jerry Amaldev who is a Scribe in the south Indian musical industry, along with Pradeep Tom and Sabu Panakkal, the other two are stars that are still on the horizon have given wings to the imaginative lines. The orchestration of the production is done by Jerry, Pradeep and Pradeesh Kothamangalam. These groups of people have been brought together by Benny Pulparampil the producer of the album and collectively they have done a commendable job in their own various ways.

The album comes with a great introduction to what this release is all about from Sunny Pulparampil, the lyricist, presenting the overall theme of the album. Sunny opens with his own priestly vocation in connection with the person of St Chavara. He dedicates the album to St Chavara and St Euphrasia on the occasion of their canonization, that many may reach God through music, through prayerful voice and the enhancing sound. Christian music is a genre defined less by its melodic distinctions and more by the content of its lyrics. Nonetheless, the contribution is so connected to the spiritual foundations of Christian music that it stands as a unique gift to the pilgrims who seek after Christ in imitation of his Saints. The album is a musical journey through the lives of these saints. Leading to a worship experience, some of the entries are suitable for a gathering to sing and worship God through the Saints.

Since I am a Chavara fan, I was immediately stoked to hear what the album may have in store. Even though this kind of release does not come around very often, and what comes out often fail to respond exactly to what you expect, I daresay, a few of the entries pleased me.

The musical project that begins with the voice of Biju Narayanan (2), the apt opener on Chavara, depicted as an Indian ascetic. It presents Chavara as a contemplative in an earthy background. His voice soars up to the heavens and then swoops back down to take you along for the ride, you are swept away even before you realize. The flute is a perfect garnish to the number. In fact, flute dominates the album as the accompaniment. The booming and extravagant enunciation and familiar voice of Kester, heard in this number (4) borders on a semi-classical style. Percussions enhance the voice. The entry is suffused in bells and chimes. Beautiful as the entry is, since it is a solo, semi-classical, it does not seem apt for a communal liturgical worship. Chithra gives rendition to the thoughts of Chavara in her beautiful voice (6) and the *tabla* artiste gives her voice a lift. However, there is at least one occasion on which the flute competes with her voice to be heard.

The angelic voice of Elizabeth is a perk (7). Probably this is the most impactful song, which lovingly and firmly calls out the children to love as Jesus did. She gives this invitation to her younger self, saying from the future that life could be different for you with the prayers of the saint. She would have done much better if accompanied by younger artistes in the chorus with voices below her voice in depth. Similarly outstanding is the entry on Euphrasia to which Mithila gives rendition (12). The contemplative tone in which the piece is given voice lulls your mind in meditative moments. With the repetition of certain phrases, this piece seems to have been designed to bring both the musicians and audience to a heightened plane of reality, an almost trance-like state of existence. Mithila also positively breaks the flow with a folk song (9) and brings in a variety. The chorus is natural as their voices blend in as they promote the eco-spirituality of Chavara. The twelve-track, album is Sunny's most rhythmically dazzling work to date that they carry a very chill vibe for listeners to slowly nod their heads to and comes with a bonus entry of two on karaoke.

In spite of all these above-mentioned goodies, the presentation of *Anayatha Deepam* comes with minor quibbles. Although there is nothing terribly wrong with them, these objections come across to me as disrupting. The excesses of illustration have a cartoonish aspect about the sleeve that the album is presented with. It is in keeping with

children's cartoon book with photos and snapshots and paintings on the cover art. These illustrations infest the presentation and distract the attention of the user. The repeated picture of Chavara (four individual ones apart from the one on the CD itself) and Euphrasia, the two photos of Sunny, the lyricist himself, and the milestones of the lives of the saints captured by the brush of a painter, complete with the signature of Chavara, presents a visual overload. The details of the contributors given on the sleeve are highly informative, but to have the name of the lyricist on the sleeve 24 times is a bit too repetitive. The sequence of the lyric-music-voice introduced before each transcript of the entry could be made uniform. The numbering of the entries on the back sleeve should have been done better as number 14 is repeated. The quote from Chavara at the bottom of the front sleeve should have been more accurate as the words of St Chavara.

The introduction, given by the lyricist should have been perfected from the perspective of enunciation and linguistic delivery. Some of the voices are beautiful, but they strain to cram words in the metre. A few lyrics should have been polished to take the rough edges and the protruding segments away (3, 6, 9). Some of the entries fail to keep you keen until the end as they get monotonous (3, 13). There are at least two entries of which the lines are repeated by the chorus making it sound like a bhajan and fail to impress (2, 13).

Although the inclusion of the last two numbers of karaoke is not a bad move per se, simply adding tracks did not feel interesting enough to warrant repeat listens. These downsides notwithstanding, overall, there is more in the album to like than dislike. It is always my desire to temper any more critical review with words of grace, but the reality is that good music and good lyrics are not often developed quickly, and worship music especially needs to take time. It must ferment in the heart and be deepened with reflection upon. Like his other excellent works, unless attention is paid, the production tends to grow old quickly and get abandoned at the back of the shelf.

In conclusion, if you love worship music and enjoy albums on saints, this album will sound good somewhere in your collection depending upon how good a collector you are. However, if you are looking for something musically innovative and lyrically off the beaten path, you may be disappointed. *Anayatha Deepam* is fine on its own standing, but it is ultimately an average collection of praise songs in honour of the saints. Although it lacks real depth of theological merit in deep poetry, it can be an emotional release for people wanting to

revel in God's love for us through other men and women who have done so and have gone before us.

It is worthwhile to purchase the physical CD because it comes complete with a booklet incorporated into the sleeve in four folds, which is a mini-museum of paintings and photos and the lyrics of the entries in order to give you a visual enjoyment as well as auditory. These images are worth pondering alongside the songs.

Benny Paul Thettayil

150 YEARS

Since the Publication of

Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul

by **Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara**

(Originally Issued on 13 February 1868)

In the loving Providence of God and with far-reaching foresight, our beloved founder Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara issued *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul* (*Testament of a Loving Father*) on 13 February 1868 to the people of Kainakary, his own kith and kin united in 'spirit and flesh'. This insightful and down-to-earth document, the first of its kind in the known history of the Church, aimed at giving practical direction to families in leading a God-fearing as well as socially commendable life, completes 150 years after it was handed over to the community in Kainakary.

Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara, a yet to be recognized 'champion of families' even within the Catholic Church and a truly loving father (*oru nalla appan*) in heart, bequeathed to his beloved family members and relatives, 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. As the Catholic Church makes earnest efforts to accompany her faithful who discern and adopt their vocation of responsible parenthood for which Pope Francis invites all pastors to go an extra mile to support "families face their present challenges with the light and strength that comes from the Gospel," the holistic and practical insights of Saint Chavara come handy, provided we are ready to translate them into contemporary idioms and make them respond to the challenges faced by modern day families. 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 of children and discipline within the family.

Family is the heaven on earth. As Saint Chavara insightfully puts it, "a good Christian family is the image of heaven, where members live together by the bond of blood and affection, duly respecting and obeying the parents, walking peacefully before God and people, seeking eternal salvation according to each one's proper state of life." It is with this intention that he, in a spirit of prayer and discernment

and yearning for “God’s light and peace,” invited family members to cultivate love, order, and peace, even if that would call for sacrificing personal convenience and comfort. Hence, Saint Chavara codified this practical guideline in forty paragraphs, addressing three vital perspectives to be maintained in every Catholic family, namely, (1) the place of a family in the redemptive plan of God, (2) the role of family in the mission of the Church, and (3) the mission of family in social networking.

Let us celebrate the message of the *Testament* by bringing it to the consciousness of every family by initiating more effective modes of love, unity, and sharing that are vital in establishing and effectively sustaining families at all times. Following the insights in the *Testament*, we shall personally and collectively strive to animate, support, and encourage all families that are close to us in our varied ministerial contexts. Let new insights emerge, inspired by the love and concern that Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara felt in his heart, for the integral wellbeing of families and to lead them on their way of becoming heaven on earth.

More Journals from Dharmaram

Journal of Dharma (Dharmaram Journal of Religions and Philosophies, ISSN: 0253-7222): Started in 1975, *Journal of Dharma* is an earnest attempt on the part of DVK to bring together scholars from all over the world and from across diverse cultures and traditions to seriously deliberate upon issues pertaining to religions and philosophies. Apart from serving as a forum for the exchange of ideas and experiences regarding approaches and methods towards religious and philosophical quests of humanity, this quarterly journal encourages research in interreligious studies and dialogue.

Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Jose Nandhikkara, Email: nandhikkara@dvk.in

Asian Horizons (Dharmaram Journal of Theology, ISSN: 0973-9068): Asia, with its wider horizons, has a noble vision to offer to the world towards its integral growth and interdependent development in the third millennium. The world is looking to Asia for enlightenment and harmony of life. AH offers a forum for genuine investigation of and reflection on the *Jesudharma* in the Asian context marked by economic poverty, cultural diversity, and religious plurality, in order to discern the way towards the glory of God and the flourishing of humanity on earth.

Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Shaji G. Kochuthara (asianhorizons@dvk.in)

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Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Thomas Parayil (thomasparayil04@yahoo.co.in)

Iustitia: It is a biannual, which aims at contributing towards the enhancement and deepening of the knowledge of ecclesiastical laws contained in the codes of Canon Law, especially the CCEO, and the particular laws of various Churches *sui iuris* and to make it accessible to scholars and experts, as well as the wider public and the practitioners of canon law in various fields of theoretical research and practical administration. Promotion of quality scientific research and comparative studies between CIC and CCEO as well as between Church laws and civil laws come within the scope of *Iustitia*.

Editor-in-Chief: Dr. C. Thunduparampil (iustitiadvkjournal@gmail.com)

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Forthcoming Publication

Thomas Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, publishers: Chavara Central Secretariat (Chavara Hills, Kochi) and Dharmaram Publications (Bangalore) in 2017; ISBN: 978-93-84964-76-4; Pages: xx + 416 (Hardbound, with Index).

Price: Rs. 360 (India) / US\$ 30 (Outside India).

Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara is a sequel to Fr Thomas Kochumuttom's earlier work, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara* (2014). While the first book deals with the life story of St Chavara, the present one concentrates on his spirituality. This study is broader in scope and different in perspective. In addition to looking at St Chavara's life and undertakings from a spiritual point of view, it brings in a lot of fresh data that have bearing on his spirituality. It also covers the Saint's teachings on various theological issues and spiritual life. The points of discussion are well substantiated with original documents and authentic testimonies. While quoting the relevant texts from St Chavara's writings, Kochumuttom makes his own translation that sets an example of accurate and lucid English rendering of such works. The presentation is scientific but simple so that it will interest both the academic and the lay sections of readers.

Thomas Kochumuttom, born in 1941 in Kerala, was ordained a CMI priest in 1971. He holds a master's degree in philosophy and a doctorate in Buddhism from the universities of Pune (India) and Lancaster (UK) respectively. He began his academic career as lecturer in philosophy and spirituality in Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bengaluru, and then moved to Wardha as rector of Darsana Institute of Philosophy. In 1999, he opted for a quiet life of prayer in Jeevandhara Ashram, Jaiharikhal in the Himalayas, and ever since he is the Acharya there guiding individuals and groups of *sādhakas* in spiritual pursuit. His works include books and articles in Indian Christian thoughts and the spiritual legacy of St Chavara. In 2014, he published a detailed as well as easily readable biography of the Indian Saint Chavara.

For copies:

Chavara Central Secretariat

CMI Prior General's House
Chavara Hills, Kakknad
Post Box 3105, Kochi 682 030 India
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