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SAINT KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA
and
THE FATHERS OF THE CHURCH

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Editorial

**SAINT KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA
and
THE FATHERS OF THE CHURCH**

Naiju Jose Kalambukattu CMI
Editor-in-Chief

The Fathers of the Church were the saintly ones who lived under the guidance of the Holy Spirit who directed the Church to the truth. Saint John Paul II in his Apostolic Letter *Patres Ecclesiae* wrote: "Those saints are rightly called Fathers of the Church, who with the power of their faith and the depth and richness of their teachings, engendered and formed her during her early centuries." He further stated that "the Church never ceases returning to the writings of the Fathers, with their deep wisdom and perennial youth, and continually renewing their memory." They all lived between the 1st and 6th centuries, and contributed in a decisive way to a deeper understanding of Christian doctrine. In ancient times, the word "father" was used for a teacher, and in both Scripture and in the life of the early Church, teachers were viewed as fathers of their students. Since the teaching of the faith was entrusted to bishops, many of them came to be called "Fathers," a title extended to other Church writers during the first six centuries of Christianity. According to Irenaeus "For when any person has been taught from the mouth of another he is termed the son of him who instructs him, and the latter is called his father."¹ The Fathers of the Church are teachers who strengthen Christians in their faith in Christ. Their theological insights and pastoral vision have played a significant role in shaping and guarding the faith of the early Church. They were nourished by Sacred Scripture, the letters of the first Christians, and the tradition of the nascent Church; and "it is the ecclesiastical doctrine of

¹ Irenaeus, Adv. Haer. 4, 41,2; Johannes Quastern, *Patrology I*, Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics, Inc., 1986, 9.

Tradition as a source of faith which makes the writings and opinions of the Fathers so important.”²

The Fathers of the Church played a very significant role in nourishing and defending the faith against the theological controversies and heretical teachings. Through their profound prayer life, resolute commitment to the orthodoxy of faith, they have laid foundations for theological development, for as the immediate inheritors of the deposit of faith from the apostles, the Fathers of the Church had exposed and expounded the truth hidden in the Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. Their works are genuine sources of Christian faith and doctrine. Hence they deepen our faith.

The study of the fathers and their writings helps us to grow in prayer life and delve more deeply into the spiritual riches of the first centuries of the Church and draw inspirations for the life and mission in the present context. The present issue of *Herald of the East* attempts to shed light on the Fathers of the Church in general highlighting the characteristic features of their lives and mission in the early Church and sees how Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara with his varying ministries in the Church played a very significant role in defending the faith in line with the Fathers of the Church. A closer and critical study of Chavara’s writings underscores that he was a great defender of true and genuine faith of the Church, for in his writings we find sound theological vision and insights. His writings further substantiate his pastoral concern, a significant character that urges us to place him alongside the great Fathers of the Church.

Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara was faithful to the mission conferred on him in the Church and was committed to it to build up the people of God. Through the volumes written, he ventured to reimagine and reinterpret the bond between the divine and the human in convincing narratives and metaphors. He figured out God as the ‘*appan*’, for it textured in a profound faith and trust in the Lord of mercy and compassion. He engaged in various spiritual and welfare activities, like starting a Sanskrit school at Mannanam for the educational development of the area, establishing the first wooden press in Kerala, renewing the Order of the Liturgy, popularising Sunday sermons and organizing annual retreats in parishes to facilitate the spiritual renewal of the people. Chavara walked on unbeaten paths to sustain the faith of the

² J. Quastern, *Patrology* I, 11.

people, was successful in responding creatively to the crisis of his time and turning it to a cradle of new initiatives.

He was one among the founders and the first Prior General of the first religious congregation for men in the Syro-Malabar Church known as Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI), and a religious congregation for women known as Congregation of the Mother of Carmel (CMC). As a pioneer in many fields and true shepherd of souls after the model and example of Christ, Chavara's life and ministry was an expression of the love of the Church he cherished, for he coordinated various ministries with pastoral care of the souls in view. In all these and throughout his life time, the passion that Jesus felt to do the will of his Father (Mt 26:39; Jn 4:34) and for the humanity (Jn 3:14ff; 10:18) was evident. His leadership was not power but service as in the case of Jesus of Nazareth; not goal oriented but God and His people oriented.

Thomas Kollampampil in his article enumerates the characteristics of the Fathers of the Universal Church and affirms that as charismatically gifted inspiring teachers, Fathers of the Church and Doctors of the Church are powerful builders of Christian tradition. They were the strong protectors of the Church from heretical teachings, schismatic developments, deviant human life patterns and edified the Church through the centuries. In this respect, Kollampampil revisits the life, mission and contribution of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara, a prophetic visionary, holy apostle and committed pastor of the Church in the context of the Thomas Christians of India. Benny Thettayil in his paper explores Chavara's ecclesiastical, spiritual, literary and socio-cultural contributions in the formative years of the Syro-Malabar Church, and expounds how St Chavara fulfils the requirement of 'antiquity', which is one of the characteristic features of the Fathers of the universal Church. Thettayil holds that the Eastern Churches in general and the Syro-Malabar Church in particular need not follow the western parameters to consider one as the Father of the Church. Alex Sebastian Kollamkalam makes a close evaluation of the life and ministries of St Chavara and presents him as a saintly Father and an Orthodox teacher. He observes that Chavara was very much saddened by the absence of saints among the Thomas Christians in India. As a man of God and man of the Church he fostered holiness and even the purpose of the religious congregations he founded was to foster holiness. Kollamkalam affirms that Chavara with his sanctity and orthodox teaching could be counted as a Father of the Church.

Mathew Maniampra in his article makes a portrayal of the pastoral personality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara and how he continued the mission of Jesus. Chavara was a pastor and his ministries were the expressions and overflow of his relationship with God. Maniampra delineates the holistic reformations that Chavara had undertaken to bring changes in the Church from within and the society. As a rich depository of the compassion and forgiveness, he was a blessing to the Church and the society, and now challenges us to enhance the pastoral attitude and continue the mission of Jesus. Reflecting on the testimony of the sisters of Koonammavu Convent on Chavara, Susmitha presents how he became the pillar that supported the Church, mirrored the face of Christ and became the lamp in Kerala of the nineteenth century. The personality, contributions and vision and mission of this illustriousness son of the Church are grouped into three titles, i.e., the pillar, the mirror and the lamp. Susmitha underscores that it was Chavara's commitment to radical following of Christ strengthened him to make substantial changes in view of genuine growth of the Church and society. John Ollukaran in his article expounds the trinitarian dimension of CMI way of life. He begins recalling the great commission of the Lord (Mt 28:16-20), and affirms that every human is consecrated to reflect the Trinitarian life of unity and every family is to be the mirror of Trinitarian family wherein the Holy Family is a model par excellence. Substantiated by the CMI constitutions, Ollukaran affirms that the Congregation as a *Darshana Kuttumbam* is a reflection of Trinitarian life with each of the three Persons in the Trinity, for the CMI formula of profession of vows is a radical commitment to the Most Holy Trinity.

In line with the Fathers of the Church, Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara with the quest to love God and neighbour in Christ and his Spirit, dedicated his entire life for the same and bequeathed to us a tremendously rich patrimony of evangelical vitality, spiritual profundity and uncompromising love of God.

Herald of the East registers the indebtedness and gratitude to Benny Paul Thettayil, the former Editor-in Chief, for his tireless efforts and hardwork to bring out its several issues on diverse themes.

FATHER OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

Thomas Kollamparampil CMI♦

Abstract: Fathers of the Church and Doctors of the Church are charismatically gifted inspiring teachers, leaders and powerful builders of Christian tradition. They protected the Church from heretical teachings, schismatic developments, deviant human life patterns and thus edified the Church through the centuries. In this respect the life and mission of St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara needs to be revisited in the context of the Thomas Christians of India. The mission of Christ was entrusted to the Church and that was fulfilled through her gifted teachers, leaders and powerful witnesses of Christian life from time to time. The mission of instructing, sanctifying and governing were based on the tripartite functioning of the priestly, prophetic and kingly (shepherding) faculties of the created humanity. These faculties and ministries were handled by the Church under the noble guidance of the Fathers, Doctors and Teachers of the Church in a faithful and discerning manner in the light of scriptures, tradition and the teachings of the Church. From those eminent teachers and preachers of the early Christian centuries emerged the 'Fathers of the Church', and later the 'Doctors of the Church', as builders of the Church.

Keywords: Fathers of the Church, Doctors of the Church, heretical teachings, schismatic developments, free will, word of God, living tradition, divine pedagogy.

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1. Introduction

Celebration of the contributions of the charismatically gifted inspiring teachers, leaders and powerful witnesses of Christian history is a noble legacy of the Catholic Church. Among such inspiring Christian personalities of the past, the 'Fathers of the Church' (*Patres ecclesiae*) and the 'Doctors of the Church' (*Doctores ecclesiae*) deserve primary attention in the Catholic Church. It is on account of their ongoing inspiration and enlightenment for the later generations of Christians in matters of faith and tradition.¹ During their life time the Doctors of the Church have attained salvific wisdom and through their powerful witnessing life enlightened the believers. By their teachings as well as Christian actions on the one hand they built up the Church and on the other remained vigilant so as to protect the Church from the disintegrating ways of life, heretical teachings, schismatic developments and deviant human life patterns of their times.

In quite realistic terms, the Christian ways of life are beset with misguiding tendencies, due to the leaning towards the materialistic and commercial concerns of the globalizing world. As a result, the value of human persons and human dignity are much disregarded or compromised in the social systems. In this regard Pope Francis has highlighted the need of vigilance against neo-gnostic (sufficiency of human knowledge alone for perfect life) and neo-pelagianist (sufficiency of human will power and actions for perfection) tendencies² emerging in world cultures. Much evil is emerging from human greed, false pride and arrogance. In all such deviant situations of human life, the inspiration and enlightenment from the life, teachings and mission of the 'Fathers of the Church' and 'Doctors of the Church' are becoming all the more relevant. It is in the background of these factors, the builders of each Christian tradition through the ethos of the same living communities have to be remembered. Based on these factors, the person and ministries of St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara need to be revisited and historically mapped, so as to have proper resourcing and updating for the current times of the Syro-Malabar Church, as an offshoot of Syriac Christianity in India and now spread abroad. St. Chavara, during his time, had to fight against schismatics (Rokos), traveled through the troubled waters of the Thomas Christians of India in the 19th century,

¹ Cf. Bernard McGinn, *The Doctors of the Church*, New York: Crossroad, 1999, 1-4.

² Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 19 March, 2019; 35, 36, 38, 40, 43, 47, 48, 62.

was pulled between the *padroado* and the *propaganda* factions of the Western missionaries in India. For the sacramental and social unity of the Church, St. Chavara had to develop on the East Syrian liturgy and for social unity, many social reforms and educational endeavours were begun in the social life of his times. For spiritual progress and life of Christian perfection consecrated religious communities were established (CMI and CMC congregations). St. Chavara has left behind for the posterity a rich body of orthodox Christian writings on Christian spiritual life and perfection. He was vigilant to the challenges of his times as well as attentive to the developmental needs of the Christian communities of his period. He built up the Church by his life and dedicated mission.

Far above the needed vigilance in Christian life, as mentioned by Pope Francis, we need to bear in mind the ever-ongoing challenges propping up in the social, psychological and spiritual levels of Christian life. There are new forms of social injustice, oppression, social marginalization, denial of human rights and dignity to humans in the context of commercial production, distribution and consumption in a market driven global economy. They are affecting the whole body of humanity and regarding these the social doctrines of the Church have to focus attention for a fruitful action plan.³ At the personal psychological level of humanity, both individually and communally, there are racial prejudices, gender discriminations, subjugation of groups and individuals in families, institutions and social sectors of the globalizing world that are amounting to psychological oppressions and suppressions.

Added to all these, at the level of spiritual realization, there are 'false teachers' and 'false prophets' in disguise. They pour out spiritual misguidance and manipulations of true Christian traditions for pecuniary gains, popularity, social prominence, etc. In the spiritual sphere, there are new forms of spiritual sicknesses. One must also take note of the ever-recurring malpractices and evil tendencies within the Christian hierarchy as well. In all these social, psychological and spiritual fields of human life, the Church needs to attend and extend pure services for salvation. The teaching of St Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 enlightens us: "may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our lord Jesus Christ."

³ II Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, 1.

2. The On-Going Incarnate Ministry of Christ in the Church

The great command of the risen Lord is: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:19-20). With this command, the disciples of Christ are appointed and empowered to carry on the mission of 'teaching all to observe' all that has been commanded. The ministry of Christ for the salvation of the whole creation (Mk 16:15) functions by a process of repentance and forgiveness of sins leading to salvation, starting from Jerusalem and spreading to the ends of the earth (inhabited world, *oikos*; Lk 24:47). This spreading from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth is more specified in terms of 'bearing witness to the Good News' as clarified in Acts 1:8, "... you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth." The risen Lord has indicated the dynamics of the normative process of salvation.

The ministry of Christ is transferred to his disciples. The normative incarnate ministry of Christ has its retrospective and prospective dimensions. While the New Testament Church lives in and takes forward the prospective dimensions of the ministry of Christ, the Old Testament Church functioned fruitfully and reflects the retrospective dimensions of the ministry of Christ through many events and personalities of the Old Testament. The salvific instructions given there, were according to the progressive levels of divine revelations in accordance with the faith and response of humans in that First Covenant. The *sensus plenior* of the OT instructions are actualized in the incarnate Son.

2.1. Divine Instructions to the Human Free Will for Salvific Response

God set the first parents of humanity in the 'initial Paradise' with all potentialities of life for orienting towards their fuller growth. The divine design of humanity was in the 'image and likeness of God' as a covenantal promise to make humans grow in the likeness of God with human free will. While exercising the free will in freedom, God wanted humans to understand and accept the divine plan and economy. In this process, humans had to believe in God's promises and respond with understanding to that divine plan and economy for the fuller realization of the divinely planned human life. In order to exercise the free will of humans in a creative way, God instructed the first parents as to what had to be done and what should not be done (Gen 2:16-17). This initial instruction of God for the human race is continued in several versions in

the history of salvation through the leaders, teachers, prophets, apostles and later disciples of Christ, all through the history. The divine instruction is still on-going as part of that initial plan and economy to be fulfilled in Christ (Eph 1:10) and to be continued in the Church and in the world.

On account of the 'free will', humanity is co-responsible, under divine guidance, for the shaping of the human destiny. St. Ephrem the Syrian explains this factor of human responsibility as follows: Even though Adam and Eve were given all facilities of a well-furnished Paradise freely, the Lord did not wish to give them all the fruitfulness and perfection as a free gift. The first parents were given the noblest gift of 'free will' to know the loving Lord and the instructions given to them, as to how they should live in Paradise (*Hymns on Paradise*, 12:18; Gen 2:16-17).⁴ In order to attain the desired perfection, humans must make personal combat, exercising the 'free will'. In order to reconcile with the divine plan, humans must fight against selfishness and offer themselves completely to the divine designs rather than to personal designs. Living in the given Paradise, thus, involves proper exercise of 'free will', combat against selfishness, reconciliations to the divine designs, etc., that have personal and communitarian dimensions. In the communitarian life, the Christian leaders and teachers have a prominent role in instructing and guiding the people. This role is eminently played by the Fathers and Doctors of the Church.

For the correct behaviour and life in Paradise the Lord had instructed them, because their finite 'free will' needed instruction, unlike the absolute free will which God alone has. In fact, God the Father taught them how to live in the Paradise, which was their given world

⁴ Adam/humanity had to make a seasoned and mature behaviour in response to the divine instructions so as to gain meritoriously the crowns of knowledge and life. Adam/humanity has to make discerning choices, in the mode of a combat, in the light of the given instructions. In this respect the teaching of St. Ephrem is an inspiration:

The Just One did not wish to give Adam the crown quite free,
even though He had allowed him to enjoy Paradise without toil;
God knew that if Adam wanted he could win the prize.

The Just One ardently wished to enhance him,
for, although the rank of supernal beings is great through grace,
the crown for the proper use of free will is by no means paltry.

(*Hymns on Paradise*, 12:18; tr. S.P. Brock, *St Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns on Paradise*, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990, 167).

environment. This was a unique gift given to humans to understand the divine plan and respond to that divine plan out of free will and attain meritoriously the promises of God in Paradise. So, it is the duty of humanity to learn and believe in the salvific instructions of the divine plan and the divine economy in the context of the given human 'free will'. In the history of salvation, according to the divine economy, stage by stage, instructions were given, based on humanity's personal and social growth. It is in such a developmental pattern the Old and New Testament instructions were given. All such instructions are made fully revealed and made perfectly active in Christ, the incarnate Son, through his teachings by words and deeds.

2.2. The Ongoing Tripartite Ministries for Salvation

For the ongoing economy of salvation, the Lord has anointed prophets, priests and kings in the Old Testament. These tripartite functions and institutions became social characteristics of the inlayed faculties of Adam/humans with prophetic, priestly and kingly (pastoral) powers in creation. These tripartite faculties have, at the same time, inner, personal and subjective functions for human perfection as well as outer, social institutional factors for the corporate human society (humanity) to attain its human, social and cultural/spiritual goals.

In Adam/humans, the functioning of the prophetic, priestly and kingly (pastoral) roles turned to disintegration due to the wrong exercise of human 'free will'. In the subsequent generations, this tendency brought deeper disintegration. It is against that disintegration that God the Son stands as the salvific Word Incarnate (fullness of prophetic Word), the High Priest of humanity (fullness of priesthood) and King of Kings (fullness of kingship/pastoral care). Wherever humanity stood in failure regarding the prophetic, priestly and kingly (pastoral) functions, Christ the Word Incarnate, High Priest and King of kings (Head Pastor) provided for all forms of insufficiencies in all; and that became tangible to all who have faith in the incarnate mission of the Son.

In the New Testament, the Lord anointed his apostles to continue the work of redemption and salvation, through the tripartite ministries that he has revealed in his own person and life. Above all, the risen Lord continues to work with them and through them in the world (Mt 28:20) for the fuller realization of the economy of salvation. It is the risen Lord, through the Holy Spirit, who guides and builds up his own body, the Church, the whole body of humanity, through the hands of the apostles/disciples of all times. For every age of the salvific growth of the Church through challenges, confusions, conflicts, etc., the Lord provides

certain men and women with specific wisdom and courage to lead the flock in their learning, doing and attaining the sanctification of the Christian goal of salvation. What one learns, believes and understands need to reach the level of observance (doing) as the flowering of Christian faith and learning/teaching and life patterns.

The Holy Spirit who was sent by the Lord is active through the eminent personalities (men and women) who are engaged in the timely building up of the Church in the right direction. The ecclesially declared 'Fathers of the Church' and 'Doctors of the Church' are preeminent among them. Such leaders of the Church have worked for the specific needs of different ages and the particular requirements of the peoples in diverse contexts in the pluralistic world of the believers in Christ. Basically, this is the continued work of the risen Lord among the people through the Holy Spirit who manifestly came upon the believing community on the day of Pentecost. That mystery of the Pentecostal indwelling of the Spirit continues in the world. In this process, the spiritually enlightened and empowered men and women of every generation serve as the continuation of the 'teaching words and deeds' of the risen Lord in the Church.

2.3. Pilgrim Journey and Salvific Pedagogy

The process of redemption and salvation is ongoing. At present, the Church is the minister to continue the redemptive and salvific ministry of Christ, the risen Lord. Church has to lead the pilgrim journey of the people to the heavenly Jerusalem (the eschatological Paradise). In any true pilgrim journey, the people are always on the move and the scenario on the way keeps on changing, with its own hopes, doubts, confusions, anxieties and conflicts. In more concrete terms, the social, personal and spiritual realities of life on the road of pilgrimage have to undergo changes in the mode of salvific transformations. Even in the changing scenario there are unchanging 'foundational orientations', such as, faith, hope and charitable active life, that are guiding principles and 'peripheral orientations'. These are liable to change, such as, different levels of catechesis, ongoing doctrinal teachings, new modes of being Church in the world, etc.

Both types of orientations (foundational and peripheral) are important in their own roles. Peripheral orientations are like the shell of a seed that is very important till the time of the coming out of the germinating seed (the fruits of the Kingdom). When the sprout (foundational orientations) has come out, the shell of the seed, as peripheral orientation, would be left behind. Hence, in the transmission

of Christian traditions, the discerning of the 'foundational orientations' from the 'peripheral orientations', has to be successfully done. Tradition needs reform, and doctrinal teachings on the basic faith need progressive levels of understanding (development of dogma). All these are to be achieved by the Church from time to time through the pneumatically enlightened teachers, leaders and gifted witnesses of Christian life. Among such enlightened Christians, 'Fathers of the Church' and 'Doctors of the Church' are prominent.

The presence of Jesus (risen Lord) in all generations and tribes is assured. But this mystery is active through many faithful disciples of Jesus as teachers and guides as envisaged by the risen Lord. In the ever-changing scenario of the world, in all generations, there is the need of people who can explain the mysteries of Christ and his teachings most effectively for the building up of the Kingdom of God. Jesus left a living teaching authority.⁵ That living teaching ministry has to be continued and fulfilled. This ministry has to see that whatever is being taught has to reach the stage of maturity in the mode of 'observing all that has been commanded' by Jesus (Mt 28:20).

Jesus declared that when the Spirit comes, more understanding would be given from time to time (Jn 14:26). Hence, the disciples of Jesus have to experience the presence of the Spirit and bring in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit on the Christian community by their divinely inspired teaching and guidance through their active witnessing life. More and more Pentecostal experience of the coming of the Spirit has to be brought about. It is in such a process that the Christian way of life (tradition) and the doctrinal teachings have been evolved by the *Fathers of the Church* in the early centuries. Together with, and following that initial formation of the Christian observances and traditions by the Fathers of the Church, there emerged the life and ministry of the *Doctors of the Church*. The epithet 'Doctors of the Church' gradually evolved in the history of the Church, considering the enlightenment they provided by their life and ministry.⁶

2.4. Sacred Tradition, Scripture and the Current Living Tradition

The Word of God is multifaceted and provides various insights, instructions and specific guidance proper to every age and tradition. It is because the building up of the Kingdom or the Mystical Body of

⁵ Christopher Rengers, *The 33 Doctors of the Church*, Rockford, Illinois: Tan Books and Publishers, 2000, xxii-xxiv.

⁶ Christopher Rengers, *The 33 Doctors of the Church*, p. xxiv.

Christ, is a dynamically unfolding mystery by the power of the Holy Spirit. This dynamic evolution is constantly guided and fulfilled by the power and energy of the Word in the world. A single individual cannot completely understand and explain the *sensus plenior* of the Word of God. The Word of God provides many nourishments from all sides.⁷ According to the need of each one and each society, the Word provides the teaching. This is a mediated ministry and it is fulfilled by the inspiring leaders and teachers. The 'Fathers of the Church' and 'Doctors of the Church' are bearers of Christ and his teachings. They interpret and guide the times and developments by their life and mission. So, in every age, there are interpreters of Christian life and traditions. By their preaching and teaching, they preserved the truth of the Word and propelled the power and energy of the Word among the faithful for the building up of the Church.

The divine economy is active in diverse ways through the ministry of the inspiring people among the faithful. That is the mode of the incarnation of the Word, in concrete, in every Christian and in the world. Thus, the power, energy and action of the Word Incarnate in the world is expanding as the ripples in a pond and travels to the outer horizons according to the divine plan. The Church is travelling to the shore of salvation, carrying the whole world. In that process there might occur wrong understanding and actions, which are to be corrected and guided. The written Word was initially a living Word in the living tradition of the believers. Then that 'living Word' became written down to enrich all nations. Now that 'written Word' has to be translated into 'living Word' in the Christian living actions. By the preaching, teaching and exemplary life of the enlightened people, the Word of God would be made living and active in the community as living tradition. The ancient tradition and the written Word and the present living tradition form a corporate

⁷ St. Ephrem, "Who is able to understand, Lord, all the richness of even one of your words? There is more that eludes us than what we can understand. We are like the thirsty drinking from a fountain. Your word has as many aspects as the perspectives of those who study it. The Lord has coloured his word with diverse beauties, so that those who study it can contemplate what stirs them. He has hidden in his word all treasures, so that each of us may find a richness in what he or she contemplates" (*Commentary on the Diatessaron*, I, 18; cf. Aphrahat, *Demonstrations*, XXII, 26; cf. Pope Francis, *Motu Proprio, Aperuit Illis*, 2).

body of revelation and salvation to the world in the form of a single continuum.⁸

The advanced horizons of the Word of God are emerging into the world and they need to be identified, understood and responded to in an adequate manner. The Doctors of the Church are faithful servants in this regard. They remain champions of orthodoxy and orthopraxis, indicating the sure path at times of change, needed transformation, and above all clearing the clouds of confusions and disintegration in Christian life. They are Scribes trained for the Kingdom, as Jesus defined, "therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old" (Mt 13:52). They are sure guides according to the heart of Jesus. Their love of humanity is the manifestation of the love of Christ for the whole humanity, as they have become configured and identified with Christ.

3. Fathers of the Church

This section explores the factors and doctrinal norms, on the basis of which, a saint, recognized by the universal Church, is declared a 'Father of the Church'.

The Christian way of life with its teachings and practices, started by Jesus, had been entrusted to the Church to be carried on in the history, so as to be made tangible and fruitful to all generations of humankind. This duty of the Church is fulfilled, in fact, by the work of the hierarchical leaders and charismatic members together with the believing community, in a synodal way. It was during the time of the Fathers of the Church many Christian teachings and practices became consolidated and got recognized. This process of consolidation and recognition passed through controversies, corrections in the teachings (orthodoxy), periodic complementing of the understanding of revelation and practices (orthopraxis), etc.

⁸ Cf. Pope Francis, *Motu Proprio, Aperuit Illis*, Instituting the Sunday of the Word of God, 30 September, 2019, no. 11: "We frequently risk separating sacred Scripture and sacred Tradition, without understanding that together they are the one source of Revelation. The written character of the former takes nothing away from its being fully a living word; in the same way, the Church's living Tradition, which continually hands that word down over the centuries from one generation to the next, possesses that sacred book as the 'supreme rule of her faith'" (cf. *Dei Verbum* 13).

During the pre-Nicene and post-Nicene periods (Council of Nicaea in 325 AD) we find the establishment of the foundations of Christian theology: canon of the scriptures, Christian meaning of Old Testament, essential teachings on the mystery of Christ and the Church, norms for distinguishing orthodox teaching and practices, formation of liturgical families, evolution of various Christian traditions, emergence of ascetical and monastic spiritual ideals and practices, encounter of the Christian way of life with various political, social and cultural forces of the times, etc. The hierarchical leaders and charismatic members of the Church, by their study and reflections on the revealed scriptures, addressed the pastoral needs and challenges of the times. They began to do systematic and scientific modes of theological reflection so as to describe and define essential matters of faith and to promote a more profound understanding of the history of salvation through its past, present and the possible future courses of development.

Through various patristic authors and their texts one finds the way in which the preachers, teachers, ascetics, thinkers and above all the faithful, conceived and practiced theological reflection and action for the betterment of their Christian life. They reflected on their faith in the light of the scriptures so as to make scriptures the soul of their theology (cf. DV 24). Their reflections integrated their human experiences, scientific findings, and found answers to the challenges put forward by the thinking people of their times, the pastoral challenges and needs of the times and so on. In this process of reflection, they were making use of the then accepted categories and modes of thinking, or in other words, making use of the accepted philosophical and social categories of the times. All these do amount to say that they were knowingly or unknowingly developing their theological method and Christian traditions.

3.1. Process of Declaring the Fathers of the Church in History

Today, the Catholic Church is blessed with many Fathers of the Church and 36 officially declared Doctors of the Church. 'Father of the Church' is not an officially conferred title and there is no definitive list as is the case with those who are honoured with the title 'Doctor of the Church'. In fact the title, 'Father of the Church', is a title that gradually began to be applied to certain Christian leaders who were distinguished by their antiquity, holiness, orthodoxy of doctrines, and ecclesiastical approval.

For understanding the title 'Fathers of the Church' a note, that is provided by St. Clement of Alexandria, is very helpful: "Words are the

progeny of the soul; hence we call those that instructed us 'fathers'."⁹ Since the principal teacher of any early Christian community was its bishop, the title 'Father' was first applied to them. In fact, the bishops who gathered in the various councils of the Church were referred to as 'council fathers'. This is a reflection of the Pauline New Testament tradition: "For though you might have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers. Indeed, in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel" (1Cor 4:15). However, since many of the important early Christian teachers were laymen (e.g., St. Justin), deacons (e.g., St. Ephrem) and priests (e.g., St. Jerome), it became customary from the fourth century to reckon these eminent teachers among 'the Fathers'.¹⁰ Later, when there were disputes about the interpretation of the Scripture, all the early exegetes sought 'consensus of the Fathers' in support of their points of view. The 'Fathers' here denoted the teachers of an earlier era who demonstrated how the apostolic writings in the Scripture were applied by the apostles and understood by their immediate successors. While all early Christian pastors and catechists "fathered" their particular portion of the flock during their lifetime, only those 'Fathers' who put their teaching in writing could continue to serve as guides to the whole Church in every age.

Hence, the title, 'Fathers of the Church' began to refer to those important Christian writers after the New Testament era, who, because of their closeness to that era, bore witness to the authentic apostolic way of interpreting the Scripture handed on to them by the Apostolic Tradition.¹¹ Such writers played a crucial role in articulating, consolidating and transmitting the Christian doctrines and bringing them to more mature expressions, at least in their most fundamental features. While the Church's understanding of revelation would continue to deepen until the Lord returns, the dogmas of the Trinity and the Incarnation, which stand at the centre of the "Hierarchy of Truths" (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 11), were defined during the period of the Fathers (the patristic era). It is significant that the age of the Early Church Fathers, commonly regarded as closing with Isidore of Seville in the West (+636), St. John Damascene in the Greek Church (+749), is roughly co-terminus with the period of the first seven great Ecumenical Councils

⁹ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 1.1.2-2.1; cf. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.41.2

¹⁰ J.H. Crehan, "Fathers of the Church", in *A Catholic Dictionary of Theology* Vol. 2, Melbourne: Nelson, 1967, 288-289, p. 289.

¹¹ J. Chapman, "Fathers of the Church", in *The Catholic Encyclopaedia* Vol. VI, New York: Gilmary Society, 1913, 1-18, p. 1.

which defined these two central mysteries of faith and drew out their most important implications. However, no such clear limit is assigned to the Syriac Fathers of the Eastern Christianity.¹²

The Church looks into the four major characteristic features in the life and works of an early Church leader who had made contributions in defending, expounding, and developing Christian doctrines, in order to be considered as a 'Father of the Church'. These are antiquity (*antiquitas*, meaning that the person lived within the early eight centuries during which the first Christian communities got themselves established), doctrinal orthodoxy (*orthodoxa doctrina*), personal sanctity (*sanctitas*), and approval of the Church (*ecclesiae declaratio*).¹³

3.2. Basic Categories of the Fathers in the Early Church

The early Church Fathers fall into three basic categories: Apostolic Fathers, ante-Nicene Church Fathers, and post-Nicene Church Fathers. The Apostolic Church Fathers, like Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch, were the immediate successors of the Apostles and were probably taught by them. They were concerned about the proclamation of the Gospel just as the Apostles themselves proclaimed it. Although most of them were not bent on formulating theological doctrines, they were zealous in rooting out and exposing any false doctrine, that cropped up in the early Church, based on the gospel taught to them by the Apostles.

The ante-Nicene Fathers also remained true to the gospel, but they had an additional concern for the initiation of doctrinal teachings. In the early centuries, several spurious writings were in circulation claiming to have the same authority as the established writings of Peter, Paul and Luke. Many of the Fathers in that era, spent their time in defending the Christian faith against false doctrines that were in vogue. Through several of these defences, we have the beginnings of the doctrines of the Church.

The post-Nicene Fathers carried out the mission of defending the gospel against all kinds of doctrinal heresies. They articulated the tenets of faith based on the Scripture and the Apostolic Tradition. However, the Fathers of that era were engaged more in developing methods of defending the Gospel and less in transmitting the same in its true and pure form.

¹² Crehan, "Fathers of the Church", p. 288.

¹³ J. Quasten, *Patrology*, Vol. 1, Westminster: Christian Classics, 1984, p. 10.

3.3. Outstanding Features of the Fathers/Doctors of the Church¹⁴

The Scripture and the Tradition are the foundations of Christian theology. The Tradition is rooted in the activities of the Apostles and ancient Christian teachers, who set up models of exegesis, theologizing and pastoral guidelines for their own communities as well as for the future generations. In this respect, the ancient Christian writers in general, and the Fathers of the Church in particular stand as foundation and models for posterity.

3.3.1. Privileged Testimonies of the Tradition

The Fathers handed down faithfully what they had received, learned and practised to the subsequent generations either in their oral or written teachings. In the early Church, the Bishops were called 'Fathers' (cf. 1Cor 4:15) as successors of the Apostles, on account of their teaching authority, which is the *Magisterium* of the Church to which is given the official duty to interpret the Word of God (*Dei Verbum*, 10).¹⁵

3.3.2. Love of the Scripture and the Tradition

The Fathers of the Church represent the true interrelationship between the Scripture and the Tradition.¹⁶ According to them, the Sacred Scripture represented the ultimate source of religious truth. They venerated, studied, explained and defended it with loving submission to it in faith. It became the foundation of their faith, subject of their preaching, nutrition for their piety and the soul of their theological undertakings.

3.3.3. Divine Originality of Christianity

The Fathers of the Church were convinced of the fundamental transformation, that occurred and was occurring in the world, brought about by the Christ event. Christ event and the consequent transformation of the world occurred through the divine intervention rather than human creativity. This transformation was something initiated by the divine power, in giving a new vision of the reality, a new hermeneutic of humanity, world and God. The Fathers of the Church have reinterpreted all good achievements of humanity with their new Christian vision.¹⁷

¹⁴ Congregation for Catholic Education, *Instruction on the Study of the Fathers of the Church*, *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition (English), 15 January 1990, 8-15.

¹⁵ *Instruction on the Study of the Fathers*, p. 9.

¹⁶ *Instruction on the Study of the Fathers*, p. 9.

¹⁷ *Instruction on the Study of the Fathers*, p. 10.

3.3.4. Masters and Promoters of Dogmatic Development

The Fathers of the Church, while defending the truth against heresies, formulated and established the basic dogmatic teachings of the Church. From these basic teachings, the Church began to make her dogmatic progress.¹⁸ It was the Fathers who with their intuition of faith propounded the formula for various articles of faith as guidance for the growth of faith and dogmatic teachings.

3.3.5. Sense of Mystery and Experience of the Divine

The sense of the Mystery among the Fathers and their awareness of the Divine Economy overshadowed their theological reasoning and led them to cultivate an attitude of piety, asceticism, humble and deep faith, as well as assiduous prayer and contemplation. These attitudes of the Fathers gave them the facility to experience the Divine in their life of faith and practice. They synthesized their mystical experience and the luminosity of theological activity. The result of this synthesis was a happy blend of faith and reason, knowledge and charity that enhanced the Christian life of faith in them and in their communities.¹⁹

3.3.6. Pastors and Interpreters of Salvation History

The theological articulations of the Fathers were aimed at the pastoral care of the faithful. Their writings were responses to the questions of their times, be it, catechism for the instruction of the faithful, homilies for the nourishment of life, exposition of the scripture, confrontation of the errors, exhortations for perfection or defence of the identity as Christians. They approached the realities of life in the light of the history of salvation.²⁰ At the same time, they defended orthodoxy and promoted orthopraxis. In their understanding these two were inseparable.

Fathers of the Church recognized the centrality of the mystery of Christ. All other mysteries within the salvation history are subsumed into this central mystery, the mystery of Christ. They exposed the mystery of salvation by stressing the unity of the present, in the activity of the Holy Spirit, with the tradition of the past and pointing to the expectation of the eschatological future.

¹⁸ *Instruction on the Study of the Fathers*, p. 9.

¹⁹ *Instruction on the Study of the Fathers*, pp. 10-11.

²⁰ *Instruction on the Study of the Fathers*, p. 9.

3.4. Specific Services in the Life and Mission of the Fathers/Doctors of the Church

1. The Fathers of the Church had a deep-rooted consciousness of the foundation of Christianity and its apostolic origin.²¹ This gave them a new vision of reality, a new hermeneutic of humanity, Church and God.
2. The main responsibilities of the Fathers of the Church were expounding, transmitting and defending the Gospel in its true and pure form.
3. They handed down faithfully the person and message of Christ, which they had received, learned and practised in their Christian discipleship to the later generations in their writings.
4. They defended the faith of the Church against false doctrines and stood for the unity of the Church.
5. They had a sense of the Mystery and experience of the Divine, which led them to cultivate an attitude of piety, asceticism, humble and deep faith, as well as assiduous prayer and contemplation.
6. Their zeal for the salvation of souls was seen in their lives, teachings, and activities.

3.5. Criteria and Norms

1. The title 'Fathers of the Church' was not applied to any one based on a canonical process or a set of previously approved norms.
2. The fourfold criterion of Fathers of the Church (antiquity, orthodoxy, holiness, and ecclesiastical approval) does not reflect any previously approved norm, but evolved through what had happened in the history of the Church and through her lived faith.
3. The universal Church considers only those persons who lived during the formative period of Christianity (i.e., until the eighth century). They contributed to the spiritual, doctrinal theological and pastoral building up of the Church.
4. The most important set of norms based on which one is canonically recognised 'Father of the Church' are based on the holiness and doctrinal orthodoxy of the person.

4. Conclusion

The Fathers and Doctors of the Church are still active paradigms, guides and inspiring disciples of Christ for the later periods for meeting the challenges and threatening developments in the history of salvation. The history of salvation is ever progressing, as envisaged by the risen Lord,

²¹ *Instruction on the Study of the Fathers*, p. 10.

"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The Holy Spirit is ever coming upon the believers from time to time, in a mediated manner, through the gifts and charisms showered on humanity, precisely through the gifted ministers of the Holy Spirit in the history, in the personalities of the 'Fathers of the Church'.

The uninterrupted living tradition of Thomas Christians in India and abroad testifies to the working of the Spirit and the enduring presence of the risen Lord in the Church. In the unique history of the Thomas Christians and in the wider history of Christianity in India, St. Chavara stands as a prophetic visionary, holy apostle and committed pastor of the Church. His personality and contribution to the growth of Christianity in India needs to be recognized. The pastoral/kingly faculties of St. Chavara were generously spent for edifying the Church and the society as a powerful Christian witness in India.

ANTIQUITY IN THE LIFE AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF CHAVARA

Benny Thettayil CMI♦

Abstract: This article explores Chavara's ecclesiastical, spiritual, literary and socio-cultural contributions and see how valuable they have been in the formative years of the autonomous Malabar Church. It further expounds how St Chavara fulfils the requirement of 'antiquity', which is one of the characteristic features of the Fathers of the universal Church. Though according to the western definition of Antiquity, Chavara of the 19th century cannot be a contender for the title of the Father of the Church. However, Syro Malabar Church need not be governed by this western parameter. Moreover, being a Church *sui iuris*, Syro Malabar Church does not have to be governed by the norms that were historically evolved in the western Church. Moreover, the Church in the East has not set such a limit since it did not have a candidate to think about.

Keywords: Fathers of the Church, Antiquity, holiness, orthodoxy, and ecclesiastical approval, Tradition, Ecclesiastical writers, Doctors of the Church, Synod of Udayamperur, Archdeacon of All-India, Church *sui iuris*.

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1. Introduction

Charismatic individuals at the head of any movement have the potential to take the followers in their stride and have the charisma to keep them in their sway. They are the patriarchs and matriarchs who influence lives beyond their geographical and temporal horizon. An early Church Father is a title that was applied to a few leaders of the Church who were distinguished by their antiquity, holiness, orthodoxy, and ecclesiastical approval. Briefly considering the notion of the 'Fathers of the Church', we explore the principle of Antiquity applied to them. Exploring the various implications of Antiquity, we see how relative is the meaning of the term and how it has to be contextually defined. We also see the appropriateness of the universal application of the term. The purpose of this study is to see how St Chavara fulfils the requirement of 'antiquity', which is one of the characteristic features of the Fathers of the universal Church. In the following pages, we explore his ecclesiastical, spiritual, literary and socio-cultural contributions and see how valuable they have been in the formative years of the autonomous Malabar Church.

2. Progenitors in the Church

Progenitors in any field, were persons who, on account of their popular appeal, originated a familial, spiritual, social, cultural or intellectual movement. Spearheading the movement, they were trailblazers, for they blazed a trail for others to follow through wilderness, desert or untreaded terrains of life. Trailblazers are fast in pace and they loathe mediocrity that turns people into trailers. They shape their fields of activities making them effective for decades and centuries to come. As innovators, in their fields of endeavour, they are the first to introduce and bring into reality something better than ever before. This introduction opens up new areas for others to follow.

As trendsetters, the Fathers are early adopters, who visualized and brought into existence, and further into use, a trend before most other people began to think of it. They were often unconventional but were so versatile that they offer enough flexibility that helped form a cushion between two generations. They worked and accomplished missions faster than their historical average. As pioneers, they launched popular movements for the sake of the society and the Church. Their place was in the heart of the society. Often they did only the fundamental works that spawned future innovations and set new trends. Often they took charge of the situation because they were people with high self-esteem and could influence others. They left a trail for others in the field. As inventors, they identified a need of the society and were bent on meeting

the need by finding a solution in remarkably novel ways. They were often immersed in projects, presenting the society with something new. They continued to seek and meet challenges. Versatility was their hallmark that their lives were characterized by variety in spiritual, literary, social, religious activities.

3. Church Fathers as Progenitors

The "Church Fathers" are a group of foundational members of the early Christian Church, who often did not have a road to follow but they followed a vision. Although the historical evolution of the term "father" is not altogether clear, in ancient times, the title was given to teachers, with the underlying idea that a teacher is the procreator of a student's spiritual personality (cf. 1 Kgs 20:35; 1 Pt 5:13). In the New Testament, father is a teacher of spiritual realities, by whose means the soul of man is reborn into the likeness of Christ. This is a reflection of the Pauline tradition: "For though you might have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers. Indeed, in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel" (1 Cor 4:15).

In the early ecclesial circles, the term "Father" was used to denote those spiritual "fathers" who nurtured the faith of the early Church maintaining what the Apostles taught. Originally, it was the bishops who were called Fathers, as religious leaders and chief teachers of the faith. Since the principal teacher of any early Christian community was its bishop, the title 'Father' was first applied to them. In fact, the bishops who gathered in the various councils of the Church were referred to as 'council *fathers*'. In the first Christian centuries a bishop was emphatically a father in Christ, not primarily because of the parallel between the leader of a community and the head of a family in Christ, but because he baptized his flock and was the chief teacher of his church. Over time this term became more focused and the Church defined specific people who qualified as "Fathers" and whose teaching greatly influenced the growth of Christianity. This included bishops from both the Western and Eastern Churches.

However, eventually the term broadened to include ecclesiastical writers who were not bishops. Several of the important early Christian teachers were laymen, deacons and priests, and it became customary from the fourth century to reckon these eminent teachers among 'the

Fathers'.¹ It is in harmony with this early evolution that the concept of the Fathers of the Church has emerged.

4. What Makes the Church Fathers

In this part of the reflection, we explore the general theological and doctrinal norms on the basis of which a saint, recognized by the universal Church, is declared a 'Father of the Church'. There are specific requirements, the fulfilment of which qualifies an individual as a "Church Father." The Church looks for four major characteristic features in the life and works of an early Church leader who made his contribution in defending, expounding and developing Christian doctrines, in order to be considered a 'Father of the Church'.² These are *antiquity* (meaning that he lived within the early eight centuries during which the first Christian communities got themselves established)³ *doctrinal orthodoxy*, *personal sanctity*, and *approval of the Church*.⁴

These features have to come together in a person in order to be found eligible for the title. Some influential writers of the early Church do not satisfy all these criteria perfectly. Origen, Tertullian and Eusebius of Caesarea are considered Fathers because of their great contributions to the Church. Indeed, some of these Fathers fell into doctrinal error. Origen's orthodoxy has been questioned and Tertullian seems to have abandoned the Church. But this was at a time when many doctrinal questions had not been definitively settled, and it was possible to hold to material (de facto) heresy while personally they were still committed to orthodoxy.

A partial list of the Fathers, including Prosper of Aquitaine, a layman, is found in the Gelasian Decree (not a product of Pope Gelasius, but perhaps a faithful reflection of the 6th century Roman Church), where the accent is on communion: According to the Decree, the Fathers are "those who have not swerved at any point from society with the holy Roman Church, and have not been severed from the faith and preaching that are hers, but by God's grace have shared her fellowship to the last day of their lives" (4.3).

¹ J.H. Crehan, "Fathers of the Church", in *A Catholic Dictionary of Theology* Vol. 2, Melbourne: Nelson, 1967, 288-289, p. 289.

² Congregation for Catholic Education, *Instruction on the Study of the Fathers of the Church*, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 15 Jan 1990, pp. 8-15.

³ *The death of St. John Damascene (cir. A.D. 750) is regarded as the close of the age of the Fathers.*

⁴ J. Quasten, *Patrology*, Vol. 1, Westminster: Christian Classics, 1984, p. 10.

5. Emergence of the Fathers

It is true that all early Christian pastors and catechists "fathered" their particular portion of the flock during their lifetime. However, only those 'Fathers' who put their teaching in writing could continue to serve as guides to the whole Church in every age. Eventually, the 'Fathers of the Church' came to refer to those important Christian writers after the New Testament era who, because of their closeness to the Apostles themselves, bore witness to the authentic apostolic way of interpreting the Scripture handed on to them by the Tradition.⁵ These writers played a crucial role in articulating and transmitting the Christian doctrine and bringing them to more mature expressions, at least in their most fundamental features.

The primitive Church produced several scholars who were good at articulating various tenets of Christian faith. The early exegetes sought 'consensus of the Fathers' in support of their points of view when there were disputes about the interpretation of a Scriptural text. These 'Fathers' they referred to were the teachers who, on account of their theological acumen and clarity of articulation, demonstrated how the apostolic writings in the Scripture were applied by the Apostles and understood by their immediate successors. Similarly, in the 5th century Christological controversies, the "proof from the fathers" was for the first time fully exploited, particularly in florilegia;⁶ all contending parties, e.g., Cyril of Alexandria⁷ and Theodoret of Cyrrhus⁸ appealed to the authority of "the fathers."

6. The Contributions of the Fathers

The Fathers are considered pillars of the Church as they formulated and articulated the early tenets of faith and their writings are inspirational. In the Church, this title is also applied to certain ecclesiastical writers of Christian antiquity because of their literary contributions to early

⁵ J. Chapman, "Fathers of the Church", in *The Catholic Encyclopaedia* Vol. VI, New York: Gilmary Society, 1913, 1-18, p. 1.

⁶ Florilegia are systematic collections of copious excerpts from the works of the Fathers and other ecclesiastical writers of the early period, compiled with a view to serve dogmatic or ethical purposes. These encyclopedic compilations, which are Patristic anthologies, are a characteristic product of the later Byzantine theological school.

⁷ J. D. Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, 31 v. [Florence-Venice 1757-98].

⁸ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Theodoret-of-Cyrrhus>, accessed on 19.12.2019.

theology. In addition to the New Testament and the documents of various Church councils and liturgical sources, our main ways of knowing about the early Church are the writings of the Fathers of the Church. And as mentioned above, they were cited as authoritative witnesses to the Church's tradition.

These Fathers of the Church have been extremely influential on a personal level. In their writings, the reader gains a unique insight into the early followers of Christianity and their thoughts. In particular, their writings confirm what the Church has always taught and continues to teach today. The Fathers stand as foundational pillars who always pointed back to Jesus Christ through the Apostles and show with their life and example, what it means to be a Christian.

Some of the Fathers are recognized as the "Great Church Fathers" or the original "Doctors of the Church" for their great and invaluable contributions: *Ambrose (340–397)*, *Jerome (347–420)*, *Augustine (354–430)*, *Gregory the Great (540–604)*, *Basil the Great (329–379)*, *Athanasius (296–373)*, *Gregory of Nazianzus (329–389)* and *John Chrysostom (347–407)* have made outstanding doctrinal contributions. The vitality of the contribution of these individuals to the universal Church can be surmised from the fact that four of these Fathers are depicted in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. They are seen carrying the great Chair of St. Peter in the apse of the church. Besides these eight Fathers, there are many other influential spiritual figures of the Church in antiquity.

7. Demarcation of the Temporal Boundaries

The early Church Fathers fall into three basic categories: Apostolic Fathers, ante-Nicene Church Fathers, and post-Nicene Church Fathers. The Apostolic Church Fathers, like Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch, were the immediate successors of the Apostles and were probably taught by them. They were concerned about the proclamation of the gospel just as the Apostles themselves proclaimed it. Although most of them were not bent on formulating theological doctrines, they were zealous in rooting out and exposing any false teachings that appeared in the early Church based on the gospel taught to them by the Apostles.

In our discussion, it is important to demarcate the boundaries of the time in which the Fathers of the Church lived and worked. The age of the Early Church Fathers, begins with the fourth century and closes with Isidore of Seville in the West (who worked until 636), John Damascene in the Greek Church (who worked until 749). When we come to think of

some of the Eastern Church, no such clear limit is assigned to the Syriac Fathers.⁹

8. Antiquity of the Fathers

The "Fathers of the Church" inevitably belonged to the Christian antiquity and are distinguished for orthodoxy of doctrine and holiness of life and have therefore been approved by the Church as witnesses to its faith. In the following discussion, we look at the various ways in which the notion of antiquity could be considered.

8.1. The Secular Notion of Antiquity

Antiquity generally denotes the distant past, that is, a long time ago. The Age of Antiquity, which is also known as the Ancient Era, spanned from the beginning of recorded human history, about 3000 BC, to approximately the mid 400's, which is the Early Middle Ages. However, according to some estimation, antiquity refers to any period before the Middle Ages, which dates from around 476 with the collapse of Rome to 1492 with the discovery of the new world.

The history of the Western civilization has periods of antiquity like the *Classical Antiquity*, which is the period in which Greek and Roman literature (such as Aeschylus, Ovid, and others) flourished. By convention, the period starts with the works of Homer, (8th-7th century BC), and ends with the arrival of Christianity and the decline of the Roman Empire (5th-6th century AD). *Late Antiquity* is the period of European and Mediterranean history between the 3rd and the 7th or 8th century AD. The period starts with the end of the Crisis of the Third Century and the reforms of Diocletian. Late antiquity is a periodization used by historians to describe the time of transition from classical antiquity to the Middle Ages in mainland Europe, the Mediterranean world, and the Near East.

8.2. The Ecclesial Notion of Antiquity

The patristic era, as a literary period, opens with the first extant piece of extracanonical literature: in the present state of the evidence, Clement of Rome's *Letter to the Corinthians* (Pope Clement I, c. 96), unless one assigns an earlier date to the Didache. More difficult is the problem of when the age of the Fathers closes. Since the end of the 18th century, Christian antiquity has generally been distinguished from the Middle Ages.

⁹ J.H. Crehan, "Fathers of the Church", in *A Catholic Dictionary of Theology* Vol. 2, Melbourne: Nelson, 1967, 288-289, p. 288.

The problem is insoluble, for a solution presupposes answers to questions intimately linked with the periodization of history: which factor – the doctrinal or the literary or the cultural or the historical – ought to predominate in delimiting the age of the Fathers? When do the Middle Ages begin? Is the patristic era co-terminus with Greco-Roman culture? How are individual countries and different areas affected in this matter by, for example, the Aryan invasion of ancient India, Byzantinism, the Chaldean ecclesial connection, the iconoclast controversy, the Arab conquest, the “discovery” of America, the Mogul invasion...?

8.3. The Periods of Western Antiquity

The criterion of antiquity is somewhat flexible. The patristic era is conventionally divided into three periods. *The first period* is that of the *origins of Christianity*, critically important because of the presence of early Christian witnesses. This is the period to which one must look in order to weigh the claims of the various Christian denominations that theirs is the faith practiced by the earliest Christians. It includes the non-canonical writings of the Apostolic Fathers, men who knew the Apostles or their direct successors personally, and extends into the third century AD.

The second period, considered the patristic golden age, begins in 300 with St. Athanasius and ends with the death of St. Augustine in 430.¹⁰ This was a great period of doctrinal development, in which the great Christian thinkers clashed with various heresies and settled important questions on topics such as grace and the Trinity.

It is significant to note that most of the early heresies were only erroneous teachings, which were proved wrong and were rejected by the official teaching authority of the Church. It would be unjust on our part to condemn any of the proponents of these erroneous teachings because they were theologians who were genuinely concerned with faith and the

¹⁰ The bulk of the Fathers are divided into Latin and Greek Fathers after the two major languages of ecclesiastical writing in this period of the Church's history. There are also writings in Syriac, Armenian and Coptic. Both Western and Eastern Christianity have four figures called the “Great Church Fathers.” These are Sts. Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, and Gregory the Great in the West, and Basil the Great, Athanasius, Gregory of Nazianzus (Nazianzen) and John Chrysostom in the East. The Roman Catholic Church calls these the “Eight Doctors of the Church,” to which more have been added in the past few centuries.

way in which people understood and explained them.¹¹ In this sense, even the heretics who were caught on the opposite side of orthodoxy, which was only emerging, also contributed to the development of the doctrines. At least in some cases, the orthodox teaching developed in response to a theological position that was later found to be erroneous.

The third period and last period has no clearly defined end, but is generally considered to have ended in the West with the death of St. Isidore of Seville in 636, and in the East with the death of St. John Damascene in 749. In addition to the reference made to the Christological controversies that played great role in the beginning of this period, Patrick J. Hamell writes: "The authors of this age formed a link between the falling ancient world and the coming new world, and reached out to the men who were to enlighten the barbarians, to St. Gregory the Great in Italy, St. Gregory of Tours in Gaul, St. Isidore in Spain, the Venerable Bede in England."¹²

8.4. Indian Ecclesial Antiquity and Historical Phases

The Malabar Church is an ancient apostolic Church founded by St. Thomas the Apostle. So far nobody from the Malabar Church has been formally declared either 'Father' or 'Doctor' of this Church. Hence, we contemplate, explore and analyse the possibility of declaring Chavara Father of the Malabar Church in the wider context of the tradition of the universal Church. We look at the possibility of adaptations of the same that could be made in the context of the unique history of the Malabar Church.

In this section, we briefly consider the particular context of the Malabar Church and its ecclesial developments in various periods. In order to enumerate the norms for declaring somebody a Father of the Syro-Malabar Church, we need a clear understanding of the Malabar Church and its unique history of development in the following four periods:

8.4.1. The Apostolic Grey Phase

As in the western history of the Church, the Apostolic period comprises of the time between the first and the fourth century when St Thomas the

¹¹ See Francis Thonippara, "Challenges in Contextual Theological Thinking: A Historical Appraisal of Heresies", in Benny Thettayil (ed.), *Fragmented Cross: Expendable Theological Visions*, Bangalore: Dharmaram, 2020, 84-104, making a historical evaluation of heresies as contextual theological responses to faith.

¹² Patrick J. Hamell, *Handbook of Patrology*, New York: Alba House, 1968, p. 11.

Apostle and his immediate disciples were active and were animating the Church in India. Academically, this phase is grey because we possess no written documents regarding the history of this period. Not many scholars nor Church historians seem to be concerned about this period in history. However, a faint historical information on this period is derived from the oral traditions, which are associated with places, families, customs, and celebrations that are extant.

8.4.2. The Archdeaconate Autonomous Phase

The Archdeaconate phase spans between the fourth and the sixteenth centuries. In this period, the Church, especially in south India, was spiritually animated by the bishops who came from Persia. However, the temporal administration of the Church was done by the Archdeacon chosen from the native priests by the Church Assembly. He was the common head of the community and his title was Archdeacon of All-India. It was a period of autonomy and a rather peaceful ecclesial existence.

8.4.3. Phase of Western Missionary Patronage

In 1498, the Indian Christians came in contact with the Latin Church with the arrival of the Latin missionaries from Europe, especially the Jesuits and the Carmelites. They took up the leadership of the Church in Malabar. The cordial relationship that the missionaries had fostered in the beginning with the native Church gradually vanished. Conflicts emerged due to the high handed interferences of the European missionaries in the day-to-day affairs of the Indian Church. The culmination of this intrusion is seen in the synod of Udayamperur in 1599 and the subsequent Coonan Cross Oath in 1653. It led to the division of the Church. This period would come to an end in 1896.

8.4.4. Phase of Rebirthing of Malabar Church

The identity, individuality and autonomy of the Apostolic Church of India were jeopardized by the consequences of the synod of Diamper. The prominent developments in this period includes the saga of efforts and struggles for protecting and living the apostolic and liturgical heritage and protest against the high-handedness of the European missionaries. There were efforts to obtain bishops from Malabar, part of which was the unsuccessful efforts of Joseph Cariattil, the first native Indian to be appointed bishop of the Catholics of Malabar who died in Goa in 1786. The demand for local leadership and hierarchy continued until 1861, when Chavara was appointed the first Vicar General of the Church of Malabar after the time of Archdeacons whose service was

disrupted when the European ecclesial leadership took charge of the Malabar Church.

The appointment of a Vicar General exclusively for the St Thomas Christians of Malabar,¹³ is the most crucial turning point in the ecclesial development of the Malabar Church. P. Podipara notes in this regard: "The great uplift Malabar witnessed in the 19th century is mainly to be attributed to the zeal of Msgr Bernardine and his Vicar General Fr Cyriac Elias (Chavara)."¹⁴ This appointment of Chavara eventually led to the autonomy and expansion of the Malabar Church. It is in this context that the seminal but significant contributions of St. Chavara, the first Vicar General of the Malabar Church, in view of regaining autonomy, identity and the overall unity of the Malabar Christians become vital.¹⁵

8.4.5. Autonomous Syro-Malabar Phase

The time span from 1896 to the present day is the period under discussion in this section. The two Vicariates of Trichur and Kottayam were erected by the Holy See in 1887 exclusively for the St Thomas Christians of Malabar, but were administered by the Latin bishops. This jurisdictional arrangement was altered by the subsequent establishment of the vicariates of Trichur, Ernakulam and Changanassery in 1896 and the complete administration was given the native bishops. Furthermore, in 1923, the Syro-Malabar hierarchy was re-established in view of the autonomy of Thomas Christians of India.

8.4.6. National Ecclesial Expansion

The life of the Church in Malabar was revitalized by the foundations of numerous religious congregations both for men and for women. This led

¹³ Cyriac Elia Chavara, *Positio*, Vatican: Typis Polyglotis, MCMLXXVII, 491ff.; CWC (Complete Works of Chavara) Vol IV, Chavara, *Alochanakal (Reflections)*, 1982 edition, pp. 83-85; 1990: p. 57; Mundadan, *Chavara*, p. 182.

¹⁴ P. Podipara, ed., *The Carmelite Congregation of Malabar 1831-1931*, Trichinopoly, 1932, pp. 58-59. See also, Mundadan, *Chavara*, pp. 245-246. Thus, the members of the congregation, directed by Fr Cyriac Elias (Chavara), visited, from the beginning, all the Churches of Malabar, preached retreats and missions, corrected abuses, and even discharged parochial work, when the peculiar circumstances of a parish required it.

¹⁵ Parampil Chandy Metran (Mar Alexander De Campo) became the first indigenous bishop of the whole of India. He was ordained bishop on first February 1663 by Mar Sebastany a foreign bishop. Mar Alexander was staying at Kuravilangad till his death, 2 January 1687. Mar Joseph Kariattil (5 May 1742 - 10 September 1786) was the first native Indian to be appointed as Archbishop of the Syrian Catholics in the territory now comprising Kerala.

to the missionary expansion of the Malabar Church, into other states of India where Syro-Malabar dioceses were eventually established. The life of the Church in this period was marked by enhanced liturgical renewal, pastoral apostolates, expansion of the mission, educational services, charismatic renewal, theological developments, social ministries, etc. In 1992, the Syro-Malabar Church was raised to Major Archiepiscopal status with the Synodal structure.

Furthermore, the migration of the St Thomas Christians in the national level necessitated arrangements for pastoral care for them resulting in the establishment of Syro-Malabar dioceses in various parts of India. Moreover, of late, the grant of a quasi all-India jurisdiction has enthused the Church.

8.4.7. International Ecclesial Extension

Various religious congregations for men and women sent their members to the developed countries for pastoral service and to the developing countries for evangelization. In addition to this, taking the international migration of the members of the Syro-Malabar Church into consideration, pastoral care was extended to them in various countries resulting in the consequent establishment of Syro-Malabar dioceses abroad.

8.5. Qualified Antiquity of the Malabar Church

The division of the entire Malabar Church in to four zones by Chavara, who was the first Vicar General of the Malabar Church, and the appointment of separate priests as plenipotentiaries for the overall administrative and pastoral care of each area, in the 19th century, is a ground-breaking development considering the state of the Church at the time. Reviewing the further major developments at the time in the context of the Malabar Church, Chavara's rudimentary pastoral, ecumenical and administrative steps are considered to be the foundations of the future Syro-Malabar Church, which continues to evolve. It is by taking these critical, significant, and creative ecclesial developments into consideration that we identify the 19th century as the formative period of the autonomous Syro-Malabar Church as we have it today, with the Synodal structure and the Major Archiepiscopal status.

In the light of all these developments in the Syro-Malabar Church, and in comparison with the universal Church, we deduce that just as the universal Church considers only those persons during the formative period of the early Church as Fathers, the Syro-Malabar Church also might consider those persons of crucial importance throughout its

formative period as the Father of the Church Sui Iuris because the formative period is the *antiquity* as far as the particular Church is concerned.

9. Fluidity of Antiquity

Antiquity is always understood relative to the time frame that is in question. When we consider the aeons in the history of the earth, measured with the Geologic Time Scale, and divide the whole time into four periods of the Hadean, Archean, Proterozoic, and the current aeon Phanerozoic, the consideration of antiquity is in one way. Although the term aeon may be used in reference to a period of a billion years, especially in geology, cosmology or astronomy, its more common usage is for any long, indefinite period. When we speak of the fossils and their studies, the time-frame of Lower Palaeolithic to Iron Age comprises the time between ca. 2,500,000 to 1000 BC. The ages such as Upper Palaeolithic, Mesolithic/Neolithic, Bronze Age are the intervening ages, antiquity is calculated in a slightly different way.

Antiquity in terms of human evolution would be considered differently too. Charles Darwin, the British naturalist published his monumental books *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871) and referred to *Homo sapiens* that first evolved in Africa about 315,000 years ago. We are now the only living members of the human tribe that consisted of *Ardipithecus*, *Australopithecus* and other species of *Homo* like the Neanderthals. The antiquity in reference to three lakh years of history would be different from the 2000 years of the history of the Church. In all these three scenarios the place of the needle of antiquity-dial is relative to the span of the time frame but always closer to the beginning of the period in question.

Analogically, in comparison with the universal Church, as far as the Malabar Church is concerned, antiquity has to refer to the time when the Malabar Church began to enjoy an autonomy, which was marked by the appointment of Chavara as the Vicar General of the Malabar Church. This period also is considered to be the formative period of the autonomous Malabar Church.

10. The Great Indian Ecclesial Slumber

The Thomas Christians of the 19th century and prior to it, lived in a caste ridden society of Kerala, where social freedom and equality did not have a place. Untouchability, marginalization of women, economic inequality and illiteracy were rampant both in the society and religion.¹⁶ The

¹⁶ N. Maria, *Empowered Womanhood*, Bangalore: Dharmaram, 2014, pp. 89-156.

Church in Malabar, being an indigenous church, was no exception. The eighteen centuries of its existence under animation, first from the Chaldeans and then from the Europeans could be characterised by the deep slumber. It is towards the end of these times that the prophetic social reform activities of Chavara made waves in the society of Malabar.

Indeed, the Church in Malabar had an apostolic origin. However, for 19 centuries, she had made no significant progress in establishing her individuality. The reasons, according to Chavara are:

1. Unfortunate status of the Malabar church deprived of bishops of their own Rite or nationality to lead their priests and the people in accordance with their own apostolic faith and tradition.¹⁷
2. Lack of consecrated men and women who practised religious virtues and the absence of monasteries and convents that caused the omission of immense good.
3. Spiritual blindness and lack of committed personnel to impart education. This caused barrenness in the Church of Malabar which produced no canonized saints like some other Churches that received faith much later.¹⁸

Chavara responded to this critical state of the Church proactively. Like St Paul, in the formative days of the early Church, he prayed, planned, wrote, travelled extensively and laboured day and night zealously not for her spiritual welfare alone, but also for her temporal prosperity.¹⁹

14. Conclusion

When we take the notion of antiquity as one of the criteria for declaring a saint as a 'Fathers of the Church', what needs also to be taken into consideration, first of all, is that this title was not given to anyone based on a canonical process or a set of previously approved norms. Secondly, the fourfold criterion for recognition of the Fathers of the Church (antiquity, holiness, orthodoxy, and ecclesiastical approval) does not reflect any previously approved norms; they evolved *a posteriori* through what had happened in history of the Church and in and through her lived faith. Finally, the universal Church considers only those persons

¹⁷ CWC, *Chronicle*, 1990, 146.

¹⁸ CWC, *Chronicle*, 1990, 146.

¹⁹ There have been sporadic activities like that of Parampil Chandy Metran and Mar Joseph Kariattil in history that give us signs of life in the Malabar Church, but they are scanty. Similarly, even prior to Chavara, we find writings of Paremmakkal Thoma Kathanar but though extensive, it is limited to a travelogue.

who lived during the formative period of Christianity (i.e., until the eighth century), as they contributed to the spiritual, doctrinal theological and pastoral building up of the Church. When we focus on the formative period of a Church *Sui Iuris*, the definition and the demarcations must be different.

In the European Antiquity, the Fathers of the Church were convinced of the fundamental transformation that occurred and was occurring in the world was brought about by the Christ event. This conviction regarding the transformation gave them a new vision of the reality, a new hermeneutic of humanity, world and God. They reinterpreted all good achievements of humanity with their new Christian vision.²⁰ It is this vision at a given time that gave formation to the community.²¹ In a temporal consideration, as we have discussed above, European ecclesial antiquity does not coincide with Indian ecclesial antiquity.

As concluding remarks, the following point needs to be considered: It is true that according to the Western definition of Antiquity, the demarcation of the terminal limit is Isidore of Seville in the West (+636) and John Damascene in the Greek Church (+749). And by this parameter, Chavara of the 19th century cannot be a contender for the title of the Father of the Church. However, Syro Malabar Church need not be governed by this Western parameter. Moreover, being a Church *sui iuris*, Syro Malabar Church does not have to be governed by the norms that were historically evolved in the western Church. Moreover, the Church in the East has not set such a limit since it did not have a candidate to think about.

²⁰ *Instruction on the Study of the Fathers*, p. 10.

²¹ In this scheme of thought, if the Malankara Church thinks of Mar Baselios, who was as the helm of the reunion movement, as a result of which it became a Church *sui iuris*, he could be considered worthy of the title *mutatis mutandis*, i.e., without prejudice to the other three requirements.

SAINT KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA A SAINTLY FATHER AND AN ORTHODOX TEACHER

Alex Sebastian Kollamkalam♦

Abstract: St. Chavara was very much saddened by the absence of saints among the St. Thomas Christians. His inspiration behind founding religious congregations for men and women was to foster an aptitude to holiness. Finally he himself became one of those holy fruits. In the same way among the 37 doctors of the Church none is from among Thomas Christians. A close evaluation makes clear that St. Chavara with his holy life, orthodox Faith and divinely inspired erudition is worthy to be numbered one among those. When he trained the faithful in Faith, faithfulness to the Church of Christ was his main concern; when he cared for the community with love, it was his holiness that was actualized, when his pen scribed something, he strictly followed Church's teaching authority. Without doubt he was a man of God and man of Church.

Keywords: Doctor of the Church, St. Chavara, holiness, orthodoxy, family, education, faithfulness to church, St. Thomas Christians, women empowerment, *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul*, *Nanmarana Sabha*, *Upavisala*, Roccas schism, *Dhyana Sallapangal*.

1. Introduction

Though the great Greek and Latin Fathers (St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory of Nazianzus, St. Athanasius of Alexandria and St. John Chrisostom from the Greek side and St. Augustine, St. Ambrose, St. Jerome and St. Gregory the Great from the Latin side) had been already renowned as the Doctors of the Church, it was Pope Benedict XIV (1740-1758) who systematized the criteria for a person to be called so -

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Holiness, Erudition, Orthodoxy and Explicit Approval by the Church. When Pope Francis declared Kuriakose Elias Chavara one among the saints of Catholic Church on 23rd November 2014, sixty six years (1805-1871) of incomparable holiness and non-compromised orthodoxy also had been universally accepted. The pioneer of Consecrated life in the Indian Church - both for men (Carmelites of Mary Immaculate) and for women (Congregation of the Mother of Carmel) - is also noted for his pioneering efforts in the reformation of the Church and the Society in Kerala. This article is a humble attempt to analyse how St. Chavara's social as well as ecclesiastical endeavours never compromised with his craving for holiness and how his erudition stuck always to the orthodoxy of the Church.

2. A Man of Holiness

St. Chavara ever wished to be the beloved son of God, calling him *Appa* (Father). He never tried to establish his own plans and programmes but always submitted himself to the divine decisions. Holiness was not something added to him from outside, but the breath of his life from cradle to grave. That is why he could confidently declare at the time of death that he has never given up the Grace received during baptism.¹

2.1. Family: The School of Holiness

The basis of St. Chavara's family vision is his vision on Holy Trinity. The loving communion of Trinity is lived on the earth by the Holy Family which is the model and motivation for all the families in this world.² The inspiration behind his letter to his own parishioners in Kainakary, *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul*, is none other than the positive experiences from his own family. According to him, the real wealth of a family is its fear and devotion to God. And any family living in the fear of God will be rewarded here on earth as well as in the eternal life.³ It was his conviction that a family gets happiness and peace not from the wealthy relatives but from those with fear of God and discipline of life.⁴ The most

¹ Canisius, *Visudha Kuriakose Elias Chavarayude Sukrtavazhikal* (Malayalam), Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2020, 15.

² Sophy Rose, *Prabodhanangalum Darsanangalum* (Malayalam), Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2020, 38.

³ Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan, *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul* (Malayalam): Kudumbachattam 18, Kochi: Education and Media of Communication, 2004, 9.

⁴ Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan, *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul* (Malayalam): Kudumbachattam 9, Kochi: Education and Media of Communication, 2004, 7.

important duty of the parents is to bring up their children well because they are the most valuable treasures entrusted to them to be cared according to the will of God. If the parents do not show love and respect between them, the children will not respect them.⁵ St. Chavara also warns the parents that if their children do not enter heaven because of their irresponsibility, they also will never attain heavenly glory.⁶ He gives clear directives for the formation of children:

When the Children begin to speak itself, teach them recite 'Jesus, Mary, Joseph'. Show them their statues and train them to kiss them, revere them and thus to love the Holy Family. Show them through your words and deeds that the parents represent Joseph and Mary. As they grow up the prayers like 'Our Father', 'Hail Mary', 'Glory to Father', etc. may become natural to their tongues.⁷

2.2. Life Oriented to Heaven

The life of St. Chavara was a life of tests and trials which he successfully overcame with his unshakable faith in God. His parents and his only brother passed away when he was in the seminary. Since only his sister in law (brother's wife) and her daughter remained in the family, the young Kuriakose was strongly persuaded by his relatives to abandon the seminary studies. But he never gave up his hope in divine providence and became priest on 29th November 1829.⁸ It was this hope in the eternal life that made him start an organization called *Nanmarana Sabha* to help the faithful prepare for a blissful death.⁹

For him, meditation is a dialogue with God where God and himself would be like close friends.¹⁰ He had an incomparable devotion to the

⁵ Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan, *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul* (Malayalam): Makkalude Valarthal 1.9, Kochi: Education and Media of Communication, 2004, 12.14.

⁶ Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan, *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul* (Malayalam): Makkalude Valarthal 1, Kochi: Education and Media of Communication, 2004, 12.

⁷ Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan, *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul* (Malayalam): Makkalude Valarthal 2, Kochi: Education and Media of Communication, 2004, 13.

⁸ Jacob Aluckal, *Indian Saints and Blesseds*, Shillong: Archbishop's House, 2016, 45.

⁹ Sophy Rose, *Prabodhanangalum Darsanangalum* (Malayalam), Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2020, 113.

¹⁰ Chavara Kuriakose Elias, *Dhyana Sallapangal*, in *Chavara Achante Sampoorana Kruthikal* vol 3, 14.

Most Holy Eucharist. In order to propagate this devotion he translated ceremonies for forty hour adoration from Latin rite to Malayalam. He also encouraged the devotion to Mary in the month of May, to Joseph in March and to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in June.¹¹ As Leopold Beccaro witnesses, “he had a son-like love towards the Blessed Virgin Mary.”¹² On the days of obligation, a mere participation in the Holy Qurbana was not enough. According to him, those days should be spent in reading good books, visiting the sick and listening to spiritual homilies.¹³

2.3. Education for Spiritual Illumination

The establishment of schools, in Chavara’s vision, were not merely for giving secular training but above all to give a renewed spiritual orientation. According to him, in order to know and experience God, wisdom is indispensable. So good books are the great treasures to be acquired for the children. Keeping bad books in house is like keeping fire inside the straw.¹⁴ He underlines:

As those who have no eyes are called ‘blind’, so those who have no learning should be called ‘spiritually blind’. Thanks to the latter kind of blindness, although we Nazarenes (in Kerala) claim to be Christians of ancient origin, we do not have the seeds and sprouts of saints. Our Lord Himself has taught that if one blind person leads another, both fall into the ditch.¹⁵

He was not satisfied with the Sanskrit school founded in Mannanam. In 1853, he started a centre for faith formation in Mannanam, the first in Kerala Church. And when he was appointed as the Vicar General for the Syrian Catholics by Archbishop Bernardine Baccinelli, he strictly instructed that each parish should open a school attached to it.¹⁶ He also showed his far-sightedness in founding the first press and first publishing house at Mannanam in 1846 which in course of time became

¹¹ Francis Kanichikattil, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara: The Wise Liturgical Reformer of Thomas Christians of Malabar*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2020, 32-33.

¹² Canisius, *Visudha Kuriakose Elias Chavarayude Sukrtavazhikal*, 78.

¹³ Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan, *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul* (Malayalam): Kudumbachattam 22, Kochi: Education and Media of Communication, 2004, 11.

¹⁴ Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan, *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul* (Malayalam): Kudumbachattam 22, Kochi: Education and Media of Communication, 2004, 11.

¹⁵ Francis Kanichikattil, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 15; Chavara Kuriakose Elias, *Letters IX,2* in Sophy Rose, *Prabodhanangalum Darsanangalum*, 69.

¹⁶ Sophy Rose, *Prabodhanangalum Darsanangalum*, 14.15.

the birth place of Rashtra Deepika (the news paper of Marthoma Nazranis) in 1887.¹⁷

2.4. Priestly Formation: Training to Holiness

In 1833, St. Chavara gave leadership in the foundation of a common seminary for the Syrian Catholics.¹⁸ And in 1844, the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly, Francis Xavier OCD appointed him the examiner and *malpan* of the priestly formation of the Malabar clergy.¹⁹ He envisaged the seminaries not only for the formation of the candidates but also for the on-going formation of priests. He composed canonical prayers from the existing manuscripts; he conducted annual retreats for clergy at Mannanam every year. Renewal in the Spiritual and Pastoral life of clergy, for him, was the best means for the spiritual renewal of the faithful.²⁰ He was fully convinced that it was the duty of the priests to teach the faithful and of the parents to teach their children.²¹

St. Chavara also realized that the leadership of prayerful priests was necessary for the people to be oriented to prayer. With this intension he started seminaries attached to the monasteries.²² Jossy Veliyan CMC establishes this fact in the context of Roccas schism: "Even after Roccas departed from Kerala in 1862, they had to concentrate on healing the wounds inflicted by him in the community. An immediate step suggested was to give proper theological training to the priestly candidates of Syro-Malabar Christians who were affected by the Roccas schism."²³

¹⁷ Francis Kanichikattil, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 17.

¹⁸ Sophy Rose, *Prabodhanangalum Darsanangalum*, 14.

¹⁹ Francis Kanichikattil, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 15.

²⁰ Francis Kanichikattil, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 15-16.

²¹ Chavara Kuriakose Elias, *Letters IX*, 2, in Sophy Rose, *Prabodhanangalum Darsanangalum*, 34.

²² Canisius, *Visudha Kuriakose Elias Chavarayude Sukrtavazhikal*, 21.

²³ St. Chavara was in serious preparation for starting a convent for women religious. A convent was almost built in Puthenpally. But as long as Bishop Roccas remained in Kerala, the leaders of the Christian community could not give attention to the foundation of a convent. Since well-formed priests became the utmost necessity of the time, the convent almost built in Puthenpally was converted as a seminary. And the actual founding of a woman congregation happened only in 1886 at Koonammavu. Jossy Veliyan, *St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara: The Founder of the Women TOCD in Kerala*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2015, 29.

2.5. Universal Love: Actualization of Holiness

St. Chavara who called God 'my father' has never excluded anyone from the circle of his love. His desire to establish the Kingdom of God here on earth by uniting everyone in God, prompted him to give caring love to all.²⁴ In 1846 a Sanskrit school attached to Mannanam monastery was opened by St. Chavara for all without any caste discriminations. Sanskrit being the language of the Brahmins, his decision to give Sanskrit training to Christians and lower caste people was also an attempt to break the prevailing social barriers.²⁵ St. Chavara stood for this revolutionary beginning when the poor and the untouchable were not permitted to enter even the Government schools. In order to make sure that the 'Dalit' students should attend the classes regularly, he has provided them with free text books, food and dress.²⁶ It was Chavara who started the first boarding house for girls in Koonammavu on 2nd January 1868.²⁷ And in the letter addressed to the faithful of Kainakary Church dated 15th October 1869, St. Chavara asked them to open an *Upavisala* for the sick and the orphans which became the mother of all Christian Orphanages.²⁸ He even says that the days not used for helping others would not even be counted as part of our life.²⁹ He wished that let there be no day in our life in which we did no good to others. And so "even the secular society admires his contributions in pioneering a set of revolutionary changes in uplifting people on the margins and those who were socially ostracised through educational and social initiatives."³⁰

"Chavara's inspiration to found a religious institute came from his gaze fixed on the Church and the society that surrounded him, namely, the particular historical situation of the St. Thomas Christians of the 19th century and the socio-religious condition of Kerala women."³¹ The first members of the Congregation for women founded by St. Chavara were

²⁴ Sophy Rose, *Prabodhanangalum Darsanangalum*, 32.

²⁵ Francis Kanichikattil, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 17.

²⁶ It was inspired by St. Chavara that Sir C. P. Ramaswamy proposed to the King to provide free lunch for the students in Government schools on 26th November 1936. Sophy Rose, *Prabodhanangalum Darsanangalum*, 34-35.

²⁷ Sophy Rose, *Prabodhanangalum Darsanangalum*, 16.

²⁸ Sophy Rose, *Prabodhanangalum Darsanangalum*, 112.

²⁹ Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan, *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul* (Malayalam): Kudumbachattam 13, Kochi: Education and Media of Communication, 2004, 8.

³⁰ Francis Kanichikattil, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, vii.

³¹ Jossy Veliyan, *St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 304.

two widows and two young women. In a social scenario where women were considered second grade citizens and where the widows were not even let live after their husbands' death,³² he showed the guts to accept two widows to be the pioneers of a revolutionary beginning.³³

2.6. Call to Monastic Life: Call to Holiness

On 8th December 1855, when he took the religious vows, he also took a new name 'Kuriakose of Holy Family'³⁴ realizing that it is a new beginning in his desire for holiness. It was not merely an attempt to attain personal holiness but the means to spread the stream of holiness to the faithful. This is clear from the very foundation of the CMI congregation. When Fr. Palackal and Fr. Porookara came to meet bishop Stabilini to get permission to lead a monastic life, bishop asked them to start a monastery that would help the people to get trained in faith.³⁵ According to St. Chavara, the monasteries are founded by God in order to be the mirrors virtues and the house for saints.³⁶ He was always lamenting inside that the Thomas Christian Church, though with a history of 19 centuries, was a barren Church, having produced no saints for the universal Church. The reason, according to him, was the absence of monastic communities. And all his attempts to start religious congregation for men and women were actually the attempts to prepare the field for the birth of future saints.³⁷ He writes:

In the land of Malayalam (Kerala) even though the true Christian religion was in practice from very early times, there existed no

³² The practice of *Sati* – the wife burning herself in her husband's death fire – was followed in India.

³³ Sophy Rose, *Prabodhanangalum Darsanangalum*, 35. When Leopold Beccaro and St. Chavara were attempting to found a religious convent for the women religious, a widow, Eliswa Vakayil (34 years of age) and her daughter Anna (18 years) expressed their desire to lead a chaste life. Eliswa's sister Thresia (18 years) also joined them. And another widow Eliswa Puthanangady (37 years) completed the first community. On 13th February 1866, they were given a small brown scapular in a very simple ceremony. Jossy Veliyan, *St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 31-34.

³⁴ Pauly Payyappilly, *Anusmriti* (CMI History), Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2020, 61.

³⁵ Mani Pius, *Daivavum Manushyarum Ivarkku Swantham* (Malayalam – History of CMI Congregation), Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2020, 37.

³⁶ Chavara Kuriakose Elias, *Letters VI,1*, in Sophy Rose, *Prabodhanangalum Darsanangalum*, 61-62.

³⁷ Canisius, *Visudha Kuriakose Elias Chavarayude Sukrtavazhikal*, 30.

monasteries or convents. The people had heard of men and women who practised religious virtues but they did not have living examples of religious virginity [...] As for women even those who desired to live a virginal life, had no way of embracing such a life style. They had no option. They had to accept marriage and live as worldly women and they were living in this sad plight for a very long time.³⁸

3. A Teacher of Orthodoxy

As Francis Kanichikattil puts it, “he [St. Chavara] articulated his views and perspectives primarily based on his personal encounters with Jesus.”³⁹ His faithfulness to the universal Church and to its teaching authority is none other than an extension of this personal attachment to Jesus. Both in the context of Rocco’s schism and Padroado schism, his first concern was the decision of the Holy See.

3.1. Faithful to the Church

He always attached the attribute ‘holy’ to the Universal Church.⁴⁰ “His love towards the Universal Church and its head the Holy Father, on the one hand and the Malabar Church of Thomas Christians, on the other knew no bounds.”⁴¹ The First Vatican Council (1869-70) was a very good occasion that concretized his faithfulness to the universal Church. He has recorded every minute detail of the council in the Mannanam Chronicle and gave proper information to the priests about the important decisions made by the council fathers. He also collected Rs 32007/- from the *Suriyani* priests for the expenses of the council and sent it directly to the Pope.⁴² He had a special love towards the western missionaries, since they were the apostles of the universal Church and they have suffered a lot to bring thousands of people to Christian faith.⁴³

The Thomas Christians ever wished to get bishops of their own rite. So the decision of the Synod of Diamper (1599) to place them under a Latin bishop was really heart-breaking for them. In spite of sharing the same emotions with his fellow Thomas Christians, St. Chavara was not ready to use ‘non catholic’ means to get ‘same rite bishops’. Though he later proposed to the Propaganda Fide that it was better to have two separate bishops here, one for the Latin faithful and the other for the

³⁸ Jossy Veliyan, *St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 19.

³⁹ Francis Kanichikattil, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, vii.

⁴⁰ Sophy Rose, *Prabodhanangalum Darsanangalum*, 61.

⁴¹ Francis Kanichikattil, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 13.

⁴² Sophy Rose, *Prabodhanangalum Darsanangalum*, 56-57.

⁴³ Canisius, *Visudha Kuriakose Elias Chavarayude Sukrtavazhikal*, 59.

Syrian faithful, he stood strongly against Bishop Roccas who came from the Syrian Patriarch without the approval of the Holy See.⁴⁴ In his circular against Roccas sent to the Thomas Christians, Chavara makes it clear that he did so for the salvation of their souls so that they may not fall into a new schism.⁴⁵

3.2. Faithful to the Supreme Pontiff

St. Chavara is also known for his extra ordinary reverence to the Supreme Pontiff. It is interesting to note that in his letters to Pope Pius IX he addresses him "the one who holds the keys of Peter."⁴⁶ He concludes the letters requesting Pope's paternal blessings for all, including the country, the king and his ministers so that their hearts may be turned to faith.⁴⁷ When the Archbishop of Verapoly appointed Chavara as Vicar General of the Syrian Christians to solve the 'Roccas Schism', the first thing he did was to write to the Supreme Pontiff to know the canonicity of Roccas' jurisdiction. As he realized that Roccas came without the permission of the Holy See, he wrote circular letters to the faithful to ask them to give up the schism. And on 30th November 1861, Roccas was excommunicated and more than 116 parishes came back to communion with the Pope.⁴⁸

And again when the Goan Archbishop Antonio Feliciano was not ready to accept the apostolic letter *Multa Praeclare* (suspending the Padroado jurisdiction in India except in Goa) of Pope Gregory XVI, St. Chavara wanted all to be under legal authority, the Supreme Pontiff.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Sophy Rose, *Prabodhanangalum Darsanangalum*, 58.

⁴⁵ Chavara Kuriakose Elias, *Letters IX,4* in Sophy Rose, *Prabodhanangalum Darsanangalum*, 61.

⁴⁶ Chavara Kuriakose Elias, *Letters I,1; I,2* in Sophy Rose, *Prabodhanangalum Darsanangalum*, 59.

⁴⁷ Chavara Kuriakose Elias, *Letters I,1* in Sophy Rose, *Prabodhanangalum Darsanangalum*, 60.

⁴⁸ As an answer to the request from the Thomas Christians, Patriarch Audo consecrated Thomas Roccas and sent him to Kerala just to study the situation of Kerala Church. But it was Bishop Roccas who started to interfere in the internal matters of the Church without the permission of the Holy See. Pauly Payyappilly, *Anusmriti* (CMI History), Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2020, 88-90.

⁴⁹ The Padroado schism caused another problem in Kerala Church, dividing the faithful between the Padroado and Propaganda jurisdiction even in the same parish. It was Chavara's insistence to be faithful to the Holy See that helped the Church overcome the schism. Pauly Payyappilly, *Anusmriti*, 91.

Fr. Leopold Beccaro testifies: "Among the virtues of this father, his faith, his strong love to Catholic Church and his devotion to the Holy Father shine in a special way [...] whenever he hears of the Holy Father, tears come out of his eyes because of devotion and joy."⁵⁰

3.3. Faithful to the Orthodox Worship

Placid J. Podipara CMI, the Church historian of the Syro-Malabar Church, enumerates Chavara's liturgical contributions: "His work consisted in the organization of Liturgical books, the rubrics of the Eucharistic celebration, the books of the Divine office, the Office for the Dead, and the Liturgical Calendar."⁵¹ The Missal of Thomas Christians had been already printed in Rome in 1774 and 1844. But the rubrics and the calendar indicated in the text were too brief and imperfect which caused embarrassment to the people, as the celebration of the Holy Mass varied from place to place. This situation made Chavara prepare the order of the Mass.⁵² The *Thukasa* (the order for the clergy) prepared by St. Chavara for the uniform celebration of the Holy Mass represents his faithfulness to the tradition of the Church.⁵³

The Thomas Christians were following the Chaldean (East Syrian) Calendar till the Diamper Synod, and the same Synod imposed on them the Latin Calendar. Since the faithful were not satisfied, Chavara prepared a liturgical calendar following the East Syrian system of being divided into seasons, incorporating into it the feasts of the Latin calendar. The Divine Offices, the Office of the Dead and the Funeral Services were compiled from ancient manuscripts, while the Funeral Service for the Children, the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Lectionary were adapted from the Latin rite.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Canisius, *Visudha Kuriakose Elias Chavarayude Sukrtavazhikal*, 60.

⁵¹ Placid J. Podipara, *Our Rite* (Malayalam), Mannanam: St. Joseph's Press, 1997, 132. There is an allegation that he was only a follower of Latin rite and encouraged Latin customs in the Thomas Christian Liturgy. After a serious study on the liturgical reforms of St. Chavara, Francis Kanichikattil concludes that though "he borrowed certain liturgical practices from the Roman tradition, bearing in mind that it would help the faithful of the Malabar Church to increase their spiritual life," he mainly concentrated on the existing manuscripts of the Chaldean rite. Francis Kanichikattil, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 16.23.

⁵² Francis Kanichikattil, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 25-28.

⁵³ Francis Kanichikattil, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 13.

⁵⁴ Francis Kanichikattil, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 25-28.

3.4. Faithful to the Correct Faith

One of the intensions behind the foundation of the schools was to protect the children from pagan formation. His own experience of primary education in a non-Christian atmosphere (*Asan Kalari*) must have surely influenced him to stand for the Christian schools.⁵⁵ As the Vicar General of the Thomas Christians, St. Chavara was behind the circular of Bernardine Baccinelli to all the parishes to start schools attached to the churches. His intension was to protect the future generation from the pagan and non-catholic influences. He also wished that the Catholics may not join the English medium schools run by non-Catholics that they may not be influenced by the protestant ideas.⁵⁶ During the time of Roccas schism almost all the wealthy parishes were on the side of the schismatic bishop. Even the civil authorities favoured Roccas. They even tried to make Mannanam and Elthuruth Ashrams, centres of the schism.⁵⁷ But St. Chavara stood firm in his stand, because he was convinced that he was fighting for the orthodox faith. He even gave up the offer to be ordained as a bishop by the schismatic group in order to stand for the genuine and orthodox faith.

3.5. Faithful in His Own Writings

In the midst of his innumerable responsibilities, St. Chavara has never put down his responsibility as a teacher. He was a gifted writer with many pioneering attempts. The *Biography of Palackal Thoma Malpan* written by Chavara is the first biography of a Malayali written by another Malayali. His work, the *Martyrdom of Anastasia* is considered the first *Khandakavyam*⁵⁸ in Malayalam. The *Ecologues*, *Shepherd Plays* were the first attempts of that kind in the Indian drama field. The spiritual work - *Dhyana Sallapangal*, the liturgical contributions - *Thukasa*, *Liturgical Calendar*, *Liturgy of the Hours for the Priests*, *Office for the Dead*, *Small Office for St. Mary*, etc. are worth mentioning. *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul*, the paternal letter written to the parishioners at Kainakary is influential in every walk of family life.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Canisius, *Visudha Kuriakose Elias Chavarayude Sukrtavazhikal*, 29.

⁵⁶ Francis Kanichikattil, *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 16-17.

⁵⁷ Canisius, *Visudha Kuriakose Elias Chavarayude Sukrtavazhikal*, 65-66.

⁵⁸ *Khandakavayam* is special literary genre where prose and poetry are intermingled.

⁵⁹ Sophy Rose, *Prabodhanangalum Darsanangalum*, 177-178.

4. Conclusion

Fr. Mathai Mariyam Kappil during his funeral speech on 4th January 1841 said, "Today the flag of Malayalam has fallen down."⁶⁰ Now we realize that the flag has fallen down in order to be re-hoisted above the world. As one of the Kerala historians M. Sreedharamenon concludes, St. Chavara is a social reformer who did not get proper acceptance from among the historians of Kerala, since the Christian reformers were unfortunately avoided by them in their historical narrations.⁶¹ Even today there are deliberate attempts from certain groups of people with vested interests to keep away his contributions. The removal of his name from the list of social reformers by the text book revision committee is a recent example. But history proves that holiness can never be hidden. As his holiness, let his erudition and orthodoxy also be universally accepted. Because as the famous Malayalam writer, Sukumar Azhikode⁶² underlines, St. Chavara is one among those few historical figures whose fame and influence easily surpass the temporal and territorial boundaries. He, who lived in the 19th century, strengthening and illumining the Kerala community, is still a shining star for us in this 21st century. It will continue so for future generations, for his holiness and orthodoxy knows no boundaries.

⁶⁰ Mani Pius, *Daivavum Manushyarum Ivarkku Swantham*, 17.

⁶¹ M. Sreedharamenon, "Kalathinumumpe Nadanna Navodhana Nayakan Chavarayachan", quoted in Sophy Rose, *Prabodhanangalum Darsanangalum*, 32.

⁶² Sukumar Azhikod, "Kalatheethamaya Mahajyothissilek", in *Sukrtam Smara* (Malayalam), Kochi: Beth Rauma Publications, 2012, 21.

SAINT KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA A REFORMIST WITH A PASTORAL HEART

Mathew Maniampra CMI♦

Abstract: The grace of salvation given through Christ is for the whole person. It touches the deeper part of the unconscious as well as the socio-economic context, so that the person may experience a holistic growth. To effect this kind of growth one is often challenged to make anguished decisions and to develop new paths. The core elements of life-giving ministry are compassion and forgiveness. Kuriakose Elias Chavara had a rich depository of these attributes and hence, he was able to exercise a wholesome ministry in his times. As a compassionate pastor, Chavara totally engaged in ministering to his people in creative ways.

Keywords: Kuriakose Elias Chavara, pastoral personality, socio cultural context, pastoral leadership, Roccas schism, Syro-Malabar Church, latinisation, *malpan*, seminary formation, Fr Leopold, *Divini illius Magistri*, *Atmanuthapam*, *Jnana Piyusham*, Confraternity for Happy Death, *Atmanuthapam*, *darsanaveedu*, *thapasu bhavanam*, Christian elegy, dirge, Synod of Diamper.

1. Introduction

In the latter part of the 20th century, we witnessed a renewed interest in the field of pastoral ministry in the Church. Jesus, taking the scriptural imagery of a shepherd, points out the characteristic features of a good shepherd (Jn 10:11). Feeding and protecting the flock and leading the sheep to greener pastures are vital part of pastoral ministry. Traditionally, in the life of the Church, a shepherd/pastor had the role of preaching and teaching. In this changed time, the Body of Christ needs to be built up by a holistic leadership and service that have far ranging

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implications in the true care of the faithful. Gifts natural or charismatic are given to individuals to build up the body of Christ. As a member of the community and as a disciple of Jesus, Kuriakose Elias Chavara saw so much good all-around even when there has been gloom occasionally. He maintained an optimistic outlook all through, which stirred him to be active.

2. Pastoral Personality of Chavara

Pastoral ministry calls for a pastoral personality. Not all are equally endowed with a pastoral personality but all can develop a personality that can enhance the pastoral attitude and continue the mission of Jesus. Priests, by virtue of their call, and religious by virtue of their commitment to Church and by the profession of evangelical counsels, are bound to develop a pastoral personality so that the ministry and mission of Jesus is continued in a more meaningful way in the given socio cultural context. Although, pastoral ministry is shared by all in the Church, in the priest/pastor who is anointed by the Holy Spirit, there is an abiding sense of Jesus as the word-made-flesh who invites all to come and see.¹

A pastor is anyone who is engaged in the mission of Jesus, continuing it in the here and now through a personal commitment announced publicly. Chavara was a pastor in this sense. While an action may be good, it is not ministry unless it is an expression and overflow of one's relationship with God. Commitment to ministry and mission warrants the skills to accompany people. Chavara, in his pastoral leadership and ministry, realized something that is similar to the Jungian position: "Condemnation does not liberate, it oppresses, and I am the oppressor of the person I condemn not his friend and fellow traveler."² Pastors and ministers shall first accept their own flaws in the love of Christ that they may know that they are loved at a deeper level, with this knowledge, they can listen to others in a non-judgmental manner. To accept oneself with all wretchedness is the hardest of all human tasks and almost impossible to fulfill. Owning one's own shadow is the primary task for all pastors before they set out to help. Chavara accepted and owned even his minor shortcomings. He was not in need of projecting the unwanted

¹ Ronald Bowlby, "Parish: Pastoral Care", in Alastair V. Campbell (ed.), *Dictionary of Pastoral Care*, New York: Crossroad, 1987, 183.

² C.G. Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, (trans. Cary F. Baynes), Marrickville, Australia: Imprint Harcourt Publishers, 1955.

part of his personality on to others. A failure to honor and integrate the negative experiences of life creates dissonance and disharmony.

Chavara was a man totally engaged in ministering to his people in creative ways. All the while, he was not obsessed with doing. He found time for prayer, manual work, learning, developing friendships, etc. Chavara's pastoral skills and ministries were such that they led people to *metanoia*, changing their attitude and mind to meet the greater plans of God as demanded by the gospel. In settling the conflicts among various groups and the way in which he solved the Roccas schism, we see this power in action. The power to change our understanding is a gift of the Holy Spirit that we are called to cooperate with and appropriate. For example, the Johannine Jesus emphasizes the gift aspect by telling the disciples that the Spirit would teach them everything and guide them into all truth (Jn 14:25; 16:13). Similarly, Paul exhorts Christians to cooperate and appropriate: "Be transformed by the renewing of your minds" (Rom 12:2) and "Be renewed in the spirit of your minds" (Eph 4:23). This tension between change as a gift and change as something we have to work at is illustrated by the Pentecost story in Acts 2.

A pastor is a caring person and his personality is a central factor in the caring ministry. Psychotherapeutic literature gives immense significance to the personality of the therapist. Likewise, a pastor's personality is vital in the church ministries. A high degree of self-awareness and an insight into the dynamics of one's own personality is essential. Chavara's pastoral personality is characterized by empathy, authentic respect for others, firmness and an ability to respond with genuineness and openness. Because a pastor's personality 'is a helping personality', usually motivated by high self-expectations and an altruistic desire to be helpful and to care for others accompanied by a strong sense of responsibility, they are likely to feel more guilt.³ Chavara became an example of integrating the traditional and modern in the ecclesial and social life. He was well aware of the preciousness of the apostolic traditions of the Kerala Church. This did not prevent him from adapting duly from other cultures, and rites. He widened his own ministry by adapting many things from Latin rite traditions. He wanted

³ A growing body of research suggests a distinctive helping personality is commonly found in the caring professions. Helping persons driven by idealistic expectations any, also deprive themselves of opportunities for pleasure and relaxation. These tendencies can be a source of tension unless properly looked into.

to have greater exposure for the Syro-Malabar community and wanted to bring it out of its confines. This good intent of Chavara has been misinterpreted in some quarters as *latinisation*. At a time when the Syro-Malabar Church was in decline due to the lack of proper leadership, God raised a holy man to ward off the spiritual and theological bankruptcy.

3. Reform of the Clergy

An urgent need of the Church in Kerala was the reform of the clergy. Chavara realized that if the priests were renewed in the model of Christ and are properly informed in the spiritual and theological disciplines, much of the problems in the Church could be solved. What Chavara says in the biography of *malpan* Palackal is indicative of the deficiencies in the system: The *malpans* of the time did not bother about this because they taught all that they knew only to their nephews or to a few others in whom they were interested in and taught the other students only how to offer the mass and recite the canonical prayers. Chavara and his colleagues felt that this situation could be redressed and much good could have been done if some form of consecrated/vowed life existed in this Church. They wanted to have such an opportunity in their land of apostolic tradition.

With his sense of history, Chavara knew that the religious orders in the west used to be centres of holiness, learning and social transformation. A lover of God, Church and people, Chavara wanted to make up for this deficit. However, he did not wait for a redeemer to come. He set himself on the path with a definitive purpose and vision and strenuously worked at the realization of religious life in the land. The religious communities that Chavara founded became models for many religious institutes for men and women and gave a boost to varied apostolic activities that energized the society and the Church.⁴ John Wesley, the protestant reformer had a motto: 'Do all good you can, by all the means you can, in all the places you can at all the times you can to all the people you can, as long as you ever can.' 'Do as much good by all means' was the guiding principle of Chavara. As in many champion saints of the Church, there was a fire in his heart to do something beautiful for God and his people.

The seminaries that were set up under the initiative of Palakkal, Porukara and Chavara brought about a new era and a paradigm shift in

⁴ Joseph Pathrapankal, "The Prophetic Ministry of St. Chavara in the Society during 19th Century", Key Note Address in the Workshop on Theological Studies on St. Chavara, Kakkanad: Chavara Central Secretariat, 2017, 13.

theological education among St. Thomas Christians.⁵ The visionary *malpans* formed a collaborative team as they felt the need of recasting seminary formation to revitalize the Church. They realized the importance of preparing new leaders in the Church with an enlightened mind and sound spiritual and theological outlook. They began to impart quality training for pastors and teachers. If there is any foundation for theological education in the New Testament, it is Jesus himself who trained his disciples in personal discussion, counseling, preaching, dialoging and listening.⁶

People imitate and follow other people. This is the basis of social learning theory, which proposes that new behaviors can be acquired by observing and imitating others. People learn by observing, imitating and modeling. Researchers have observed that children treated dolls exactly the way the seniors treated it. The theory of learning is what Jesus employed when he taught his disciples. Paul instructed the believers that they might follow his example, just as he followed Christ. Peter urged the Church leaders to be example to the flock. For Chavara verbal teaching was secondary because he himself was an embodiment of all that he taught and preached. What is lacking in the system of seminary formation in our times is adequate number of models who inspire and teach by their life.

4. Media for Christian Formation

The centrality of the media in today's life in social, political, economic and personal realms is beyond dispute. Media, whether audio or video, print or electronics is a powerful instrument to create networks of relationships and communication. The universality and the presence of media in different forms and shapes radically influence the life style of people whether they want it or not. As a writer, organizer, social reformer and above all, a spiritual guide, Chavara realized the significance of media and thought ahead of time and utilized it in the best possible ways. He turned his attention to the print media, which was the only main mass communication facility of the time. Pope Pius X in his encyclical *Divini illius Magistri* (1930), pointed out the need for healthy principles in the media. Chavara, with his farsightedness and

⁵ Gratian Mundadan, "CMI Legacy of Theological Education", in Thomas Kollamparapil (ed.), *Christian Leadership and Integration*, Bangalore: Dharmaram, 2007: 44-46, 45.

⁶ Paul Achandy, Inaugural speech in the CMI Philosophers and Theologians Forum, 2017.

visionary nature, sensed that the pastoral care of the people and the evangelization would not be complete without exploiting the potentialities of print media.

Modernity was introduced to the Church in Kerala by the endeavors of Chavara. Printing technology was strictly the monopoly of the foreign evangelical missionaries and the government. It was a rare and expensive technology unavailable to the general populace. Its trade was controlled by the colonial powers. Because of the political and economic interests of colonial powers, who did not want it to get into the hands of the commoners and the rival missionaries, it was a herculean task to avail it for indigenous purposes. Chavara, like the Prometheus of the Greek epic, who stole the fire from the gods for humanity's sake, made it happen. He foresaw the good it could bring to his community and the people at large. In dealing with people of all kinds, he displayed so much of sensitivity and inclusiveness that he did not alienate anyone in the planning and execution of his project. He was a catalyst of social reformation because of his spiritual outlook that encompassed everything that brought good to humanity.

The books of the divine office for clerical use were not available in print. This was a real concern for Chavara. To a great extent, the new press that he established helped to make up for the lack of books on the Bible, liturgy and spirituality. Many Malayalam and Tamil books came out from the press that Chavara launched. These changed the spiritual and intellectual climate of Kerala at a critical time in the history.⁷ Although he was involved in promoting modernity in his society and Church, he was never oblivious of the primacy of the spirituality of his people. The first book he printed in the press in 1846 was *Jnana Piyusham*. This is the first book that was made available to the Christians in Kerala in their mother tongue. It was a translation of a Tamil Christian book. It is in the same press that the first Malayalam daily *Nasrani Deepika* was printed. It is interesting to note that Chavara did not print any of his own literary works. The year after his demise, Fr Leopold printed *Atmanuthapam* of Chavara at the Immaculate Mother Press, Koonammavu. By using the print media to bring out books on faith and life, he was announcing the good news from the 'house top.'

⁷ Thomas Kochumuttom, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Mumbai: St. Paul's, 2014, 112.

5. Liturgical Innovations

Chavara sensed the significance of liturgy in the life of the faithful. He composed no less than ten books for liturgical use in the Malabar Church. Prior to this composition, the liturgical texts of the time contained various errors and the Synod of Diamper had effected radical changes in the liturgy. Many East Syrian and Indian usages were replaced by the missionaries with those of the western Church, especially those sanctioned by the Council of Trent. This produced an unhappy admixture of Latin, East Syrian and Indian practices. The intention of Chavara in attempting to reform the liturgy was that the public worship should be performed with decorum and dignity. He borrowed from Latin sources wherever it was found appropriate. His close associations with the western missionaries and the Latin practices prompted him to draw whatever was good for enhancing the piety and devotion among his people.

Chavara was anxious to preserve all that was good in the traditional liturgy of the time. One also needs to take into account the fact that he was the Vicar General of the faithful of the Malabar Church under the Latin Vicar Apostolic. Prompted by pastoral concern for his people, whatever he found helpful in other traditions, he brought into the devotional practices of the Malabar Church. Pastoral concerns sometimes demand some amount of flexibility in matters of worship. As long as the essential characteristics of the liturgy are retained and the purpose of the liturgy is maintained, adaptations are welcome. Liturgical formulas and expressions shall be conducive to enhance the spirit of worship.

6. Renewal of Parishes

The Church, religious life and its various forms have no existence in itself apart from the mission of Christ. The mission of the Church is to enlighten the world by the gospel truth, bringing the gospel message of God's love and salvation to all. In this mission naturally humans will be able to enjoy greater sense of dignity and belongingness to the family God. The Church in Kerala was in need of a reform. Other than keeping traditions blindly, there were not much scriptural and theological wisdom disseminated in the community. Chavara and his group of religious took it upon themselves to preach the word of God and challenged the faithful to be real vehicle of the gospel. Through preaching, teaching and print media he let some fresh air into the rigidly conservative mindset of the St Thomas Christians.

He realized that in the formation of the Christian community, it should be properly fed with the Divine word, for the Church is built upon the word of God; she is born from and lives by that word. "We declare to you what we have always seen and heard so that you may also have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his son Jesus Christ" (1 Jn 1:3). We believe all that exists came into being because God "spoke". The existence and identity of the Christian community are derived fully from God's word, spoken in history by the one like us.

Listening to God's word is one of the fundamental principles of Catholic theology.⁸ Chavara was a motivational speaker. With style and substance, he influenced the faithful and led them to the desired destination. Immediately after his ordination, he began undertaking preaching ministries. He began parish retreats for the renewal of the parish and encouraged his colleagues to do it and made it a feature of parish life thereafter. Again, he was deputed to preach and bring back people who strayed to the schismatic bishop. In his last testament to his parish family, he wrote how to face and live through difficult times. His paternal heart and pastoral mind is seen vividly in the testament. He never preached anything that he did not practice. Since he walked his talk his words enjoyed the power of authenticity.

7. Reforms for Suffering Humanity

Chavara wanted everyone to enjoy the human dignity conferred by the creator. Being created in the image of God, the final and critical stage of life shall have loftiness despite any physical illness. Dying people shall have an inner joy and peace that comes from the spiritual resources available to them. He felt that the Church has an immediate and urgent responsibility to confer the spiritual joy and peace that come from the hope of eternal life. The sacraments of the Church designed to help the dying, especially sacraments of reconciliation and anointing of the sick shall be available to all. In his pastoral openness, he took special care in this regard.

Chavara himself went to people who were dying of epidemic to console and give the last rites and blessings despite warning that it was dangerous to his health. Although he was dissuaded, he acted courageously and set an example before the whole community that he was pasturing. He witnessed the peace and joy of many people as they

⁸ Paul Achandy, "Inaugural Address," in *Contextual Ecclesial Education, and the Evangelizing Mission of the Church*, Bangalore: Dharmaram, 2017, 14-20, 16.

received the sacraments and blessings of the Church. He nursed his own colleagues Valliara and Nellissery who happened to be sick. He saw the difference in the dying people as they are surrounded by loving and caring people who represent the Church. He saw that no Christian people shall die without the necessary spiritual care and assistance that they need in the last minutes of their life, because the whole life will lose its luster, if human beings die like animals. This prompted him to make a *Confraternity for Happy Death*. He asked the people of Kainakary to keep a charity box to collect enough money to meet the expenses of the dying people.⁹ He pointed out to the parishioners how important it is to prepare ourselves and others for a salutary death. In response to his request the parishioners wrote:

We shall not only pray for all those who were instrumental in establishing this confraternity in our chapel so that all may be blessed with happy death, but we also pray for the poor folk who have none to take care of them so that they also may be given a happy death, and we propose to open here a hospice for the poor and the destitute and to take care of all their needs. Hoping to get from our Christian brethren small gifts by way of charity to aid us in this venture, we have placed here a charity box.¹⁰

As a man of compassion and Christian charity, Chavara desired that the poor and the destitute feel wanted and loved and to be taken care of in their helpless situations. When he asked his parishioners to constitute the *Confraternity for Happy Death*, he was proving to be a father to all in their spiritual and material needs. Palliative care for the terminally ill is deemed as a modern concept. In fact, Chavara began it in his humble settings. He knew that by experiencing personal love and care in distressed time, people are more naturally disposed to be recipient of God's love and grace. Palliative care units are founded all over Kerala now and are supported by numerous welfare agencies. It is now deemed as a specialized medical care to improve the quality of life even when the disease is incurable.

When a person's health cannot be restored, it is time to focus on the other dimension of life, namely spiritual. Towards the end of life, naturally people have a greater opening towards the spiritual. But they need help and guidance, especially for people who have been away from

⁹ Thomas Panthaplackal, *Athisahanangalum Athyandadangalum*, Kakkanadu: CMI Department of Research and Documentation, Chavara Hills, 2017, 135.

¹⁰ CWC IV *Letters: Testament*, 127-28.

the religious practices, to take steps towards further growth. In fact, human spiritual consciousness is expanded through suffering and struggles. We see that even great spiritual giants had lot of suffering, physical and mental by which they further rose in their spiritual consciousness and were seen at their best.

In 1843, Chavara sent a circular letter to all priests to establish more of such confraternities. What Mother Teresa did in the streets of Calcutta, he had done in a different context; that is helping people to die with dignity receiving human love and warmth thus helping them to open up to the grace of salvation if they were lacking it. As sons and daughters, they should be able to have a glimpse of the future in the wake of their death. Most people are able to have some glimpse of their future at these moments and could prepare themselves in a more radical way. Chavara who helped and witnessed the happy death of his predecessors Thomas Palackkal and Thomas Porukkara and many others whom he personally assisted in thier illness, felt the need of more facilities to care for the sick in order to help them towards a happy death.

The desire to save souls was the motivational fire behind such acts that Chavara initiated. What you give away with love, you are likely to receive, perhaps in manifold ways as the Lord himself said: "And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life" (Mt 19:29). He was blessed with a happy death in the company of all who loved him, of course, with the Holy Family and hosts of saints invisibly present with him. Fr. Leopold wrote in his diary: "Today on 3 January 1871, Tuesday at 7.15 am, Fr. Cyriac Elias of Holy family, the first Prior died after a life of great innocence. He could declare before his death that he had never lost the baptismal innocence."¹¹

8. Rendering Wholeness to the Mourners

Death in Christian life cannot be overlooked, for, Christian life is orchestrated from the very beginning to the end for a happy death. A happy death means dying in full human dignity knowing one's status as the son/daughter of God. To modern man, death is an unpleasant topic that is to be avoided as much as possible. But mortality is part of being human. Human beings will not be human without having the mortality

¹¹ Leopold Beccaro, *A Biography of the Venerable Person*, published at Koonammavu in 1871 as part of *Atmanuthapam* and later published by Lucas Vithuvattikkal in 2003, 17.

built into his being. It gives the sense of urgency to make life beautiful. The art of good living involves the art of dying well. Death is related to life and life is related to death; they mutually enrich each other. Life and soul surpass the body, for body did not create it. Body has been an aid for the soul to evolve, grow and reach its destination. Body is the mediator we could see, feel and interact easily; therefore, the loss of it is painful for the survivors. This pain is real. This pain needs to be addressed. All religions and cultures have many rituals in the wake of death. It is often presented as helping the soul departed: in fact, it is all for the grieving people. Rituals help them to grieve properly taking time, revisiting the traumatic times and incidents. Recalling and verbalizing our loss giving it spiritual vibrations help people to reconnect with lives after traumatic experiences of death.

Faith gives immense hope in crisis time. Faith in a loving God who brings the deceased to a new life is consoling. The scriptures, rituals, prayers all help grieving people to grieve well so that life may be restored. Today psychologists are sent to people who experience heavy losses in catastrophic incidents. They are often desensitized by slow exposure to the sad episodes by means of different therapies. People who grieve well can easily return to normal life. Fortyone-day commemorative gathering in memory of the diseased is a wakeup call to leave behind the episode after the sadness for a span of time. Sadness frozen into the humans without grieving leads to depression for a lifetime unless it is addressed. Hence, we have a tradition of mourning for forty days or a similar period of grieving time.

Religions in their wisdom, had found different rituals of mourning so that after its completion, one can get along with life. The Book of Lamentations and the Book of Job have this kind of significance too. Chavara who had insight into the human nature, felt the need of an elegy, which he couched in a religious language filled with hope. We have a better appreciation of his poetic work titled *Pana* (Dirge) as we view it from this angle. One of the common messages that runs through such religious elegies is the evanescence of life and the need to reconstruct one's own life in the light of its brevity and its unexpected termination. By composing *Maranaveetil padunnathinulla pana*, Chavara was fulfilling the need of a Christian elegy or dirge in the best tradition of Christian faith. Collective public display of emotions of sadness and loss has been part of all cultures. We see such images in Greek mythologies and in the Indian epic of Mahabharata. In some locales this kind of mourning was organized and performed by traditional

mourners. Rather than gritting the teeth and face it, it makes more sense to feel one's pain and sadness so that we are not alienated from real self.

The *pana* begins with the parable of a man who had three friends. They had promised to each other that each will be alert to come to the other to rescue him in the wake of any tragedy. In spite of the assurance, the King sentenced one of them to death. The parable unravels the nature and identity of each companion and why they could not help. The first companion is the world. All the powers of the world, medicine, money and magic cannot help the one who is dying. All human means are obviously powerless in the event of death. The second friend represents the kith and kin. Their love and good will are not enough. They are helpless like anyone else at this critical moment. And the third is one's own ego, which perceives that it has no prospect of survival. When all friends failed and were helpless, the real friend enters the scene namely 'Virtue.' The only friend who could help at this critical moment was his own virtues he had earned in life. The fourth friend was invisible and had refrained from making any promises. This last friend was the only helpful friend in the journey to heaven. The chant is powerful enough to evoke a sober mood in the sad and disheartened people mourning around the deceased. The personal emotions are raised to a universal and supernatural sphere.¹²

In a culture, where mortality was very high on account of epidemics like small pox, cholera, malaria etc., Chavara felt the need of people to deal with these exigencies of life in a religiously mature manner making use of faith in the eternal life and the redemptive love of Christ. He himself was a victim of such a calamity as he lost his whole family early in life. Bible and Christian theology are the obvious sources of his inspiration and his immediate purpose was spiritual consolation. In the Christian perspective, life is like a journey to one's heavenly abode. For, here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city, which is to come (Heb 13:14). John Bunyan's monumental work *Pilgrim's Progress* tells the story of a pilgrim Christian who makes his way from the city of destruction (the world) to the celestial city (heaven). We are pilgrims here on earth, naturally this pilgrimage comes to an end when it reaches the pilgrims destination. This and similar messages are seen in many classic Christian literary works.

¹² N. Gopinath "An Ode to Inner Engineering" in John Mannarathara (ed.), *The Life and Legacy of St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, New Delhi, Viva Books Pvt Ltd, 2015, 149-158, 152.

9. A Holistic Reformer of all Times

As a reformer in the Church, Chavara is more akin to Sts Francis Assisi, Benedict and Ignatius Loyola. Unlike Martin Luther, he tried to effect changes in the Church from within. There were several divisions in the Church. As an astute visionary, Chavara sensed that one more division in the Church would make no good to anyone. He wanted to keep the unity in faith and fellowship in the Church that he belonged to. He could inspire his people by his humility and sanctity, so much so that when he spoke, it was received as the voice of a father who always intended the good of the children. The true Christian discipleship involves the call to become the father of all needy and all people of good will. Church and society in Kerala was not free from the feudalistic remnants in the administrative and social set up. There were always different classes of people that were protectors and protected. The protected was not always really protected but were at the mercy of the protector's discretions. Socially, economically and religiously there were untouchables who maintained life apart from the normal stream of life. He understood that education was the only way to effect changes in the society.

In the religious sphere, Chavara wanted to have more *darsanaveedu* and *thapasu bhavanam* to promote authentic spiritual life. He himself was an epitome of integrated life with his simplicity, asceticism service and love for all humans without boundaries and segregations. He imbibed the Indian spiritual genius of Budha and Mahavira in his compassion and charity.¹³ Seeing the poor state of women in religion as well as in the socio economic realms, he wanted to start a religious congregation for women by means of which women could be empowered. He wanted the religious women to become effective agents to reform the society.

Chavara was a man of reformations in the Church. However, unlike many others, he did it through his humble and meek style. He felt the need of more organized formation and greater scholarship for priests in theology, languages and all socially relevant themes. He sensed the need of proper seminaries after the model of the western countries in his land. Hence, new seminaries were founded. Just as the Society of Jesuit was a tool and competent weapon during the Reformation to fight against the opponents who were negatively inspired by the corruption and unenlightened religious practices of the 16th century, so with the help of his newly founded congregation, Chavara brought about some

¹³ Govinda Pilla, *Sukrutham Smara*, Kakkanadu: Chavara Central Secretariat, 1998, 43.

meaningful reforms first in the Church and subsequently in the society at large.

All great *acharyas* who had a special vision and purpose in their life, after imparting it, always wanted it to be continued without fail for the greater good of humanity. In order to consolidate the gains, they started new movements defining the nature of the new institution or the principles and values to be adhered to while following the ideals envisaged. Chavara felt the need of such institution from the very beginning. Hence, he nurtured and maintained two religious congregations based on his initial ideals and reformatory acts. Even though in the initial periods it faced hurdles of different kinds, those institutions sustained by the virtue and vision of the founder today are innovatively in the forefront with multiple ministries. Chavara was basically a religious without any masks. Though he was a multifaceted genius, he kept his humanness without being corrupted by any pomp.

Chavara creatively planned many remedial programmes to strengthen his apostolic community. He awakened the giant that was sleeping. The reforms he started found its fruition by bringing up many to the path of holiness. He lamented that this Church with so much spiritual patrimony had been barren and had not produced saints. And today in this Apostolic Community, a few are raised to the status of blessed and sainthood and others are in line to be raised to the honour. He himself set the best example so much so that the Church raised him for universal veneration. Authentic people start reforms with themselves. His reforms in the Church of Kerala were successful in every respect, for he himself was their starting point. He did not blame the socio-political and ecclesial milieu of the 19th century and wait for the opportune time to arrive. The monastery he initiated at Mannanam became a reserve bank of spiritual currency and guidance that could refashion the ecclesial and social life of the 19th century and thereafter. However, an important characteristic feature of the society is that it is very slow in understanding and appreciating the significance of the role played by its great personalities.

10. Fundamentals of Wholesome Ministry

St. Chavara, through his spiritual leadership, attempted to reform the body of Christ. It was the love for the Church and Christ that stirred him to act untiringly. It is said that Christianity is not a do it yourself religion. God made us social creatures and declared that it is not good to be alone. All Christians by their baptism are called to be in the body of Christ acknowledging Jesus the head. Each one is given gifts and abilities to

build and perfect the body that is the Church, so that many may experience the gift of salvation in a more complete manner. All have varying degrees of responsibilities for spiritual formation based on their unique vocation in the Church. Christian formation includes all attempts, means, instructions and discipline intended towards deepening the faith and the furtherance of spiritual growth. By introducing retreats and homilies and making greater participation of the faithful in the liturgical worship possible, Chavara was reforming and rebuilding the Church.

The Church desires that the personality of a priest is to be a bridge and not a hindrance for others in their reaching out to God in Jesus Christ. The value of communion is one of the most eloquent signs and one of the most effective ways of transmitting the gospel message.¹⁴ The capacity for communion presupposes an adequate level of affective maturity in a person. As the humanity of the word-made-flesh was the channel of salvation, so the humanity of a priest is instrumental in mediating the redemptive gifts of Christ to the people.¹⁵ Pastoral ministry in the Church becomes a reality when priests involved in the projects have human maturity. The personality of the priest should be formed in such a way that it is acceptable to the community that he serves as well as to his team of ministers. The human formation that we emphasize today has been the need of all times in the ministry of the Church. Human qualities are to be fostered in oneself. Authorities in offices of the Church shall endeavor to promote human qualities for collaborative ministry. All that Chavara achieved was the result of fostering such qualities in himself and others. Chavara was a good steward of the temporal assets. He was prudent and discerning in public life resembling Christ in the Church. The human foundations of a priest's personality shall be strong enough to allow the divine grace to flow through him.

Authentic pastoral ministry can be carried out only by a man of balanced integration of feelings and values, so that he may not be driven by raw feelings and needs, but be powered by proper affectivity. This kind of affective growth is evidenced in his ability to live well with authority and in an ability to take direction from others. A mature and integrated person can exercise authority over the peers and can

¹⁴ John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* # 43.

¹⁵ Linus Neli, "Human Formation in the Documents of the Church," in Shaji Kochuthara *et al.* (eds.), *Human Formation in Major Seminaries*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2017: 80-98, 96.

productively deal with conflicts and stress, which are part of ministry. Chavara, in his dealings with his peers as well as his authorities and faithful reveals how his integrated personality contributed to the efficiency of his ministry. As a sensitive, genuine and intuitive person, Jesus sensed what was part of humanity (Jn 2:25). Therefore, everyone involved in the ministry must make an effort to know what is in the depth of human heart in order to create trust and cooperation. Those who engage in mission and ministry are invited to transform themselves, society and culture by being individuals of deep living faith, with God as the very heart and centre of their lives and as they maintain the stewardship given by Christ.

Pope Francis spoke about the concept of mission in the following words: "My mission of being in the heart of the people is not just a part of my life or a badge I can take off; it is not just an extra or just another moment in life. Instead it is something which I cannot uproot from my being without destroying my very self. I am a mission on this earth; that is the reason why I am in the world."¹⁶ Chavara embodied the mission in his personality and pastoral ministry and lived the life of a true missionary that Pope Francis was speaking about.

11. Conclusion

Chavara was a charismatic personality. The gifts he was endowed with, he employed for doing good to his fellow human beings without any reserve. He extended his wings fully and flew to the horizons touching the subsequent centuries. As we live in the 21st century, we still can feel and experience the waves that the fluttering of his wings made. He was not born immortal; rather he achieved immortality by his good works and virtues. He lives in the heart of God and God's people. He was a true blessing to Kerala society and the Universal Church at large. He had many feathers on his cap being a poet, writer, literary genius, educationist, social reformer, administrator, orator, spiritual guide and more. It seems that he was not really concerned about titles, name or fame. He was all concerned about uplifting all in a holistic manner. Therefore, he explored different realms to bring about all that is good from all domains.

¹⁶ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* #273.

SAINT KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA A PILLAR THAT SUPPORTED THE CHURCH

Sr Susmitha CMC♦

Abstract: One of the strongest revolutions which brought about substantial change and held high the flag of mother Church, has been by St. Chavara. Mirroring the face of Christ, leading an exemplary life of complete obedience and profound love of God, Chavara became the fifth Gospel of his time. This study makes a humble attempt to look at him through the lens of progression, through the vistas of constructive growth, love and expansion. Chavara skillfully navigated the phases of the Church, understanding them and bringing about an uplift in any cause he set his hands to. As testified by Fr. Leopold Beccaro, his first biographer: He had an ardent desire to spread the light of the Holy Church in all directions; he was grieved to the point of shedding tears when he heard of the trials and persecutions of the Church and eagerly longed to see days of triumph. From fighting for justice, to bringing about essential facts to light, to the humble task of turning convents and monasteries into holy abodes of Christ, it was Chavara who took strength and received the grace to turn factual instances into the most worthy portals of Divine love.

Keywords: Koonammavu Convent, The pillar, the lamp and the mirror, Bishop Thomas Roccas, Propaganda Fide, *Lex orandi lex credendi*, *Jnanapiyusham*, Fr. Leopold Beccaro, Gerard Mooppachan, *Slamlekh*, *Nishkama karma*, *Chavarul*, *Alochana*, *Koodapirappukal*, *Punyasanketham*, *Malpan*, *Tukasa*, Abode of Virtues.

1. Introduction

"This father was a mirror and a lamp to all the Christians in Kerala. Moreover he was a strong pillar that supported the Holy Church in protecting its faith.

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With great zeal, he worked for its growth and expansion."¹ These touching and moving words by the sisters of Koonammavu Convent unveil the greatness of the person of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara. Their testimony stands as ever true and revealing a unique picture of Chavara, as their close, lived experience was more authentic and valid than any other. His personality, contributions, and his clear vision and mission of his life can be grouped into these three basic titles- *the pillar, the lamp and the mirror*- attributed by his daughters. Chavara, of course, realized the dream of God about him; to be the brave son of the Mother Church. In all that he did, his sole motive was that the Church should be the platform for every new beginning. She is to be flourished and spread out bearing the name of Christ, establishing his Kingdom. He was an epoch making a spiritual tower, a lead figure of his time.

The 19th century Kerala Church, saw a new phase, it was her re-birth, a new - Pentecost through which the flag of the Mother Church flew high. Treading through a novel path and inspiring many to follow, Chavara could become an initiator in many fields, bringing remarkable changes in the existence of Malabar Church. He could beautifully and systematically fulfil his role as the defender, builder and reformer of the Church, taking efforts and facing challenges in transforming her internal and external phases. Fighting tooth and nail against the storm that attacked her, he became the pillar of the Church that supported her. He became the light to enlighten all who were in the darkness of superstition, ignorance, false belief, etc. Mirroring the face of Christ, leading an exemplary life of complete obedience and profound love of God, Chavara became the fifth Gospel of his time. Thus his every initiation has its far reaching consequences that extent even today.

This study is a humble attempt to look at Chavara - as a pillar that supported the Church, a mirror and a lamp in the church, unfolding his tremendous love and great zeal with which he worked for its growth and expansion.

2. The Phases of the Church

2.1. The Internal Phase

Among the two phases of the Catholic Church the internal phase contains the mystery of the Holy Trinity, Sacraments, Saints, Angels, Word of God, etc. which are holy in themselves; nothing can make it contaminated or spoiled; never can it lose its holiness or purity, as a consequence of someone's failure to lead an authentic life, neither of a

¹ *The Chronicles of Koonammavu Convent (CKC)*, vol. II, p.23.

simple lay faithful nor of any who holds ecclesial power. This internal phase, which is holy in its very nature, forms the core of the Church. So, the Church by her very nature and existence stands ever holy, as her core is holy.

2.2. The External Phase

The other phase of the church, called the external phase contains the hierarchical and administrative set up, such as the Pope, bishops, the priests, religious, lay faithful, the institutions, the material and physical dimensions, etc.

3. The Pillar that Supported the Church

When the sisters addressed Chavara as the pillar they were clear enough how he supported the Church. He became the pillar by strengthening the faith of the people of God and by fostering their unity. He protected the people in unity from the attack of the intruder bishop Thomas Roccas. Introducing programs for spiritual re-awakening such as Sunday homily, retreats for the priests and the laity, family renewal programs, and so on, he nurtured the growth of their faith life.

3.1. A Courageous Leader in the Open War

The years 1861-1862 can be called as an age of 'open war' for faith and unity in the history of the Malabar Church. The coming of the Chaldean bishop Thomas Roccas from Baghdad without the authorization from the Holy Father, on 9 May 1861 marks the beginning of the faith war. When the Vicar Apostolic Baccinelli felt the situation going out of his control, he found in Chavara, a shepherd after the heart of Jesus, to bring back the scattered sheep of the Church. He was sure that through Chavara God would act in time. In a letter appointing Chavara as the Vicar General, he writes:

On account of the difficulties which we experience in the administration of churches under our jurisdiction for a long time, because of our advanced age and the consequent exhaustion and indisposition, and more over, since through our administration we do not see spiritual fruits both among the priests and among the laity, in the present circumstances of things...it is necessary to constitute a vicar general. Hence we appoint you as vicar general, so that you govern, as regards spiritual affairs, priests and lay people in the Syro-Malabar churches under our jurisdiction. In fact, I am persuaded that

you have the fortitude (strength), skill, wisdom and the virtues which are necessary to fulfil this responsibility.²

In a letter to the Prefect of Propaganda Fide, informing him of the appointment of Chavara as the vicar general bishop Bernardine highly appreciated his qualities, saying "...who is the prior of the of the old and principal monastery, and head of the whole Congregation, a man truly Christian, virtuous, very prudent, very well-versed in Sacred Scriptures, most proficient in Syriac language, who in this circumstance with his deeds proved himself to be very faithful to the Catholic Religion and to the Holy See, even though the intruder and his seditious group from Baghdad itself endeavoured to draw him to their side ... even promising to consecrate him bishop. If they have obtained his consecration, all or almost all would have followed him, since he enjoys great esteem, respect and authority among all. Now therefore, in order to divert the clergy and the people and to oppose the intruder I judged it (his appointment as vicar general) as the most appropriate means, and perhaps the only one."³

Chavara, who was all the more worried about the trouble and misfortune caused by the schism, took it as the plan of God and being ever submissive to the order, began acting immediately for its defence. The prudent and wise intervention of Chavara proved his very personality and his zeal in saving the Church from the clutches of the schismatic. He sent circulars to the priests and to the laity; he entrusted the worst situation of the Malabar Church to Mother Mary whose continuous and immediate maternal assistance always felt strongly in his life. The news that the tricks of Roccas and his party deceived many, made Chavara sad and restless. So he along with other priests sent letters to the Pope requesting clarification about the intruding bishop. Roccas splitted the Catholic Church into parts. Chavara couldn't bear seeing 86 of its churches had completely joined to the Roccasian group and 36 other churches partially. Because of Chavara's earnest efforts Roccas left for Babel.

The trouble caused by Roccas did not end up with his departure alone. Chavara acknowledged that the troubled task still lie ahead; that was to bring back the scattered churches, reuniting them to the Church. Thus he started mending the torn parts of her patiently by collecting

² Paul Pallath, *Vicariate Apostolic of Verapoly and the St Thomas Christians in 1867*, Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publication, 2018, p.17.

³ Pallath, *Vicariate Apostolic of Verapoly*, p.20.

details of all who were ordained by Roccas, writing letters to the Holy See asking permission for absolution and to bring them back to the Catholic Church. He also knew clearly well, that it was the ardent longing of the St Thomas Christians to have native ecclesial leadership that invited Roccas schism. While animating and empowering the church to keep up its unity, he courageously informed the church authority the root cause of the problem and the remedy for it. After the departure of Roccas, Chavara wrote to the Propaganda Fide:

We are St Thomas Christians. Since several years we do not have a bishop of our own. But those who received faith recently have their own bishop.....hence Your Eminence, I would bring to your kind attention the following. It is good that we have two bishops here, one for the Latin church, and the other for the Syrian church. Thus the craving for own bishop would cease and the relationship with the Babel would end.⁴

3.2. Liturgical Celebration: An Expression of Faith

The celebration of the Sacramental and Liturgical life in faith by the faithful would add the internal beauty of the Church ever bright. Chavara believed the maxim, *Lex orandi lex credendi*, which is found in Prosper of Aquitaine's eighth book on the authority of the Apostolic See concerning the grace of God and free will - One prays what one believes, one believes what one experiences in truth. He worked hard for establishing uniformity in the celebration of the liturgical life with decorum and solemnity, preserving the age long liturgical traditions of St Thomas Christians, adopting many devotional practices which he believed would foster the spiritual life of all. So he aimed at an orderly devout celebration of public worship and good participation by the faithful in unity. He sent a circular to the priests⁵ informing them about the printing of the missal and the Order of Mass which contained all the rubrics; knowing that the rubrics together with the calendar would bring uniformity in the celebration of the Liturgy, thus cementing the unity among the members of the Church which indeed was his intention.

3.3. Spiritual Welfare of the people

Bishop Ludvic encouraged Chavara and granted him permission to translate books from Tamil to Malayalam.⁶ The first printed book from Mannanam Press called '*Jnanapiyusham*' which could be used for the

⁴ Chavara CWC, Vol. IV: *Letters*, II:5.

⁵ Chavara, CWC, Vol. IV: *Letters*, IX:7.

⁶ See Parappuram, *Chronicles* 1472-1474.

faithful individually and collectively, contains many prayers that also could be used as family prayer such as 15 decades of Rosary, all the minor and major feasts of the Church, Holy Mass in simple form both in Latin Rite and in Syrian for the use of the faithful, etc. He also made effort to translate the Holy Saturday Service in to Syriac, forty hours adoration ceremonies, and various benedictions from Latin Liturgical books. It was Chavara who introduced the Sunday homily, by which the faithful were enriched in their faith, breaking of the Word along with the breaking of the Bread drew all to one in faith. He preached retreats for the laity in all the parishes, helped them live their faith life. He was sure that the catholic family which is known to be the domestic church is the base of every individual's faith journey. 'The Testament of a loving father' gives precious directives and guideline for an authentic Christian family and worthy Christian manner of rearing the children. Great and incredible were his efforts to promote and foster faith in the Church.

4. Mirroring the Face of Christ

"I feel that by the grace of God, the sanctifying grace I received in the holy baptism has never been lost to me at any time."⁷ It is in this pure conscience, the fellow beings of Chavara saw him as the one who mirrored Christ. He had in his mind that the convents and the monasteries are established to remain as "the mirror of virtues" and "abode of saints".⁸ His life itself was quiet an insight and inspiration for this. By his very life, he lived and shown to all the aim of founding the religious Congregation. All who approached him felt him to be a man of virtues. He helped his brothers and sisters in their faith journey seeking for sanctity and holiness. He was an ideal religious who walked his talk. By his own upright life he persuaded others to live their call following the discipline of life. Thus the credibility of his words and the authenticity of his deeds proved him to be the mirror of the face of Christ. He was bathed in the love of Christ, each of his steps became the milestone, the words that he uttered were the gem of great wisdom to be pondered and lived upon. Jesus Himself says 'learn from me for I am humble in spirit' (Mt 11:29). Following the Lord, this perfect disciple of the Master, accepted this challenge, to reflect the virtues of the Lord throughout his life. So seeing the life of Chavara, others could address him as 'the mirror'. For in him they saw the Christian values and virtues.

⁷ CKC, Vol. II, p.13.

⁸ Chavara, CWC, Vol. IV: *Letters*, 6.2.

Some of his outstanding virtues such as love for the Church, Obedience to the hierarchy, fraternal love are taken here for discussion.

4.1. Ardent Lover of the Church

Chavara being enflamed by great love towards Christ and the Holy Catholic Church, the mystical body, was concerned always about the matters of the Church. In all that he did, his sole aim was the growth and unity of the Church. All his activities, renewal programs, and establishment of different organizations got directed towards this single motive – to extend the Kingdom of God to the ends of the world. The missionaries were surprised to see this man of God, burning with the love for the Church. Fr. Leopold Beccaro, his first biographer testifies:

Among his virtues the most outstanding was his ardent faith in and devotion to the Holy Catholic Church and to the Holy Father. He had an ardent desire to spread the light of the Holy Church in all directions; he was grieved to the point of shedding tears when he heard of the trials and persecutions of the Church and eagerly longed to see days of triumph. Whenever he happened to hear the news about the Pope, he was always moved to tears, either of sorrows or of joy.⁹

Chavara lived a perfect life in his local church. His concern for the universal Church was marvelous. It could never cease to amaze me, how he managed to collect the news and incidents of Europe, at a time when the communication facilities were absolutely not in progress. Chavara's tremendous love for the Church, compelled him to collect the details about her, about the Pope, about the struggles faced, about the first Vatican Council, declaration of the decree of infallibility, the abrupt close of the council as the Franco-Prussian war broke out, the flee of the cardinals, such traumatic experiences were known to him¹⁰. All these news were his concern and it pained him. With due reverence and anguish he responded to them, accepting them as his own family issue. Through his letters he informed the fathers and the sisters in the monastery and in the convent and requested them to pray for the Pope and the Church.

On his sick bed, when he was unable to offer the Holy Mass due to the severity of his infirmities, his thoughts were linked with the universal Church. He united himself with the holy priests who offer the

⁹ Leopold Beccaro, *A Short Biography of K.E Chavara*, Mannanam: St Joseph Monastery, 2003, p.12.

¹⁰ Chavara, CWC, Vol. IV: *Letters*, V:6,15.

blood of the Lamb of God to the Heavenly Father, incessantly, in all the four continents like Asia, America.¹¹ This most touching words uttered on his death bed weigh high his deep passion and reverence towards the Church, pointing to the very nature of the fire that ignited his whole life as a priest - the fire of love towards the universal Church.

Chavara's pilgrimage of faith began with his baptism on 18 February 1805, in Chennamkary, an interior and less known parish and reached its climax at St. Philomina's Church at Koonammavu. What we notice in his faith journey is its gradual growth and expansion accepting Jesus as the Cosmic Christ. This map of faith became so broad that it could hold the whole universal Church, all the continents of the entire world.

4.2. An Obedient Son of the Mother Church

Obedience is the reflection of Love. A kind of reciprocity lies between obedience and love. The intensity of one's love is measured in the keenness and willingness of the person's obedience. In Phil 2:8, St Paul presents Jesus as an *Obedient Son* par excellence in *Love*. Being filled with the love towards His father, Jesus accepted even the death on the Cross, as it was inevitable to fulfill the mission entrusted to him by the Father.

The life of Chavara was a saga of heroic obedience. According to him obedience is to experience heavenly peace in the monastery, in the convent, which is a small heaven, by obeying the hierarchy of the Church, the superiors, even one another. The proof of a true religious is obedience without seeing and hearing, total renunciation of one's will.¹² For him obedience was part of his very being, not for a stipulated time. It was his conscience that directed him, even during his last days when he was suggested to be taken to Mannanam for a change, his reply would astonish every one. He said that as the Excellency the Bishop and Fr. Leopold told him to stay at Koonammavu, his conscience did not permit him to leave that place in their absence.¹³ He was ever ready to do what he was asked to do. Obedience was a leading principle of this holy man. It's very clear from the words of the sisters when they said of him that their very Reverend father used to obey like a child. This good example which he has shown even at the moment of his death was something that everyone marveled at.¹⁴ For the reception of the Sacrament of anointing the sick, Chavara left the desire and decision to

¹¹ *Chronicles of Mannanam Monastery*, Vol 3, (1864- 71), p.134 (Malayalam MSS)

¹² Chavara, CWC, Vol. IV: *Letters*, VI:5.

¹³ CKC, Vol. II, p.13.

¹⁴ CKC, Vol. II, p.20.

others. As an answer to the question asked by Gerard Mooppachan, 'In which Rite do you wish to receive the last Sacrament and indulgences?' Chavara could answer like this, 'As you all will it, if it is in my own language, I too can give the response to the prayers, but I shall be quite satisfied with whatever you decide.'¹⁵ As Leopold Beccaro testifies his obedience towards the ecclesial authorities could never be paralleled to anyone else.¹⁶

4.3. A Man of Tender Love

Chavara was fascinated by the supreme love of God, which forced him to flow the tender love towards his brothers and sisters. Fr. Kuriakose Eliseus Porukara writes about the way Chavara loved the sisters. "Just as Patriarch Jacob had a greater love for his youngest son Benjamin, so Chavara loved the sisters most deeply, and brought them up most carefully, providing them with all the needs even as a hen took care of the chicks."¹⁷

Chavara looked into every minute detail of the Koonmmavu convent as a loving father. His heart was full of love for everyone. In everything Chavara had a thought about his children. See how affectionately he sent the chillies and the mangoes to the convent for the sisters, instructing them to keep the seed for the future.¹⁸ He used to call the sisters as 'loving children'. Chavara approached them with the dignity of the status of their life, addressing them as "O! Glorious royal ladies! O queens of the Lord and God! How great and praiseworthy is the state of life to which you have ascended."¹⁹

The paternal heart of Chavara was with full of affection and concern for them. The last three visits that he made to the convent were the manifestation of his love for them. *The Chronicles of the Koonammavu Convent* records the incident as the expression of his tender and fervent love for them. On 15 October 1870 out of his great love he went there; even though he was very weak he made a visit again in the afternoon. Without being able to walk by himself, he reached there, with the help of another person. During that visit he made them sing *slamlekh* (Hail holy Queen). Since they did not know where exactly the pauses where

¹⁵ CKC, Vol. II, p.15.

¹⁶ Leopold Beccaro, *A Short Biography of K.E Chavara*, p.12.

¹⁷ Sebastian Palathara, ed. *Stapakapithakanmar*, Mannanam: St Josephs Monastery, 1995, p.29.

¹⁸ Chavara, CWC, Vol. IV: *Letters* VII:8.

¹⁹ Chavara, CWC, Vol. IV: *Letters* VII:2.

he showed them the places where to stop and marked it.²⁰ The sisters marveled at his interest to teach them handicrafts. "They recorded in their Chronicle their words of indebtedness and gratitude. Besides this he taught us, what thread to use for sewing, how to dye the thread the process to be followed and the color to be used, etc."²¹ Nothing bothered him, even his own sickness and weakness of the body. Heart touching was his last visits, even his eye sight was not proper, with the help of the superior; he went to the convent just to see the sisters and the girls in the boarding house. His physical ailments couldn't stop him from visiting them as an expression of his love and concern.

4.4. Nishkama Karma Yogi

The desire to have position, power, and prestige was kept away from the life of Chavara. He was a man of '*nishkama karma*'. He loved and served the Church with the pure intention of serving the souls, keeping up the bond of mother-son relationship. Ecclesiastical offices or its dignified position never bothered him. Even when the intruder, bishop Thomas Roccas offered him the chance of becoming a bishop, his answer was, "my desire is not to become the bishop, but to save souls."²² His humility held him back, to be known only as the prior of the monasteries, never he desired for the position of the vicar general. We never find any letter signed by Chavara as vicar general.

4.5. A Hand for the Art of Writing

As any earthly father, Chavara wanted his spiritual daughters to be equipped, with all that they were needed to develop their talents. He took special interest to give them training in the art of writing which could be the best means for their self-expression. He reminded the superior to encourage Sr. Anna to write down all the details of the daily events.²³ On the day of the inauguration of the bamboo-mat convent, on 13 February 1866 Chavara wrote in his diary that Sr. Anna and Sr. Thresia began to write on the paper.²⁴ He added that Sr. Anna learns the things faster than others. He himself showed them how to write. The first sixteen pages of the Chronicle are in his hand writing. He corrected the

²⁰ CKC, Vol. II p.11.

²¹ CKC, Vol. II p.12.

²² A. M. Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2008, p.229.

²³ Chavara, CWC, Vol. IV: *Letters* VII.1.

²⁴ Chavara, CWC, Vol. I: *Chronicles*

rest of the pages of the first volume and gave them necessary corrections to improve their articulation.

4.6. A Man with a Family Heart

Chavara had a big and broad heart that he could accommodate everyone accepting all, as the members of his own family. His affection towards the sisters was praiseworthy. Acknowledging the strong bond of relationship that existed between the sisters and himself he said: "What reason is behind this that now more than your blood relations, you love me and I love you?"²⁵ Wherever he lived he considered the community his own family. He insisted the members of his congregation to live in unity as '*koodapirappukal*' - children born of and nursed by same mother.²⁶ He testified that it was true in his life: "I renounced my home and relations for God's sake. See I am writing this sitting at Arnattukara. My brethren here love me more than my family members, brothers, children and others. Tomorrow at Koonammavu, then at Carmel Vazhakulam and at Mannanam, whichever monastery I may go, I am loved equally."²⁷ Chavara couldn't but love all, none left unloved, uncared. Chavara's life was engaged in making bridges with all who came to his life. Fraternal love, union of hearts, universality of prayer and all these were something precious to Chavara.

5. To be the Lamp

Chavara was a burning light in the darkened Kerala of nineteenth century. He was a pioneer in many respects, a man with far sightedness, who walked ahead of his time. Never was he scared of taking initiative. He understood that formation of good leaders for the society and for the Church was a felt and inevitable need of the time. With the introduction of religious houses for men and women, renewal of formation of clergy, printing press and the education system he dispelled the darkness of faith and ignorance. Thus he became a lamp to lead the people from darkness to light.

5.1. Forming the Leaders

"The priests have to keep wisdom on his lips; the people would approach him seeking his instructions. He is the messenger of the Lord of Hosts" (Malachi 2:7). The priests are the backbone of the Church. In and through them the Church guides her flock and administers her task.

²⁵ Chavara, CWC, Vol. IV: *Letters* VII.6.

²⁶ Chavara, CWC, Vol. IV: *Letters* VI.5.

²⁷ Chavara, CWC, Vol. IV: *Letters* IX.11.

Chavara was well aware of the greatness of the status of the priests in the Church. Admiring his own call to priesthood and the duty as a shepherd to the flock of Christ, he knew well that the Church would grow well with the presence of wise and prudent priests: the desired renewal in the whole Church depends to a greater extent upon the priestly ministry; an uneducated priest is not only insufficient to do anything worthwhile in his pastoral work, but may be even detrimental to the salvation of souls.²⁸

The existence of the universal Church is to lead all her children to the shore of salvation. The priests are anointed and commissioned to serve her with this purpose. Chavara decided to renew the system of formation of the clergy in Kerala. Along with the monasteries he started the seminaries: at Vazhakulam (1866), at Elthuruthu (1868), and already Mannanam had a Seminary attached to it from 1833 on. He considered the formation and renewal of priests his most important duty.

While in the seminary itself, the charism of Chavara in priestly formation was noticed and recognized by Malpan Palackal. So then, Chavara was entrusted with the coaching of other brothers who were weak in studies. Also, it was Chavara who had to look in to the seminary matters, whenever Malpan went out. Chavara dedicated himself for the priestly formation for more than three decades. Bishop Francis Xavier on 16 February 1844 appointed him the '*Malpan*' as a mark of appreciation and recognition of his service to priestly formation. He was awarded with the title '*the examiner*' of all priests of the Syrian Rite and the '*Malpan*' of all theological faculties of the priests.²⁹ The priests who had the training in the seminary stood along with Chavara taking daring step with brave heart and with unfailing faith to confront unanimously the Roccas schism. These priests under the guidance of Chavara went around strengthening the faithful in their Christian living.

In order to foster their bond with Jesus the eternal high priest, Chavara initiated the renewal of canonical prayer, and *Tukasa* (order of the Holy Mass) and special retreats were preached for them. Spiritual books and other reading materials were made available to them. We get an echo of his motivating force to work for liturgical renewal in Vatican Council's 'Decree on Priests': "No Christian community can be built unless it has its basis and centre in the celebration of the Most Holy

²⁸ Leopold Beccaro, *A Short Biography of K.E Chavara*, p.6

²⁹ Chavara, *CWC*, Vol. I: *Chronicles*, p. 44.

Eucharist. It is here that all education in the spirit of community must originate."³⁰

5.2. An Abode of Virtues

The Chronicles of Koonammaavu Convent begins with Chavara's distress and disappointment in not having monasteries or convent in the land of Malayalam though the true Christian religion was in practice from early times. Being the vicar general, he knew that there were many women, who desired to live a chaste life, but they had no way out to lead such a life. He was aware that men enjoyed the privileges of the church whereas women's cries were not heard. Men could live the life of chastity but women had to accept marriage and live as worldly women and they were living in this sad plight for a long time.³¹

The religious are in the heart of the Church. They have the duty of working for the implanting and strengthening of the Kingdom of Christ in souls and for spreading it to the four corners of the earth³² Chavara was grieved of the absence of canonized saints in the Malabar church, who, he believed, will add beauty to its internal phase. Chavara not only desired for the convent but toiled hard and prayed earnestly for establishing one in Kerala. '*Alochana*' introduces Chavara's interest in accomplishing his desire for establishing the convent. It reads, "Because frailty and weakness is seen to be doubled, but earnestness, piety, fraternal love, interest on the convent have increased than before. Simplicity is also increased."³³ From this earnestness he set out for the building up of the convent about which his biographer says, "It was his great desire to start a religious house (*punyasanketham*) for women with the main intention of making it a safe place for the girls of Malabar to live their religion as good Christians and to learn spiritual things..."³⁴

5.3. The Spark of Knowledge

The nineteenth century Kerala underwent a strong and intense discrimination of caste, creed, gender, etc. Though the proclamation of the Gospel was not prohibited or chained, there was delay in getting into the life of the '*dalits*'. Chavara who had the spirit of St Paul who underwent labour pain until Christ was formed in the people, worried

³⁰ *Decree on Priests*, 7.

³¹ *CKC*, Vol. I, p.1

³² *Lumen Gentium*, 44.

³³ *Alochana*, 1865, December, p.92. It is the report book of the Council meeting (1864-1870) Malayalam MSS.

³⁴ Leopold Beccaro, *A Short Biography of K.E Chavara*, p.12.

about the faith of all, including the marginalized. He found education as the best means to bring forth '*the seed and the sprouts of holiness*'.³⁵ His prime aim of establishing educational institutions was to increase the strength of the Church, in number, in quality, in faith, and in knowledge. As the vicar general, he sent a letter to all the parishes exhorting them to begin a school along with all the parishes.

St Ephrem teaches us that the second means for vision is education. Just as we cannot see things without vision in the eyes, without knowledge we will not be able to see Heaven and God who dwells in it. Those who cannot see are blind. Similarly, those who are not educated are spiritually blind. It is because of this blindness that the Christians of Malabar, although they are followers of Jesus of Nazareth from the very beginning, are without the seed and sprout of holiness.³⁶

The spreading of light of faith and knowledge through education was not an inclusive matter for Catholics alone. Believing that the *pulayas* and the casteless masses of *dalits* are dearest to God, on 9 October 1864, he opened a school for them in Mannanam. By starting a school for the lower castes, he proved to the world that in the heart of the Church there is place for all, who are created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:28). Chavara was in haste to begin the schools for them in different places. In the meeting of August 1869, the '*Alochana*' explains the exhortations he made for the development of the education system. Through his circular letters, the priests were encouraged, instructing them the different ways to go ahead along with the plan.

Each monastery was entrusted to open new schools in their respective areas, to bring more children of the less privileged who were denied the right to education and to inspect the schools regularly and they gathered the students of four or five schools together and conducted retreats for them at Mannanam.³⁷ TOCD Fathers took care of 42 such schools in the central Travancore in 1866.³⁸ This intervention and interference of the priests in the schools slowly paved the path for conducting retreats for school children. Schools were opened in Elthuruth and Ambazhakadu as well. When all the parish priests gathered for their annual retreats, the Prior of Mannanam Monastery

³⁵ Chavara, CWC, Vol. IV: *Letters IX.2*.

³⁶ Chavara, CWC, Vol. IV: *Letters IX.2*.

³⁷ *Alochana* (May 1868), p.195.

³⁸ *Alochana*, p.111.

reminded them of their greater responsibility to educate the children of their locality.³⁹

He not only established the schools and envisaged systematic education, but also reminded the parents about their responsibility in giving good education to their children and accompanying them. In his *Chavarul* he says, "As soon as the children come of age, they should be sent to school. From time to time, parents should enquire about their progress in studies and also about the type of friendship they cultivate. Every Sunday, parents must review what they have studied."⁴⁰

As the schools were opened for all, Chavara got engaged in bringing those lower casts to the light of faith. Restraints and restrictions were many, but this zealous son of the Church went ahead of the mission. The Fathers took keen interest to gather them on Sundays to care for the pastoral needs of the new Christians; their number reached 100 in 1866,⁴¹ and 250 in 1870 in different places of Kuttanad (Pulincunnu, Edathua, Changanassery, Kalloorkadu, etc.).⁴²

5.4. Printing Press: A Light to Enlighten

Chavara knew well that knowledge is the powerful weapon to fight against evil and corruption. He wished all to be learned and literate in order to withstand the enemies of the Church, and of the society. He thought that the starting of the printing press was the best and powerful means for the learning process, to bring them to the light of faith, knowledge, and truth from the darkness of ignorance, curse, false belief, etc. He wanted all, specially the children of the Church to be educated. For this, he equipped himself to be the role model for his fellow beings and followers, becoming a versatile linguist, for he mastered more than eight languages (Malayalam, Tamil, Syriac, Sanskrit, Latin, Portuguese, Italian and English). Till the printing press started functioning at Mannanam, only a very few individuals had in their possession some prayer books printed in Tamil and manuscripts in Malayalam. It was to facilitate the imparting of religious knowledge among the people and provide them with devotional literature that Chavara thought of starting a press at Mannanam.

At the time of Chavara there was no Catholic Printing Press in Kerala. The Protestants at Tharangampadi, were on a large scale printing and

³⁹ *Chronicles of Mannanam Monastery*, vol. 3, p.122.

⁴⁰ Chavara, CWC, Vol. IV: *Letters IX:10*.

⁴¹ *Alochana*, p.129.

⁴² *Alochana*, p. 269.

publishing books harmful to the Catholics, much more than those at Kottayam were doing. To respond to this urgent issue, Chavara daringly stepped out, in spite of all the struggles and hardships. The scarcity of good and devotional books was something that affected the Catholic Church very badly. He himself experienced this when he was a seminarian, due to the lack of theological books. Catholics were prohibited to use the books published by the Protestants. In order to seek a remedy Chavara got in to the revolution of letters.

Along with the social uplift of the people, Chavara being a unique pastor brought the spiritual renewal in their lives. Monthly devotions, prayers to be used during Mass, and other prayers were printed and were published. He has written in the *Chronicles of the Mannanam Monastery* in detail the hardship endured in establishing the printing press and the tiresome journey he had to tread related to it. The money gave by a benefactor of Mannanam Monastery called Mrs. Mariyathumma Kappamavumoottil, became the capital fund for the press. Imported products from Europe like the printing machine, ink and paper were not affordable for him. On one occasion he wrote, even when he reached the monastery, there was no money to pay for the labourers. With no way out, as he was praying to St Joseph and to Guardian angels, miraculously a parishioner of Cherppunkal came with 500 'chakram' as donation, then promising him another 500 more that would be sent by someone. Those words made him relaxed and he breathed a sigh of relief.⁴³ Such were the crucial financial situations that Chavara had to face at many a times, but this man of God, trusting in His providence with strong determination went ahead in spite of all the blocks and hindrances.

Recognizing the value of knowledge, the urgent need of making the members of the Church rich in knowledge which in turn, he knew, would make them rich in faith, he started printing the books and leaflets, and made them available to the people. He collected books from all possible sources, which soon evolved into a Library. Mannanam Press became a busy publishing hub of religious, social, and cultural works. Slowly this became a power house of knowledge, and of faith. Malayalam translation of the *Holy Bible*, the innumerable prayer books, monthly devotions, etc., were the products of this printing press. The first Daily newspaper of Kerala called '*Deepika*' came out from this press.

⁴³ Chavara, CWC, Vol. I: *Chronicles*, p.136.

6. Conclusion

This brilliant and multi-faceted man of God always kept burning the fire in his heart, and worked tirelessly for the mission of the Church. He accepted himself to be the son of the Mother Church, which he knew well that could never be replaced by any. So then the issues of the Mother became his, her sons and daughters were his own brothers and sisters too. His earnest love for the Church made him a staunch and brave son, which reinforced him to face the struggles and misfortunes, keeping away himself from mediocrity and lukewarmness. The world came to know him to be the personification of the values, qualities of Christ himself. He was successful in bringing out the values and teachings of Christ to the people. His efforts to foster unity in the Church proved his true and genuine spirit in fulfilling his *dharma* as the son. Chavara being the son never allowed the Mother Church to be broken or shattered, but defended her as a pillar, that supported. "God created me to do some unique and definite service. He has entrusted some work to me which he has not committed to another. I have my mission" (John Henry Newman). These words of Newman were true in the life of Chavara.

Chavara wished always to remain as the daring son of the Church. He was quite sure of his 'dharma' as a son. He dedicated himself totally to the Church, his mother, by serving and defending her. He believed that the Church exists as a channel of salvation for her children. She stands in the world as a sign of unity. Chavara knowing well off his duty in keeping her united, in faith and in love, set out burning with fire. His sole intention was to bring about the name of Christ glorified and known. Chavara was very much conscious about the holiness of the Church. To keep up her purity and holiness he introduced renewal in her life of faith, in the sacramental life and in the celebration of the liturgy.

When Fr. Kappil made the striking and ever memorable remark in the funeral oration of St Chavara that the flag of Malayalam has fallen today, the mission of his very life was affirmed and made known to all. Becoming himself a lamp for the people of the 19th century, Chavara was flying high the ensign of the prestige and honor of the Church, raising all her children without the discrimination of caste, creed and color, to the breed of spiritual, educated and cultured society. He could re-write the destiny and fate of millions. Truly Chavara was a bright burning lamp that dispelled the darkness of all kind. For him, discipleship was a radical following of Christ, a way of resembling him to the world, mirroring the values shone in the Master. His words, actions, all his

initiatives and even his dreams resembled that of the Lord. He mirrored the One whom he followed. Thus Chavara lived in letter and spirit his life as the *Brave Son of the Mother Church, the pillar that supported her, by being the lamp and the mirror.*

THE TRINITARIAN DIMENSION OF CMI WAY OF LIFE

John Ollukaran CMI♦

Abstract: The doctrine of the Trinity as foundational to the Christian faith in general and to the CMI Way of Consecrated Life in particular. Each Divine Person plays a distinct and irreplaceable role in the life of a person to grow into a member of the Trinitarian Family here on earth and beyond. The three Persons in the Trinity are: (1) the Transcendent God, the Father, who is the incomprehensible, unknowable and unsearchable Creator existing outside of space and time. (2) the Transparent God, the incarnated Jesus Christ is the Saviour who lived among human beings and (3) the Immanent God, the Holy Spirit, who indwells in every human being as the helper and counsellor through timely promptings. The CMI Constitution is a living proof to the fact that the Congregation as a 'Darshana Kutumbam' is the reflection of Trinitarian Life with each of the three Persons playing a vital role at every stage from its very inception to what it is today. The CMI Religious life, as defined by the Constitution, "requires closer following of Christ in intimate communion with the Father in the Spirit, through a life of

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prayer that manifests to all, the presence already here of the Kingdom of God.”

Keywords: Trinitarian Mystery, Trinitarian formula, Transcendent God, Great Commission, Neoplatonic philosophy, Transparent God, The Way and the Truth and the Life, Immanent God, CMI way of Life, Spiritual movement, CMI missionary charism.

1. Introduction

The Gospel of Mathew concludes with the Great Commission: “Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Mt 28:16-20).

It is a mandate given to any follower of Jesus. However, a Christian is officially initiated into the Trinitarian Life through the Sacrament of Baptism. If the rite of ‘baptism’ with a Trinitarian formula could be boiled down, that would mean a change of identity into the household of the Holy Trinity through an act of purification, sanctification, or initiation. Every Christian child is taught to begin the day with the Holy Trinity through a sign of the Cross and a prayer: “By the sign of Cross, deliver us, O Lord, from our enemies, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen”. St. John Chrysostom describes baptism as giving birth to a “new way of creation.” This process of consecration to the Trinity was already begun even before the birth of a person: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations” (Jer 1:5). Every human is therefore consecrated to reflect the Trinitarian life of unity and sharing to the world. St. Chavara, the founder of the CMI Congregation, conceived of four types of families – Trinitarian Family (*Thritva Kutumbam*), Holy Family (*Thiru Kutumbam*), Religious Family (*Sanyasa/ Dharsana Kutumbam*) and Wedded Family (*Dhambatya Kutumbam*). To him the earthly families are to be the mirrors of Trinitarian Family wherein the Holy Family is par excellence.

2. Trinitarian Mystery Unveiled

The doctrine of the Trinity with the unity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as three persons in one God-head is considered to be one of the central Christian affirmations about God. It is rooted in the fact that God came to meet Christians in a threefold figure: (1) as Creator, Lord of the history

of salvation, Father, and Judge, as revealed in the Old Testament; (2) as the Lord who, in the incarnated figure of Jesus Christ, lived among human beings and was present in their midst as the "Resurrected One"; and (3) as the Holy Spirit, whom they experienced as the helper or intercessor in the power of the new life. The concept of Trinity could be derived from the Bible: (i) There is only one God: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one" (Deut 6:4). (ii) The Father is God: "God also said to Moses, say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers - the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob - has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation" (Ex 3:15). (iii) Jesus Christ is God: "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God..." (Phil 2:5-6). (iv) The Holy Spirit is God: "Then Peter said, 'Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit... You have not lied to men but to God'" (Acts 5:3-4). (v) Father, Son and Holy Spirit are distinct: "As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased'" (Mk 1:10-11). "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Cor 13:14).

Taking cue from the above Scriptural revelations, the Three Persons in the Holy Trinity could be described as God the Father, the *Transcendent God*, God the Son, the *Transparent God* and God the Holy Spirit, the *Immanent God*.¹ Each Divine Person plays a distinct and irreplaceable role in the life of a person to enable to grow into a member of the Trinitarian Family here on earth and beyond.

2.1. The Transcendent God

'God is transcendent' means "to exist above and independent from, to rise above, surpass, succeed." The idea of a transcendent God has roots both in Neoplatonic philosophy and Judaism. Neoplatonism is a form of idealistic monism which is largely derived from the interpretation of Plato's philosophy by Plotinus who taught the existence of an ineffable and transcendent One, which exists in it of itself and transcends all categories of being, and thus no attributes can be placed on the "One"

¹ This reflection is based on the former depiction of the Trinity in three overlapping triangles at the rear wall of the altar at CMI Prior General's House, Chavara Hills, Kakkanad, by the artist, Fr. Joy Elankunnapuzha CMI.

(which is also the Good in itself). Plotinus conceived the One by way of negation of multiplicity and diversity, which characterize the phenomenal world we live in. Neoplatonic philosophy emphasized the idea that God is so pure and perfect that it completely transcended all human categories, ideas, and concepts. Biblically, this concept is marked in a variety of ways. (i) "God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen 1:1). Since He created all things, He clearly holds power over creation. (ii) The Lord told Moses, "You cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live" (Ex 33:20). His holiness was so great that no human could withstand it. (iii) God is transcendent in terms of His '*sinlessness*': "We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away" (Is 64:6). (iv) God is transcendent in the sense that He is eternal. "He, everlasting God...will not grow tired or weary...he gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak" (Is 40:28). (v) God is transcendent in His power: "But the thunder of his power who can understand?" (Job 26:14).

A Transcendent God is the incomprehensible Creator existing outside of space and time and thus is unknowable and unsearchable. Neither by an act of our will nor by our own reasoning we can possibly come to understand God or experience Him personally. God wants us to seek to know Him, yet how can the finite possibly know and understand the infinite: "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him is the glory forever!" (Rom 11:33-36). To see the fullness of the glory of God would be too much for any human to bear; it would break the earthen vessel in pieces. The full revelation of God is therefore reserved for the future, when all things will be seen as they are, and men will be in a condition to receive them.

In Christian theology, the transcendentals can be described as the ultimate desires of Human being. Human being ultimately strives for perfection, which takes form through the desire for perfect attainment of the transcendentals. The Catholic Church teaches that God is Himself truth, goodness, and beauty, as indicated in the Catechism. Each transcends the limitations of place and time, and is rooted in being. The transcendentals are not contingent upon cultural diversity, religious doctrine, or personal ideologies, but are the objective properties of all that exists.

A. P. J. Abdul Kalam said, "Look at the sky. We are not alone. The whole universe is friendly to us and conspires only to give the best to those who dream and work". God the Father, though transcendent, always attracts and pulls upwards each and every human being to dream and strive hard to reach out to the heights of transcendence. Jesus Christ himself has encouraged us to aspire or practice any virtue to that of Father's standard: "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.... "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Mt 5:44-48). Even in practicing the virtues like forgiveness, our frame of reference should be that of the heavenly Father: "Jesus answered, 'I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times...'" (Mt 18:22).

God the Father inspires and attracts humans not only to strive for perfection in spiritual matters but in every domain of life and existence. That is why Dr. Kalam once said, "Great dreams of great dreamers are always transcended." If man could make his foot print on the surface of moon - an idea which was earlier confined to the dreams and poetic imaginations, - it was Heavenly Father who instilled the flame in humanity to dream to venture out in to Moon. Every scientific discovery and advancement in knowledge and discoveries right from the human existence has derived from the motivation instilled in each individual by the Father who watches over us like any earthly father who encourages his toddler with the faltering steps to walk ahead with perseverance and confidence. Consequently, no limit could be set to any enterprising activity of man in any realm of development and progress.

At the same time, the Transcendence of God reminds us of the fact that humans are pilgrims on earth whereby none have permanent abodes here on earth, nor can have total perfection in anything that is done, yet they are consistently and constantly prompted to strive hard to reach out to the horizons of perfection which would be fulfilled in the world to come. This is true in any sphere of activities. This is the reason why some flaws or imperfections are invariably found in anything in this world making always room for further improvement and modification. The perfect beauty towards which our mind inclines is the Form of Beauty as in Platonic Triad. In the same vein, even an expert painter would not be satisfied with his own piece of art and so also the case with any other acclaimed artist or scientist. St. Augustine, musing over heart's

such longings or disappointments, concludes: "Thou hast created us for Thyself, and our heart is not quiet until it rests in Thee."

2.2. The Transparent God

The characteristics of transcendence and transparence appear to be in conflict. The more God's transcendence is emphasized, the less God's transparence can be understood and vice-versa. A transcendent is the one who is beyond perception, independent of the universe, and wholly "other". There is no point of comparison, no points of commonality. In contrast, the transparent God is one who exists within us or the universe and, hence, very much a part of our existence. There are all sorts of commonalities and points of comparison. How can these two qualities exist simultaneously? It is found in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh and dwelt among us. The transparence of God means that he is knowable, perceivable or graspable. For example, Jesus Christ is God incarnate (in the flesh) and therefore he was transparent in the first century among those who knew him, perceived of him or experienced him with one or more of their five senses.

Philip said to Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us." Jesus replied, "Philip, I have been with you all this time, and still you do not know Me? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I say to you, I do not speak on my own. Instead, it is the Father dwelling in me, performing His works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me — or at least believe on account of the works themselves" (Jn 14: 8-11). Jesus came to the world as 'God in human form': "He was like us in all ways except that He was without sin. His sinless nature transcended all humanity" (Heb 4:15). "Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?' Jesus answered, "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him" (Jn 14:5-6).

2.2.1. The Way

Jesus is the only way to really know the Father in heaven. On our long trips we used to turn on GPS to know the way as well to get an idea of how long it will take to get to our destination. Thomas was looking for the same kind of information. However, Jesus makes it clear that we don't have to define a route but simply know and trust in Jesus daily. When we abide in him, we are before his eyes, walk with him or

constantly converse with him as St. Chavara has instructed us, we need not define route, but surrender to Him who will lead us exactly where we need to go. Jesus compares himself to a shepherd. Sheep don't choose their own path to safety and protection, but rely on the shepherd to guard and care for them. In order to be safe, we have to trust the shepherd, and not wander off on our own adventures and try to find our own way. That will lead us to danger and pain. But when we follow Jesus, he leads us to exactly where we need to be.

2.2.2. The Truth

When Jesus tells, "I am the truth", he can testify to the truth and teach the truth because he himself is the truth. In him there is nothing false, nothing misleading, and nothing fake or uncertain. Each of us is capable of knowing truth, but none of us can claim to actually be truth. There are too many things we don't know, and too many things we get wrong throughout our lives. When Jesus claims to be truth, he claims to be one with God. The words of John 1:1 set the stage for this very fact: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." When we seek to figure out what is truth and what is a lie, we can measure it against the words of Jesus.

2.2.3. The Life

In John 10, Jesus says, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. ... "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me- just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and I lay down my life for the sheep". Jesus is not only painting a picture of how he defends and leads his sheep, but also foreshadowing his death on the cross for the eternal life of all. This life is not our ultimate goal and does not encompass the entirety of who we are. This life is a mere drop in the ocean of eternity and serves as the starting block on the marathon that leads us to our goal of eternal life. We can slow it down, we can spend time, money and energy working to fight against it, but we can't stop it from marching forward. Jesus teaches us what we are to really be concerned with is not this life, but with eternal life. As we follow the voice of our shepherd, we can grasp what the eternal life is here and now. We can live this life in such a way that we are not chasing things that don't last but the things that do last and have eternal significance. This type of life has eternal impact not only for us but for others around us.

As consecrated persons our vocation is to show the characteristic features of Jesus – the Chaste, Poor and Obedient One – to the world around. According to *Vita Consecrata*, we have to be a living memorial

and tradition to the message, actions and life of our Saviour. We are exclusively chosen to closely follow Jesus and to be another Christ with 'ears to listen and forgive, with hands to bless and console, with legs to walk an extra mile to the needy and marginalized and with a heart burning with the zeal and passion for the Lord' as expressed in the CMI motto – *Zelo zelatus sum pro Domino Deo*.

2.3. The Immanent God

The immanence of God refers to God's relationship to the world that He actively operates within it, sustains it as its effective cause, and is continually present (i.e., omnipresent). Immanence is the balancing concept to God's transcendence, which describes God as being of a completely different kind or substance from and completely independent of the universe He created. While God is far above and "transcendent" of this world, He has also chosen to place Himself in direct connection with it as its creator, sustainer, and savior. The idea of an Immanent God can be traced to both Judaism and Greek philosophers. The Old Testament depicts a God who is very active in human affairs and the working of the universe. Christians, especially the mystics, have often described a God who works within them and whose presence they can perceive immediately and personally. Various Greek philosophers have also discussed the idea of a God who is somehow united with our souls. In religion, transcendence is the aspect of a deity's nature and power that is wholly independent of the material universe, beyond all known physical laws. This is contrasted with immanence, where a God is said to be fully present in the physical world and thus accessible to creatures in various ways.

God's transcendent nature keeps Him distant and remote from His creation both in space and time, yet on the other hand, His immanent nature works to draw Him near to His creation and to sustain the universe. 'Am I a God nearby,' says the Lord, 'and not a God far away? Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?' declares the Lord. 'Do I not fill heaven and earth?' declares the Lord" (Jer 23:23-24). God's love for His creation is so great that we see His immanence overshadowing His transcendence. This becomes clear in His incarnate Son, Jesus Christ, as He breaks through the barrier of sin and separation to draw all mankind back into a close, personal relationship. We see God not only choosing to draw near to His creation but to personally come into the hearts and minds of His people through the indwelling power of His Holy Spirit. This is the miracle of God's transcendence.

Jesus reveals the Holy Spirit, the Immanent God: "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, Spirit of truth. The world cannot receive Him, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. But you do know Him, for He abides with you and will be in you. All this I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have told you" (Jn 14). The emphasis of the passage is on transformation wrought by the Spirit of God. "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit" (Jn 3:5-8). Our lives are formed by heredity, environment, and will. When Jesus says "that which is born of flesh is flesh," he stresses our heredity which cannot produce a spiritually transformed life. Our environment and waywardness further limit us. Something new has to take place. This something new is being born of the Spirit. "There is a mystery about the new birth, as about every act of God. One who is born of the Spirit is like the wind. We cannot tell its direction or source, yet we can see its effects. It is the manifestation of an unseen power. So the life of the regenerate soul will always be a puzzle and an enigma to men of the world; yet even they must be able to test its genuineness by its acts of humility, of purity, of love" (Eerdmans).

Jesus promised the apostles, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. You will be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth" (Act 1:8). The emphasis on the Holy Spirit is the key throughout the book of Acts especially in the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8: 26-40. The story unfolds with the Spirit taking over the task of directing Philip: "Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goes down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert", then telling him to join himself to the eunuch's chariot and finally snatching him away at the conclusion of the story.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones in 'The Sovereign Spirit' infers from the story, "Now there are leadings such as that.... If you read the history of the saints, God's people throughout the centuries and especially the history of revivals, you will find that this is something which is perfectly clear and definite—men have been told by the Holy Spirit to do something;

they knew it was the Holy Spirit speaking to them, and it transpired that it obviously was his leading. It seems clear to me that if we deny such a possibility, we are again guilty of quenching the Spirit”.

Wherever the Spirit works, there is abundance of joy. The Ethiopian went away from the experience “rejoicing.” Luke does not say anything about receiving the Spirit, but joy is a part of the work that the Spirit performs. When disciples (Acts 13:52) see spiritual results, they often have an accompanying joy. It is Paul, however, who writes about joy as a fruit of the Spirit. Only when the missionaries begin with the wishes of Imminent God asking always, “How does God desire that we minister within this context?”, their mission would be fruitful. The book of Proverbs says, “The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps” (Prov 16:9) and “Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed” (Prov 16:3).

3. CMI Way of Trinitarian Life

The CMI Constitution is a living proof to the fact that the Congregation as a *Darshana Kutumbam* is a reflection of Trinitarian Life with each of the three Persons playing a vital role at every stage from its very inception to what it is today. The first article of the Constitution underscores this fact: “Inspired by the Holy Spirit, they (the founding fathers) committed their life to intense prayer and deep recollection and the building up and renewal of the Church” (C-1, p.9). Apart from this inspiration to start, “It (the CMI Consecrated life itself) was a life of communion with the Triune God: experiencing the freedom of the Spirit, and making “the Word our sole food and drink” (St. Kuriakose Elias, Chavara, *Atmanuthapam*), they became powerful heralds of the same Word and formed themselves in the likeness of the Son” (C-3, p.10).

The CMI Religious life, as defined by the Constitution, “requires closer following of Christ in intimate communion with the Father in the Spirit, through a life of prayer that manifests to all the presence already here of the Kingdom of God. Yet, as the pilgrim Church on the way to the Father’s home, we have to exercise a radical renunciation through the profession and practice of the evangelical counsels in the true fellowship of the religious community” (C-8, p.12). The “call to perfect love (PC 1) invites CMIs to a deepening of our baptismal consecration (ET 4) through a total surrender of ourselves to God in the profession and practice of the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience. Through these vows we dedicated ourselves to the Father in Christ who communicates himself through the Spirit intimately to the innermost core of every man” (C-17, p.15). “By the profession of the Evangelical Obedience, we identify

ourselves with Christ (PC 14) who learned obedience through suffering (Heb 5:8) even unto death on the cross and carried out the Fathers' plan of love" (C-37, p-19). Further, "Listening to the Spirit acting in every individual and community, we seek the Father's plan for each one of us as well as for the community" (C-39, p.20). Underlining the inevitable place of Community life, the Constitution elaborates: "Giving ourselves to one another, we show forth the unity of the Body of Christ, the people of God called to participate in the fellowship of the Most Holy Trinity" (C-45, p.21). The CMI Missionary Charism demands in sharing Christ's Mission from the Father: "Made disciples of Christ through Baptism and in a special manner by our religious consecration, we participate in the mission of Christ from the Father to make all men share in his son ship" (C-62, p.26). The Supreme Model to which every CMI has to be formed is "Christ praying on the mountain and proclaiming God's Kingdom to the multitudes, identifying himself with the poor and always obeying the will of the Father" (C-79, p.310). "The Holy Spirit, the author of our sanctification who dwells in us, forms us into the image of Christ" (C-80, p.32). To cap it all, the CMI formula of Profession of three Vows is a radical commitment to the Most Holy Trinity (C-110, p.41).

4. Conclusion

The transcendence of God means that He is outside of humanity's full experience, perception or grasp whereas the transparence of God means that he is knowable, perceivable or graspable. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three persons that exist in perfect harmony as one God. Each member of the Trinity fulfills the specific role as Transcendent God, Transparent God and Immanent God respectively. The verse of Paul, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Cor 13:14) provides the most complete and explicit summary of their functions. In simple sense, the Transcendent Father creates a plan of highest perfection, the Transparent Jesus Christ in human form implements the plan tangible to the human beings in perfect obedience to the Father and encourages the people to live according to the promptings of the Immanent Holy Spirit who administers the plan in the day-today lives of each individual and empowers and enables them to strive to be perfect as the heavenly Father is.

Every CMI, consecrated to the Holy Trinity by their religious profession is called to be a constant '*learner*' about the way, laid out by Jesus Christ, the Transparent God, who lived among human beings. A way of life sets a paradigm to the behaviour and habits, that are typical

of a particular person or group, and leads everyone towards the Transcendent God striving to be Perfect in every aspect of their lives both temporal and eternal. This Way modelled by the Transparent God during his earthly life is "*loving*" Jesus in and through the little ones, and "*to live*" a CMI way of life guided by the Holy Spirit doing the Will of the Father in everything and everywhere and thereby transforming the Congregation in to a radical Spiritual Movement in perfect tune with the saintly lives of the Founding Fathers.

BOOK REVIEW

Jossy Maria CMC, *Fostering Feminine Genius: An Empowering Theology of Women from Kuriakose Elias Chavara* (Theological Studies on Saint Chavara 7), Kochi: Chavara Central Secretariat & Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2020; Pages: lxxxii+294; ISBN: 978-81-946576-3-7; Price: Rs. 250; US\$ 25.

Christian discipleship is a collective and earnest effort to reclaim 'the original blessing' for the whole humanity in the form of the Kingdom of God. Various enlightened individual Christians as well as communities have been making persistent efforts in this regard. Although we may be forced to admit that there were a number of counterproductive events in the history of the Church, as a faith-based institution that has survived two millennia, Christian discipleship has contributed significantly towards the humanization process as well as in instilling a positive value consciousness in human minds across the globe. One of such pioneering efforts from the Indian Church is seen in the life and ministry of Kuriakose Elias Chavara of the Holy Family, the first indigenously consecrated religious person, who not only founded two indigenous religious congregations (CMC and CTC), but also spearheaded a series of programmes to uplift the ordinary and marginalized people in his capacities as the Prior of the monasteries and the Vicar General of the Marthoma Christians in the Vicariate of Varapuzha during the nineteenth century.

Along with many accomplishments of great pioneering merit, Chavara is also credited, first, with realizing and acknowledging the genius of the women faithful and, later, with developing programmes as well as the required infrastructure to support the blossoming of their feminine genius in such a way that not only the Christian community, but the entire society benefited out of their life of consecration and innovative and creative ministries. As these ground-breaking contributions of Chavara have not been systematically explored so far, it is unfortunate to state that even the Catholic Church in India does not recognize his ennobling vision and action plans that have paved the way for a positive transformation of the socio-cultural landscape of India in general, and Kerala in particular. It is against this backdrop that the present study, *Fostering Feminine Genius: An Empowering Theology of Women from Kuriakose Elias Chavara* by Jossy Maria CMC, becomes very

significant and forward looking. As the author has observed, this exhaustive work convincingly reveals “how Saint Chavara valued, celebrated, and promoted the greatness of womanhood and motherhood in his life, writings, and ministry.”

Josy Maria’s *Fostering Feminine Genius* succinctly navigates through the innovative vision of Chavara and arrives at the noble position that he was “a woman-friendly man, a Gospel-based feminist, and a liberator who empowered women through women.” As a young boy at home, or as an ordained priest who subsequently embraced religious life during his adult life, Chavara’s life was led in close spiritual proximity with women. The impact of his mother’s personality upon him was so unique that her image and impressions repeatedly occur in his writings; his unique devotion to Mother Mary could be seen as an extension of his love for his own mother, though Chavara’s Marian devotion scaled greater heights in his spiritual life and set a model for later generations. Further, his growth in spiritual life was inspired and sustained by women characters in the Bible as well as a number of Christian saints, particularly Saint Teresa of Avila, whom he addressed as ‘my mother’. Indeed, the feminine genius has a special affinity for spirituality, and Chavara spontaneously identified it among his own faithful, accompanied and animated them as a pastor, and cherished it as a seeker and as Christ’s disciple, and led others to its full blossoming as the founder, superior, and spiritual guide of religious communities.

As it is pointed out very clearly in this pioneering research study, Chavara made a consistent and deliberate use of women characters in his poetical works, chronicles, and letters also to make important theological points on the spirit of self-sacrifice of mothers and other women. It is significant to note that at no place in his writings were women depicted as inferior; instead, in Chavara’s inimitable style, he accorded women significant roles in the plots that he had constructed in his writings, especially in his plays and poems. It is important to note that he did not let any woman assume a demeaning, diminutive, or self-belittling position. As he was positively influenced by women in his own personal life, it was impossible for him to conceive that women could be treated without proper dignity. Hence, we find his actions and instructions consciously moving towards an imperative in the form of an on-going transformative process, both among women and men so that everybody would be awakened to the full humanity of women, as they were certainly created in God’s image and likeness (Gen 1:28). Chavara, through his positive involvement, wanted to inculcate a new

consciousness among the people so that “without succumbing to the temptations of domination of woman on the part of man and of servitude to man on the part of woman,” a culture of mutual respect and equality could be cultivated, especially among Christians. Certainly for Chavara, his stature as an ordained priest, a consecrated religious, or a spiritual animator never meant that he could enforce and exercise his (male) authority upon the women faithful under his care, including the Sisters; instead of making them submissive to his authority, he loved and cared for them, and offered them the best of his services (and harnessed the support of as many as possible) to facilitate their humane and spiritual blossoming whether they lived in their homes, or in the convent.

In *Fostering Feminine Genius*, Jossy Maria has brilliantly pooled together Chavara’s extensive contributions for the empowerment of women in a coherent whole. She has successfully explored the theme, aiming it at the theological landscape within which Chavara’s inspiring Christian insights and practical intelligence were blended together to create a new ethos of respecting women and according them their rightful place in the Church and the society. Long years of close proximity with Chavara and his writings have enabled the author to make a beautiful but logically-laid out matrix of the viewpoints and activities of Chavara that facilitated his unique pastoral outreach especially focusing on an integral and all-inclusive blossoming of women within the portals of the Church, which, in turn, made it possible for them to claim their own merit-based space in the civil society. In fact, his staunch faith in women and their inherent capabilities came from his conviction that they share the same creative DNA, cultural patrimony, civilizational benefits, and potential for establishing the Kingdom of God, as possessed by men; in addition, he was also convinced of the power of the feminine genius that each of them is uniquely blessed with. Hence, it was natural for Chavara not to “regard women as impure or powerless. Instead, he depicted them as models of great faith and dignity and launched a civilization of equality.”

Chavara, imbued with his deep spirituality of *Appa* experience, opened up the avenues for women to stand up in the social sphere and to stamp their own unique signature in strengthening the spiritual and cultural fabric of the society. Jossy Maria captures it in substance: “According to Chavara, women are not a sub-species of men. They share a common humanity and common baptism with men, and should, therefore, share the opportunity in decision-making processes and take

up leadership roles in the institutional Church. Chavara saw and recognized women as qualified, independent, capable, and worthy persons, who should be integrated into the Church and society as equal partners, overcoming the prejudices of their traditionally assigned gender roles." Supported by various pieces of evidence, the author affirms her conviction: "When the society kept women inside their homes, Chavara encouraged them to extend their presence and services unto unfamiliar and faraway places." At least a century prior to the Vatican Council II, we find that one of its forward-looking statements had already come true in the life and ministry of Chavara: "The hour is coming, in fact has come, when the vocation of women is being acknowledged in its fullness, the hour in which women acquire in the world an influence, an effect and a power never hitherto achieved. That is why, at this moment when the human race is undergoing so deep a transformation, women imbued with a spirit of the Gospel can do so much to aid humanity in not falling" (The Council's Message to Women on 8 December 1965: AAS 58 (1966), 13-14).

Although Jossy Maria's project involves a lot of historical research, the output made available to us in the form of *Fostering Feminine Genius* puts up a challenge to everyone, a challenge which becomes so significant in the twenty-first century, as the Church as a whole and the humanity at large seem to be still faltering in positively according women their legitimate place in the Church and the society. She agrees with Pope Francis in admitting that "the role of service of woman slides towards a role of servitude" (Falasca, "Francis and Women," *L'Osservatore Romano*, 29 December 2019, 1) and insists that such a position contradicts the Gospel paradigm. Infused with biblical wisdom and armed with the practical steps prescribed by Chavara for the empowerment of women, the author brilliantly poses the challenge that both women and men should face squarely: "... for women, it challenges them to live up to their God-given dignity and equality with men; for men, it calls upon them to take the side of the 'vulnerable human beings' in the periphery and to shed their hard-heartedness and arrogance in the treatment of women. For Chavara, taking the side of God meant simply taking the side of the defenceless human beings, to empower them, and bring them to the mainstream of the society."

The ecclesial communion faces serious hurdles in the chauvinistic attitude traditionally adopted by our male-dominated society, in which the Church finds herself existing and operating. Chavara, modelling himself along the attitude of Jesus Christ himself (John Paul II, *Mulieris*

dignitatem, 25), made room for women within the ministry of the Church, offered them opportunities to reclaim their God-given dignity and autonomy, worked on a strategy to heal the wounds that humanity has bequeathed from the time of 'original sin' (that which distorted the equilibrium of human community and the whole creation), and instilled in everyone the hope that the 'original blessing' can be redeemed provided those who have been subjugated could be brought back to their original status of equity by walking the 'Kingdom way'.

Saju Chackalackal CMI

BOOK REVIEW

Sophy Rose CMC, *A Pillar and Guiding Light: Kuriakose Elias Chavara, a Theologian of the Church* (Theological Studies on Saint Chavara 4), Kochi, Chavara Central Secretariat & Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2020; pages xlvi + 162; ISBN: 978-81-944061-2-9; Price: Rs. 160; US\$ 15.

Although Saint Chavara had made unparalleled contributions in shaping up a theology existentially suitable to the Saint Thomas Christians through his relentless and overarching efforts to animate and strengthen the community of faithful, it is regrettable that no significant effort has been made so far to unravel his theological contributions, though there were innumerable attempts from various corners to bring out a number of popular publications highlighting his spiritual as well as socio-cultural and administrative contributions. Despite the great appreciation for the socially and administratively significant contributions made by Saint Chavara, it seems that no one took the trouble so far to study his writings to unearth his theology. Many trained Catholic theologians, whose teachings and writings are solely inspired by the methodology of western theologians, have never taken it upon themselves to study this key figure in the ecclesial spectrum of a vibrant Indian Church; even many others who take the native thinkers seriously seem to have bypassed Saint Chavara's contributions probably because he hailed from the southern-most state of India and belonged to the Syro-Malabar Church; the fact that most of his writings are in Malayalam also might have been a roadblock for some in exploring his pioneering efforts at theologizing for a native Christian community in India.

It is strange and unfortunate that although he had treaded a path unparalleled in many respects, even after his canonization on 23 November 2014, neither the ecclesiastical authorities nor members of the three congregations he had founded (namely, CMI for men and CMC and CTC for women) took the trouble to bring out his indigenous and pioneering contributions towards theologizing among the Saint Thomas Christians. It is in this context that *A Pillar and Guiding Light*, a well-organized scientific study by Sophy Rose, a member of the Congregation of Mother of Carmel which was founded by Saint Chavara himself, clearly delineating the unique as well as pioneering theological contributions of Chavara, gains its prominence both on the ecclesial horizons and within

the academia. The objective of this work, as the author puts it clearly in the introduction, is “to bring out and systematize his theological vision and insights in a systematic manner by making use of certain theological models and disciplines.”

A Pillar and Guiding Light, a well-argued out survey on the theological contributions of Saint Chavara, has successfully brought to the public light those significant theological insights offered by Saint Chavara during his lifetime, though they went undetected due to the fact that they were spread across the width and breath of his manifold writings. With a masterstroke, Sophy Rose has managed to pool and string them together to present a convincing argument that Saint Chavara was indeed a theologian of great merit, who could be placed alongside the great Fathers of the Church as far as the Saint Thomas Christians are concerned. After an extensive and focused analysis of the contributions of Saint Chavara, Sophy Rose takes a definitive position that “his writings contain the doctrines and dogmas of the Church in a vivid manner.” His uniqueness, according to Sophy, is that, in Saint Chavara, we find an integral synthesis of the teachings of the Fathers of the Church in the early centuries and the Second Vatican Council of the twentieth century.

True to his aspiration to be an agent of Christian synthesis, seen throughout his life, Saint Chavara’s theological contributions also bridged Catholic teachings from different epochs. Highlighting some of his key theological contributions, especially in the light of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, which came almost a century after his death, the author insightfully makes the following list about his achievements: “... he imbibed the centrality of liturgy for the renewal of the Church from within, the first and foremost duty of the pastors to preach the Word of God, the urgency of providing formation to the family, necessity of giving solid formation to the seminarians, the necessity of fostering religious life for the missionary endeavour of the Church, the need of giving catholic education to the children, offering all possible care to the poor and the needy, etc.” From an enlightened ecclesial administrative point of view, Saint Chavara is acclaimed to have “ascertained the need of protecting and promoting the apostolic heritage of the Church, acknowledged and asserted the apostolic succession and the ecclesiastical jurisdiction, demanded the shepherding of bishop for each Rite from their own Rite, defended the unity of the Church, promoted the communion with the Holy See, encouraged unity with diversity in the Church, and upheld the equality of churches.” In the light of the above, Sophy Rose minces no words to affirm that he was indeed “a man with divine wisdom and

pastoral prudence," qualities that are essential to constitute a genuinely Christian theology.

In *A Pillar and Guiding Light: Kuriakose Elias Chavara, a Theologian of the Church*, we have a mystic theologian, a pastoral theologian, and an ecclesial theologian merging together perfectly in the person and writings of Saint Chavara. Although his writings may not be classified as theological treatises in modern theological parlance, the rich theological content that we come across in them is so compelling to confirm that Saint Chavara was indeed a theologian of great merit. This is more appealing when we also realize that he had no precursors in theologizing in his own land or in his own Syro-Malabar Church: practically, he had to start from the scratches, based on the limited access he had to some rudimentary sources; this, however, made his theological contributions more existential, which had great practical import for the whole Church of Saint Thomas Christians, especially when her faithful had no sound but native ecclesial leadership to animate them in their life of faith. In this regard, it is also clear that the theological acumen of Saint Chavara was instrumental in transforming the life of the Saint Thomas Christians and in guiding them to affirm that theirs is an apostolic church that should be accorded its legitimate administrative autonomy to see its full-flowering in Christian faith and charity. Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara, a pioneering theologian of the Saint Thomas Christians, an ecclesial theologian of great merit, indeed continues to be a trailblazer, a 'pillar' and a 'guiding light' in effectively navigating the Church of Saint Thomas Christians towards her providential destiny.

As this pioneering study on the theological contributions of Saint Chavara is brought to the public by the Chavara Central Secretariat (Kochi), which is a joint effort of the CMI and CMC religious congregations, as the fourth volume in a series of publications under the banner of Theological Studies on Saint Chavara, it is reasonable to hope that, on the one hand further researches will be undertaken by others interested in Indian theology, and to apply the theological insights of Saint Chavara in contemporary theological discourses, on the other.

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BOOK REVIEW

Thomas Kadankavil, *Chavara: A Multidimensional Saint*, Kottayam: Deepika Book House, 2016, pages: 235.

The book under review, *Chavara: A Multidimensional Saint* is a praiseworthy one as it helps to understand the various dimensions of the saintly personality of Chavara. The book is a contribution in responding to the pastoral challenges of the family in the context of evangelization as deliberated in the third extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in 2015. Emmanuel Attel, furnishes the book with an enriching Preface that highlights the great contributions of Saint Chavara. As pointed out in the preface, the author, while developing the theme, “ventures to carve out a splendid and illustrious icon, Saint Kuriakose Elias, an ever vibrant symbol of religious life and social reformation... the entire fabric of this book is opulent with scientific presentation and accurate exposition” (p. 8), and the very vision is encapsulated in the title itself.

Let me now point out a few notable features of Kadankavil’s work. The book has two parts, and it unfolds itself in 13 chapters. The first part, *Chavara a Saintly Person*, presents nine essays that depict the biography of the saint and the author dwells on and analyzes the indelible contributions of Saint Kuriakose Chavara including his efforts to establish the first indigenous congregation. His visions of monastic and family life with relevant quotes from the saint himself make the book both inspiring and interesting. Chavara’s understanding of a good Christian family as the heaven on earth (p. 26-27), and the directives on family life (p. 29-30) are well expounded.

The author presents Chavara as a symbol of sanctity and a prototype of women empowerment activities in Kerala of his times, for it tells the story of the establishment of the first indigenous congregation for women (CMC) and the hardship the saint had to bear in its realization. The exhortations of the saint to the members of his community (p. 57-66) and the charism of the CMI Congregation are incorporated with meditative reflections (p. 66-91). The author succeeds in presenting the role of Chavara in the restoration of the liturgical worship, education of the faithful and the establishment of the Syro-Malabar Hierarchy (p. 150-157).

In the second part, *Chavara a Multidimensional Saint*, there are four entries. The first one establishes the fact that 'being for the Absolute is being for the other.' Chavara is presented as a man for others and the philosophy in reaching out to the other is delineated by underlining the primacy of love. The second entry is on the ideal life of St Chavara. Many of the qualities attributed to a prophetic leader of a religious movement is verified in St Chavara (p. 211-216). The author in the third entry highlights that the followers of Chavara in religious vocation have to become messengers of God's love and peace perfectly freed from their own selfishness. It also depicts the formation process he and his early followers have bequeathed to their posterity. The last entry sheds light on the ideal of being a creative and meaningful presence, and urges everyone to be a meaningful presence for others, for Chavara was a positive presence among the dalit community in Kerala (p. 227-235).

What is most interesting about the book is that the author with an inquisitive mind reflects on the multidimensional personality of Chavara. What attract a reader are the profound thoughts expressed in a simple language with examples, quotes from the writings of the saint, excerpts from Chronicles, terms from Indian Philosophy... etc. The author deserves appreciation for providing the building blocks for an in-depth research into the field of theological studies on St Chavara. The scientific study of the writings and exhortations of Chavara and the various dimensions of his personality require serious application of mind. The insights are relevant and beneficial in the present context, and challenge and urge everyone to live a holy life according to the call received.

A General Introduction and a Conclusion to the volume would have helped the reader to have a better understanding of the volume. An index and a bibliography at the end also would have provided better sense of the appendix. It is beyond any argument or doubt that the book draws attention to certain issues related to the life and mission of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara, which require further discussion and deeper reflection and research. Therefore, the present volume by Dr Thomas Kadankavil, a prolific writer, is a relevant and inspirational one, and I confidently recommend this book, for it is really worth engaging.

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