

Theological Studies on Saint Chavara 14

**FATHER AND DOCTOR OF
THE CHURCH**

**A Theological Reading of the
Life and Writings of
Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara**

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**Benny Thettayil CMI
Naiju Jose Kalambukattu CMI
Editors**

**Dharmaram Publications
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Editors:

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THEOLOGICAL STUDIES ON SAINT CHAVARA

Kuriakose Elias Chavara (1805-1871) – a Carmelite religious priest and professor of theology (*Malpan*), who pioneered consecrated life in the Syro-Malabar Church by founding the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI in collaboration with Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara, in 1831, the first indigenous religious congregation for men, and the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel (CMC in collaboration with Leopold Beccaro OCD in 1866) – is widely recognized for his pioneering efforts to reform the Catholic Church in Kerala and broader nineteenth-century society. His credible Christian witness, along with the leadership he offered to the St Thomas Christians, at a time when they were undergoing multiple jurisdictional crises, a spiritual and disciplined growth in the Kerala Church.

Canonised on 23 November 2014, Chavara's personal sanctity and Christian wisdom have been identified as unique. While secular society admires his contributions to uplifting those existing on the margins and who were socially ostracised through educational and social initiatives, the fundamental core of all his achievements is solidly established in his filial discipleship to Jesus Christ, whom he addressed '*ente nalla appa*' (my beloved father).

Chavara had a firm foundation in Christian faith, which is clearly visible throughout his life and is testified by those who knew him. He articulated his views and perspectives primarily based on his personal encounter with Jesus and only secondarily based on his readings and theological reflections. They are available to us through his extant writings, which are published in the four volumes

of the *Complete Works of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*. Some of these works, recognized as efforts hitherto unprecedented in Indian literature, offer us a goldmine of rich and sound theological insights. Although his access to scientific Christian literature was minimal (if not completely absent), his writings draw from the biblical as well as other Christian traditions, which he had faithfully and creatively interpreted for the enhancement of the faith of the Christian community that he had catered to throughout his life.

Theological Studies on Saint Chavara, a joint effort of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI) and Congregation of the Mother of Carmel (CMC), attempts to promote and publish the fruits of scientific investigation into the unique and varied theological insights of Chavara in the form of monographs. These theological investigations will be instrumental in appreciating and popularising the sound and solid theological contributions he made toward enhancing Catholic faith in the nineteenth century, which, in turn, indicate that he deserves titles such as 'Father of the Syro-Malabar Church' and 'Doctor of the Church.' As the publication of this series is undertaken with the blessings of the Synod of the Syro-Malabar Archiepiscopal Church, which has also benefitted from the eminent theological acumen, pastoral insights, and ecclesiastical leadership of Chavara, these studies will hopefully bring to light the multifarious theological heritage that he had bequeathed to the Church and the subsequent generations of faithful in India.

The present number in the *Theological Studies on Saint Chavara* titled, *Father and Doctor of the Church: A Theological Reading of the Life and Writings of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara* is edited by Benny Thettayil CMI and Naiju

Jose Kalambukattu CMI. It makes an investigation into the requirements that would contribute to the recognition of Kuriakose Elias Chavara either as a Father of the Church or a Doctor of the Church. The work is divided into five parts and each part delves deep with clarity into each of the aspects that is considered significant to count a saint a Father or a Doctor of the Church.

Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara's profound impact on the Church and society, his fidelity to the Church and his contribution toward the growth of the Church through spiritual leadership, educational initiatives, social reforms and the foundation of religious congregations ensured the preservation of faith among the people and flourishing of the Syro-Malabar Church and its heritage. His vision and dedication were driven by unwavering faith and his life is a testament to the power of faith in God the Father. The edited volume also explores the multifaceted person of Chavara and his mission. Taking into account the great legacy that Chavara bequeathed to the posterity, and as all the parameters followed by the Church in considering a saint as a Father of the Church or a Doctor of the Church are found fulfilled in him, the present work has a special merit of presenting Chavara worthy of being a Father of the Church or a Doctor of the Church.

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General Editor

FOREWORD

Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara's life was dedicated to the service of the Syro-Malabar Church. Under his leadership and inspiration, a good number of apostolic initiatives were undertaken: the establishment of seminaries for the education and formation of the clergy, the introduction of annual retreats, a publishing house for Catholic works, a house to care for the destitute and dying, schools for general education and programmes for the training of catechumens. He contributed to the Syro-Malabar Liturgy and spread devotion to the Holy Eucharist and the Holy Family. In particular, he dedicated himself to encouraging and counselling Christian families, convinced as he was of the fundamental role of the family in the life of society and the Church. But the unity and harmony within the Church was one of the burning concerns of this great man of faith. It was as if he had always before his mind the prayer of Jesus, on the night before His Sacrifice on the Cross: "That they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us" (Jn 17:21).

Saint Pope John Paul II who beatified Kuriakose Elias Chavara at Kottayam on 8th February 1986 said the following words about him: "Today the Church solemnly recalls with love and gratitude all his efforts to resist threats of disunity and to encourage the clergy and faithful to maintain unity with the See of Peter and the Universal Church. His success in this, as in all his many undertakings, was undoubtedly due to the intense charity and prayer which characterized his daily life, his close communion with Christ and his love for the Church as the visible Body of Christ on earth." When we look into the writings of Saint

Chavara we understand that everything stems out of the aforesaid dimensions of this holy personality.

The Book *Father and Doctor of the Church: A Theological Reading of the Life and Writings of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara* (Theological Studies on Saint Chavara 14) edited by Fr. Benny Thettayil CMI and Fr. Naiju Jose Kalambukattu CMI, published jointly by Chavara Central Secretariat and Dharmaram Publications has scholarly articles by Fr. Francis Thonippara CMI, Fr. Benny Thettayil CMI, Sr. Sophy Rose CMC, Sr. Mareena CMC and Fr. Thomas Kollamparampil CMI, opening with a note on the series by the General Editor Fr. Kalambukattu. The General Introduction powerfully states that an unbiased examination of the life and contributions of this Saint who lived in 19th Century in the State of Kerala presents a compelling case to raise him to the status of a Father and Doctor of the Church. Touching on a wide range of topics, the book reveals why Saint Chavara matters and how he engaged a world that was desolate and transformed it for the better.

Some saints are so distant from us in point of time that they are almost lost in the dim light of history, but about Chavara whose life we read in these pages lived close to our times (1805-1871). Saints are as diverse from one another “as star different from star in glory” (1 Cor 15:41) but all are identically one in their Christ-life. As Saint Paul proclaims, Chavara lived exemplifying this from moment to moment: “I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me” (Gal 2:20). The articles in this scholarly collection portray in authentic language, the goodness and truth of the Chavara’s legacy and tradition. In our world dominated by secularism where religion is treated with disdain and even cynicism,

this prodigy of saintliness exemplifies the beauty, sublimity and perennial relevance of the Catholic faith. Through Chavara's engaging theological observations, this book covers prodigious ground. Each article is a credible and forceful witness to Chavara and his cultural and transformative influence and how he was able in that moment in our cultural history to engage in authentic religious argument with people of widely divergent backgrounds, bringing all into a common moral and metaphysical frame of reference.

In Part I, *The Criteria*, Fr. Francis Thonippara CMI attempts to define who a Father of the Church is. Fathers of the Church are those who bore witness to the authentic apostolic way of interpreting the Scripture handed down to them; they articulated and transmitted the Christian doctrine. The four major characteristic features in order to be considered a Father of the Church are antiquity, doctrinal orthodoxy, personal sanctity and approval of the Church. He further states convincingly how Chavara qualifies for this status and how he satisfies the norms laid down. Here the focus is on the aptness of conferring the title Father of the Syro-Malabar Church on Chavara. The major distinguishing features - antiquity, doctrinal orthodoxy, personal sanctity and approval of the Church - have been established unambiguously in the case of our Saint. The nine norms that have been deduced are Antiquity, Holiness and Leadership, Defender of Apostolic Faith and Cause of the Church, Building up of the Church, Zeal for Souls, Proclamation of the Word of God, Writings and Mystical Experience.

In *Historical Setting of the Syro-Malabar Church and the Unique Position of Chavara*, Fr. Thonippara further reiterates

Chavara's unique and distinct qualifications to be named a Father of the Syro-Malabar Church and a Doctor of the Universal Church. An analysis of the historical trajectories of the Syro-Malabar Church under Chavara's leadership with regard to regaining autonomy, identity and unity tell us that he was indeed a "pillar of the Catholic Church". The author urges the Synod of the Syro-Malabar Church *sui iuris* to declare Saint Chavara as a Father of Syro-Malabar Church, and to make an appeal to the Holy Father to declare him a Doctor of the Universal Church. This would render the Apostolic Church more visibility and consequently contribute more to the communion consciousness of the Universal Church and affirm the *sui iuris* nature of the Apostolic Church of Saint Thomas Christians and her legacy.

In Part II, *The Antiquity*, Fr. Benny Thettayil CMI tries to clarify the term 'Father'. He dwells at length on what makes the Church Fathers. In the section dealing with the phase of rebirthing of Malabar Church, Fr. Thettayil gives a scholarly substantiation for his claim as to why he insists that Chavara has to his credit the seminal contributions which led to the autonomy and expansion of the Malabar Church. He awakened the Malabar Church from the 'Great Indian Ecclesial Slumber'. Fr. Thettayil argues that 'antiquity' need not be defined using Western parameters as it is a notion relative to the formative years of the Church.

In the article, *Chavara: Father of the Eastern Church-Biblical and Theological Perspectives*, Fr. Thettayil, justifies the claim that based on the biblical and theological perspectives Chavara can be considered a Father of the Eastern Church. The Chapter also details on the multifarious dimensions of Father and Fatherhood. He concludes this section with

the fervent hope that this luminary from the East will be celebrated with the honour that he richly deserves, and through him the Christian Churches in the East.

Fr. Thettayil, in his article, *Chavara: Antiquity in his Ecclesial Contributions*, traces the blazing path of the life and activities of St. Chavara and how this Patriarch, a faithful and Spirit-filled son of the Malabar Church left an indelible mark in the history of the Church. His seminal contribution, 'Chavarul, the Testament of a Loving Father' which transcends boundaries of time and space, invites comparison with the *Didache*. Fr. Thettayil establishes that there is no other contender in the community who deserves this title as does Chavara and requests the Synod to make the declaration as soon as it can be done. The next section presents Chavara in multifaceted splendour. His social, spiritual, intellectual engagements which heralded the good times, of which we are the beneficiaries, left a well-defined trail to reach answers to the burning issues of faith and morals in particular locales and time-frames.

In Part III, *The Thought*, Sr. Sophy Rose CMC presents her article, *Orthodoxy of Doctrine and Defence of Faith in Saint Chavara*. She lucidly illustrates the dual ideas contained in the term 'Doctor'. Doctors are not only those manifesting deep theological knowledge, they are also those who apply this for the healing of souls! The definition is both for the abstract and spiritual realms. Chavara's writings stand proof for the richness of theological insights and doctrine. The divine mysteries were revealed to him by God Almighty as a gift for his deep contemplation before the Eucharistic Lord. Filled with the Holy Spirit, wisdom and practical knowledge he evolved into a mystic and a missionary. Sr. Sophy Rose CMC establishes through

scholarly enquiry that his writings are theologically rich, doctrinally sound and orthodox in keeping with the Catholic faith. In her analysis on *Mariology in the Writings of Chavara*, *Atmanutapam* is specially dwelt upon. Where Chavara reflects on Mother Mary, the beloved of the Holy Trinity, we hear echoes of *Lumen Gentium*. Though richness of imagination pervades, the stance that he takes is biblically and traditionally sound. The article, *Ecclesiological Vision of Chavara*, anticipates the vision and insights of Vatican II. It is such a holistic vision as expounded by Cardinal Dulles in *Models of the Church*. When we peruse the writings of Chavara, they come across as rich and multilayered where the Church is an institution, a mystical communion, a sacrament, a herald and a servant. The author through her deep reading of Chavara states that the confession of Chavara that the Church is “One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic” is the basic tenet of his ecclesiological conviction.

Part IV is on *The Virtues*. Sr. Mareena CMC and Fr. Benny Thettayil in *Sanctity and Virtues in the Life of a Saints* state that holiness consists in a sustained attention paid to the heart which is the core of the personality, the well-spring of Christian conduct and the quintessence of the soul. There is a cogent relationship between virtue and holiness. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* further exemplifies this idea in CCC 1803-1805. An analysis is made of how he practised the theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity and the Cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude and how all these contributed to the life of perfect holiness. The attestations of his contemporaries bear eloquent testimony to the heroic life lived in close association with his Divine Master. This helped him preserve the baptismal grace until his last breath. The

authors through their engagement with the holiness in the life of this saint pronounce confidently that the joy in his soul was the result of holy living which enticed him further to pursue an even higher degree of holiness. They conclude with the simple statement which is relevant to all: The reward of holiness is pure joy.

In Part V, *The Title*, Fr. Thomas Kollampampil CMI in his article, *Chavara: Father of the Universal Church* explores the factors and doctrinal norms on the basis of which a Saint is declared a 'Father of the Church'. He further iterates that Chavara has been a prophetic visionary who generously spent his spiritual gifts in powerful and edifying witness for the growth of the Church. Fr. Kollampampil in the article, *Doctors of the Church and Saint Chavara*, states that the Doctors of the Church made vital contributions in the organic growth of the Church. They were catalysts of spiritual and ascetic life. In the case of the Thomas Christians of India Saint Chavara infused the Church with the power and the energy of the Holy Spirit and preserved unity in the face of ordeals and challenges.

The *General Conclusion* sums up all the arguments put forth in the earlier chapters and succinctly looks at the possibility of declaring Saint Chavara, a Father of the Church and Doctor of the Church. The papers included in this edited anthology visit all the scholarly treatises and books by and on Saint Chavara in such a way that his qualification for the requested titles has been firmly established.

Let me congratulate the Editors and the contributors of this book. The arguments put forward for the case are convincing and they make a strong theological ground for

the declaration of Chavara the Doctor of the Universal Church. This volume is part of the series published at the bidding of the Synod to bring to light some of the treasures of the Church contributed by a holy soul and meritorious personality, Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara.

On a very personal note, I consider the request made to me for a Foreword to this volume a divine commission. Recently, before the request was made, I had a miraculous healing experience through the powerful intercession of Saint Chavara. During a visit to Italy, I developed intense pain in the chest in the late hours of the night, which lasted for about an hour and a half. As I did not want to wake the family with whom I was lodging, I prayed fervently to Saint Chavara and rubbed the episcopal ring that has the relic of Saint Chavara encased in it, over the affected area. In an hour, the pain was alleviated, and I was well again. I am convinced that the healing that I received was through the intercession of Saint Chavara.

I wish and pray that those who go through the pages of this book may come out of this reading changed and further enlightened. The themes of this book explore the treasures of the Church, God, Christ, the sacraments, the great theological and spiritual traditions. Each era has had intelligent and passionate bearers of the Sacred Mystery who were granted the privilege of participating in His sublime mission. The life of Saint Chavara, as depicted in this book, is especially welcome in our times and will continue to inspire in the time to come. In a culture tempted to devalue the holy and the Divine, we see a Saint who exhausted himself embracing these timeless values. For those who think that a rejection of traditional faith is

essential for a liberated life of fulfilment, we have here, a powerful saint, who believed that humility and obedience are the keys to happiness and success. He lived it. He invites us to live it!

Bishop Sebastian Vaniyapurackal
Curia Bishop of the Syro-Malabar Church

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The holiness of the Church shows itself in a special way in the “saints” who lived their life faithfully and heroically. A saint is a mark of holiness stamped by the historical circumstances of the Church of any given place and period in which he lived and worked. Scripturally, there were scores of ways to attain the beatitudes and there was no *a priori* historical pattern to which these ways could be reduced. The attainment of beatitude depended upon the expression of the freedom of the children of God, expressed between humans themselves, or between human and God. Since freedom of the children of God defies parameters, nobody has been able to fathom the degree of sanctity nor has anybody been able to determine its shape. All that was and is possible is a *post factum* survey of those historical figures who displayed distinctive characteristics that correspond to the scriptural precepts that they lived.

The saints are a diverse group of holy men and women gone before us, but are constantly united with us in the communion of saints in prayer, and are ever interceding for us. They include apostles and evangelists; virgins and mothers; wives, husbands and fathers; children and youth; founders of religious communities; popes, bishops, priests, monks, friars and brothers; nuns and sisters; kings and queens; teachers, pastors, social workers. They represent every age of the history of the Church and every inhabited continent on earth. Ultimately, they are either a martyr for the faith or a confessor of the faith. As martyrs and confessors, they share one essential feature – they loved God and his people more than they loved themselves or as much as they loved themselves. The martyrs shed their blood for that love but the confessors did everything but the shedding of their blood in martyrdom.

The early Christians derived inspiration from the martyrs and shared the stories of these martyrs who had suffered at the hands of the Romans for their faith. They hallowed the sites where they were executed, and saved the relics of their human remains and considered them sacred. Thus developed a cult of the devotion to the martyrs.

The veneration of saints also began with the cult of the martyrs. Right from the time of the martyrdom of Stephen, the martyred disciples of Jesus and the hundreds of Christians in the subsequent years who embraced death in various ways for their faith in order to bear witness to the precious nature of what they had received – faith. Martyrs, even in the early Church, are a heroic minority. We do not have tens of thousands of Christians being martyred. That is the number of people admiring their representatives who were fortunate enough or courageous enough to be martyred. In the early Church, or in any age, for that matter, a martyr marked out a spiritual height to be admired but not necessarily be emulated. Hence, the stories of the martyrs had an incredible effect on the imagination of Christians, because heroically witnessing to their faith, they stood against a hostile power making it powerless, as Jesus himself did. There is an imaginative continuity between Jesus and the martyr who died bearing witness to him.

When the heroic age of the martyrs passed, there was an incredible efflorescence of the already existing cult of the martyrs. Their shrines were built, bits of their relics were venerated, and their liturgies were written to commemorate them. There was an incredible energy involved in worshipping God at their tombs. The mid-2nd century onwards, the word martyr was used exclusively

for those who bore testimony shedding blood. Since the 2nd century in the Eastern Church and since the 3rd in the West, the Eucharist was celebrated upon the tombs of famous martyrs and the faithful began to pray for their intercession.¹ The veneration at the alters is given to the individual because he is a justified Christian whom the Church expressly recognizes them as having arrived at the fulfilment and whom she singles out in a special way for this veneration.²

As the time of the persecutions drew to a close and Christianity became an official religion, it was an advantage rather than a risk to be a Christian. Although martyrdom had been the absolute measure of Christian perfection, in the post persecution period, it was no longer able to represent the ideal of the Christian life. Eventually, a more accessible form developed. The reference to this form of sanctity is found in the sermons of the Fathers that describe “the uncompromising and radical Christian life as an unbloody martyrdom.”³

¹ Jorg Splett, “Saints,” in K. Rahner, ed., *Encyclopaedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, London: Burns and Oates, 1975, 1496.

² Jorg Splett, “Saints,” 1496.

³ Jorg Splett, “Saints,” 1497. White martyrdom is typically defined as being persecuted for the faith, but never shedding any blood. It consists of living a life boldly for Christ, yet never being asked to die for it. *Green/blue martyrdom*, on the other hand, is more specific and focuses on self-imposed extreme penance and fasting for love for God. This type of martyrdom is usually associated with the hermits of Egypt, who influenced Irish monasticism. Following the lifestyle of the hermits, monks, in their own environments sought out places of extreme solitude and harsh weather. *Red martyrdom* refers to giving one’s physical life, shedding one’s blood, bearing witness unto death. From the point of view of Political Science, Jolyon P. Mitchell, *Martyrdom: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: University Press, 2012, provides a historical analysis to shed light on how the concept and practice of martyrdom has evolved, as well as the different ways in which it is used today.

With the passage of time, in the new accessible form of sanctity, the virgins (men and women) were ranked first. Gradually, ascetical groups of both men and women acquired a fixed institutional form. These ascetics who suffered greatly for confessing the faith without being martyred came to be called confessors, who were next in rank to the martyrs. The martyr in his death, represented the final and fatal contradiction to the world, and the confessor was a type of living contradiction to his “worldly” surroundings. This is most evident in the ascetics and hermits who fled “the world”.⁴

The ascetics pursued the practice of constantly seeking God, living solely for God’s glory, abiding in God’s glorious presence. In the desert, they learnt that true holiness began with recognizing one’s utter dependence on God’s grace and relying on his power to transform the individual. This was a continuous journey of abandonment, mortification, and purification seeking the constant spiritual regeneration and transformation. For them, holiness involved deliberate and consistent choices made in order to align thoughts, words, and actions with God’s Word, even in the most insignificant aspects of life.

For these seekers, holiness was not an optional add-on to Christian life, but was an essential response to the

⁴ Jorg Splett, “Saints,” 1497. The Desert Fathers and Mothers were the first Christian monks and nuns who lived in solitude in the deserts of Egypt, Palestine and Syria. In contrast to the formalised and official theology expounded by the Fathers of the Church, the Desert Fathers and Mothers were, in general, ordinary Christians who chose to renounce the world and live lives of celibacy, fasting, vigil, prayer and poverty in direct and simple response to the gospel. See Benedicta Ward, *The Desert Fathers: Sayings of the Early Christian Monks*, London: Penguin, 2003.

inner yearnings they felt. Guided by insightful wisdom and practical supervision, they set out on a transformative journey, embracing the radical notion that they were called to be set apart, to live differently from the world around them.

Gradually, even the flight from the world had to be qualified in relation to the world. The individualistic and radical nature of this flight had to be toned down. Even in the flight, the relation to the Church and the world had to be maintained and be expressed especially in their petitionary prayers for the community in general and in their acts of vicarious penance.⁵ Through their insightful teachings based on their experience, and relatable examples of life, the confessors in the world provided the ordinary believers with a roadmap to understand that the Christian pursuit of holiness is an ongoing process of conforming to the image of Christ and to embrace it as a lifelong journey.

The life of the hermit in the desert was understood as a battle which, in imitation of Christ (Mt 4:1-11), was carried out singlehandedly against the adversary. The same battle was also waged in the world in a different way by the bishops, princes and the founders of various orders who chose to remain in the world and continue the struggle both individually and with their confreres.⁶ Flight from the world to be away from the world and sanctification and transformation of the world living in the world became two ways of combating the sinful world. All the manners of the pursuit of holiness in the subsequent years in the history of the Church were the variation of these two basic movements and they are numerous.

⁵ Jorg Splett, "Saints," 1497.

⁶ Jorg Splett, "Saints," 1497.

The cult of the sanctified individuals who met a natural death, originated spontaneously among the members of a particular tradition in which the saint lived. The acquaintance that the members of the community had with the holiness of these individuals, lived on even after their death as the members of the society had admired not only their human virtues but also the transcendental virtues that they had practised. The grace that had worked in them made the people cherish their memories and they wanted to benefit from the saintly person even after his death. The experience of the members of the society who were convinced of the sanctity of these individuals got their conviction confirmed by the favours that they received. In respect they visited their tomb, in reverence they paid them homage, and in hope they prayed for their intercession and in many cases, in response to their prayers, they received favours from God through these saints. These favours and signs were considered to be signs of divine approbation of the acclamation by the community about the sanctity of the person.⁷

Conventionally, by the 4th century, the prehumous sanctity of life and posthumous miracles were reason enough to confirm the sanctity of the person. The thaumaturgical power confirmed their sanctity. Until the 12th century, there was neither an official involvement nor any official recognition given to the local veneration of saints from the part of the ecclesiastical authority in the universal Church. Both in the East and in the West, people were moved to the veneration of various saints by the proper sentiments, enthusiasm, and admiration of the way

⁷ C. Thunduparampil, *The Role of Miracle in the Process of Canonization*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2003, 161.

in which they practised virtues heroically. The recognition of the saint was more of a popular nature than ecclesiastical and hence, there was neither an examination of these claims nor was there any control. In fact, it is the life of the saint, as was known and judged by the people, that laid the foundation for the veneration.⁸

By and by, the reputation of the holiness of the saints and the acclamation given to them by the people, confirmed by the miracles happening at their intercession, made the local church take notice of the cult and with the concurrence of the local church, they were elevated to the honours of the altar and their mortal remains officially became relics worthy of veneration.⁹ The two-fold criteria that led saintly persons to the honours of the altar was the recognition of their sanctity by their contemporaries and the confirmation of that recognition by God through the miraculous favours granted through their intercession. Both these have, in turn, to be recognized by the local church introducing them to the universal Church by the declaration of their feast by enrolling them in the Catalogue of the Saints by means of canonization. Since the 13th century, the twofold criterion was expanded to include one more element, namely, the practice of virtues – both theological and cardinal – in a heroic manner.¹⁰

In both these streams of pursuit of holiness, i.e., red and white martyrdom, saints contributed immensely to the

⁸ Thunduparampil, *The Role of Miracle in the Process of Canonization*, 159ff.

⁹ See Agostino Amore, "La Canonizzazione vescovile," in *Antonianum* 52 (1977), 231.

¹⁰ Thunduparampil, *The Role of Miracle in the Process of Canonization*, 145.

life of the Church. According to K. Rahner, from this point of view the great saints are the “creators of new styles of Christianity”.¹¹ Illustrious and saintly men and women of the past point out new possibilities to the Church, new ways of answering the demands of the world, new ways of responding to God’s call with total dedication in a certain place and time. The holy founders of the various orders and religious congregations responded to their times in creatively new styles with the help of the communities they established. This is also true of great and holy individual figures who operated on an individual level. In a wider perspective, as God’s salvific arms extend universally, saintly individuals can also inspire the Church even though they do not belong to it, as the Spirit also gives his gifts and graces and “strengthens many even to the shedding of their blood” (LG 15). In this scheme, to extend the scope a little further, time might judge a few saints like Luther and Zwingli in the Protestant tradition and recognize a few saintly heretics like Arius, prophetic dissidents like Jerome Savonarola or farsighted philosophers like Kierkegaard! A reunification of the various churches will usher in an array of saints who kept inspiring those churches for centuries.

Postmodernist idea of Deconstructionism has already begun to challenge the way the Church used to consider and interpret the meaning of the heroic practice of virtues. This concept identifies a central meaning and a marginalized meaning of a work, then changes the positions of those meanings, and thus shows that the marginalized meaning could just as easily become the central meaning. In this way, meaning is shown to be unstable. This can

¹¹ Jorg Splett, “Saints,” 1497.

easily occur by the passage of time. In the process of canonization of saints in the Church, the marginalization of the idea of the “great”, “heroic” or “noble” and the recognition of a sanctity without glamour, but all the more deeply moving and inspiring, is but one of the examples. The Church has learned to disregard the seeming pettiness of the externals, and to find beneath it a new, but less spectacular, everyday form of dedication and sanctity. The clearest example of this is the case of the “Little Flower”.¹²

It is this postmodernist idea of Deconstructionism that played a role in John Paul’s record sprint to sainthood, caused by the popular demand during his funeral Mass in 2005. Responding to the calls, Benedict XVI waived the typical five-year waiting period before a saintly investigation could begin, and allowed the process to start just weeks after his death. Similarly, Mother Teresa privately experienced doubts and struggle in her religious beliefs which lasted nearly 50 years, until the end of her life. She had expressed grave doubts about the existence of God and pain over her lack of faith. Perhaps a century ago, neither could one think of expediting a cause nor would a cause be forwarded if there was a shadow of doubt regarding the candidate’s state in connection to the first of the theological virtues – faith.

What is seen in the following pages is an ecclesio-theological reading of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara in the light of his life and contributions, and an attempt, in the light of various criteria for declaring a Saint Father of the Church or Doctor of the Church, to delve deep into the life, person, mission and contributions of Chavara to make a

¹² Jorg Splett, “Saints,” 1498.

reflection on the *antiquity* of his works and contributions; on the *orthodoxy* in his theological reflections and spirituality; on his *sanctity* by means of a scrutiny of the heroic practice of virtues; and the approval of his sanctity by the Church.

The presentation of the work is made in five parts – each part making an investigation into one of the requirements that would contribute to the recognition of Chavara either as the Father of the Church or the Doctor of the Church. Reflecting on the criteria for consideration, in *part one*, Francis Thonippara CMI makes a general study of the criteria for declaring a saint “Father of the Church”. He continues his reflection on Chavara considering him also the Doctor of the Universal Church. Finally, he establishes the eligibility of Chavara for the title “Father of the Church”. In *part two*, Benny Thettayil CMI studies the antiquity of the life and teachings of Chavara. He begins with a perusal of Chavara as a Father of the Eastern Church from the biblical perspectives. He also elucidates the antiquity in his life and ecclesial contributions. In *part three*, Sophy Rose CMC dwells on the orthodoxy in the theological reflections and spirituality of Chavara. She makes a detailed study of the theological vision, Mariological reflections and ecclesiological views of Chavara. In *part four*, Mareena CMC and Benny Thettayil CMI make a scrutiny of the sanctity of Chavara in his practice of the theological virtues, cardinal virtues, and the practice of evangelical counsels that defined his sanctity. In the *fifth and final part*, Thomas Kollampampil CMI examines the ecclesiastical approval of the sanctity of Chavara. In the light of the entire array of the Doctors of the Church and the Fathers of the Church, he makes a theological assessment of Chavara, his life and works.

In the light of the ecclesiastical precedence of making a postmodernist deconstruction in the case of some of the saints in the past, when Chavara is considered in the backdrop of the 19th century Kerala Church of the St Thomas Christians, his life and contributions loom large in the Indian ecclesiastical horizon. Anyone who makes an unbiased cursory glance at his life and contributions cannot but consider him both a Father and Doctor of the Church.

PART ONE

THE CRITERIA

*A monastery should be a miniature heaven,
where God's will is perfectly done.*

- Chavara

The Fathers of the Church are traditionally described as the orthodox writers of the early Church after the period of the Apostles. The Church came to regard these figures as the exponents of divine truth in the age when the Church was taking shape. Their interpretations of the scripture and the early creeds were decisively influential for all later theology, and today, no theological investigation is considered complete without a perusal of the patristics.

St Kuriakose Elias Chavara lived in a crucial period of the history of the St Thomas Christian Church and made significant contributions to guide the destinies of the Church in various ways. His sanctity of life and the orthodoxy of the doctrine have been approved by the universal Church as he was raised to the honours of the altar when he was declared a saint. In the light of the factors mentioned above, when we compare Chavara with the Fathers of the Church or the Doctors of Church, we wonder, if he could be considered worthy of one of these or either of these the titles.

The early Church leaders can be divided into several groups on the basis of the period they lived: The Apostolic Fathers, the Apologists, the Polemicists, and the Scientific Theologians or the Nicene and Post Nicene leaders. Historically, the development of the concept resulted in the formulations that one finds in the manuals and dictionaries of the modern era. Here is, for example, the definition proposed by E. Amman. According to him, by Fathers of the Church one means “a group of ecclesial personages belonging to the past and whose authority is

decisive on matters of doctrine.” According to Amman, four elements or “traits” allow specifying the definition:

- the orthodoxy of doctrine (not necessarily on all points, but at least on essential points);
- holiness of life; and
- the approval of the Church;
- antiquity (the traditional time-frame being the closing of the patristic era in the middle of the 7th century for the West and in the middle of the 8th century for the East.¹

The study of the life and works of the progenitors of a tradition that we make is not just a sentimental journey to the sources nor an exercise in antiquarianism. It is based on the realization that our faith and our life as a Church are rooted in our collective memory. It is by reflecting on our history as a people and on the torch bearers who have gone before us that we discover the divine presence that prodded us on throughout.

The literature produced by Chavara has given rise to several studies that allow us to know his thoughts better.

¹ Émile Amman, “Pères de l’Église,” in *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* [*Dictionary of Catholic theology*] 12, (Paris: Letouzey & Ané, 1933), 1192. However, there is an exception of applying the expression to a later author such as Bernard of Clairvaux who is described as “the last of the Fathers” because of the great proximity of his exegesis to patristic exegesis). In the past, more restrictive definitions were used which sought to limit the list to the Fathers. Gradually, the definition has widened as scholars of patristics, the study of the Church Fathers, have stretched their scope.

These studies shed light on them from the historical situations in which the literature was produced. More studies are being made in order to understand their meaning in a more exact way, to clarify their importance within the whole of the various kinds of writings that Chavara has bequeathed to us. At this juncture we rejoice in the fact that the aforesaid studies have provided us with a profound understanding of his spiritual acumen and in these recent years, they have been considerably expanded by various individuals.

In the light of all these, we establish that Chavara meets all the criteria followed by the Church in considering a saint as the Father of the Church or Doctor of the Church.

CHAVARA AS THE FATHER OF THE SYRO-MALABAR CHURCH: CRITERIA FOR DECLARATION

Francis Thonippara CMI

1. Introduction

In the following discussion, we focus on the criteria for declaring a saint as 'Father of the Church' in the Syro-Malabar Church *sui juris* (SMC) and exploring the possibility of conferring the title 'Father of the Syro-Malabar Church' on Chavara.

In this part, 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'.

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

Today, the Catholic Church is blessed with many Fathers of the Church and 38 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'. 'Early Church Father' is a title that gradually came to be applied to certain Christian leaders distinguished by antiquity, holiness, orthodoxy, and ecclesiastical approval.

In understanding the title 'Fathers of the Church', a note is provided by Saint Clement of Alexandria: "Words are the progeny of the soul; hence we call those that instructed us 'fathers'."¹ Since the principal teacher of any

¹ *Stromateis* 1.1.2-2.1; see also Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.41.2.

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" (1 Cor 4:15). However, since many of the important early Christian teachers were laymen (e.g., Saint Justin), deacons (e.g., Saint Ephrem), and priests (e.g., Saint Jerome), it became customary from the fourth century to reckon these eminent teachers among 'the Fathers'.² 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 'Fathers of the Church' came 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.³ These writers played a crucial role in articulating and transmitting the

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

³ J. Chapman, "Fathers of the Church," in *The Catholic Encyclopaedia*, Vol. VI, New York: Gilmary Society, 1913, [1-18], 1.

Christian doctrine and bringing them to more mature expressions, at least in their most fundamental features. While the Church's understanding of revelation will 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 (i.e., 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), Saint John Damascene in the Greek Church (+749), is roughly co-terminus with the period of the first six great Ecumenical Councils 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.⁴

In short, the Church looks for four major characteristic features in the life and works of an early Church leader who made his contributions to defend, expound, and develop Christian doctrines, in order to be considered a 'Father of the Church'. These are antiquity, doctrinal orthodoxy, personal sanctity, and approval of the Church.⁵

3. Basic Categories of the Fathers in the Early Church

The early Church Fathers fall into three basic categories: Apostolic Church 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

⁴ Crehan, "Fathers of the Church," 288.

⁵ J. Quasten, *Patrology*, Vol. I, Westminster: Christian Classics, 1984, 10.

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. 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 this era spent their time defending the Christian faith against false doctrines that were in vogue. In several of these defences, we have the beginnings of the doctrine 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 in this era were engaged more in developing methods of defending the Gospel and less in transmitting the same in its true and pure form.

4. Outstanding Features of the Fathers/Doctors of the Church⁶

The foundations of Christian theology are the Scripture and the Tradition. The Tradition is rooted in the activities of the Apostles and ancient Christian teachers, who set up models of exegesis, theologizing, and pastoral guidelines

⁶ 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.

for the future generations as well as for their own communities. In this respect, the ancient Christian writers in general, and the Fathers of the Church in particular stand as foundation and models for posterity.

4.1. 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' (see 1 Cor 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).⁷

4.1.1. Love of the Scripture and the Tradition

The Fathers of the Church represent the true interrelationship between the Scripture and the Tradition.⁸ 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.

4.1.2. 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. This transformation was something initiated by the divine

⁷ Congregation for Catholic Education, *Instruction on the Study of the Fathers*, 9.

⁸ Congregation for Catholic Education, *Instruction on the Study of the Fathers*, 9.

power, 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.⁹

4.1.3. Masters and Promoters of Dogmatic Development

The Fathers of the Church, while defending the truth against various heresies, formulated and established the basic dogmatic teachings of the Church. From these basic teachings, the Church began to make her dogmatic progress.¹⁰ 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.

4.1.4. Sense of Mystery and Experience of the Divine

The sense of the Mystery and awareness of the Divine Economy among the Fathers 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.¹¹

⁹ Congregation for Catholic Education, *Instruction on the Study of the Fathers*, 10.

¹⁰ Congregation for Catholic Education, *Instruction on the Study of the Fathers*, 9.

¹¹ Congregation for Catholic Education, *Instruction on the Study of the Fathers*, 10-11.

4.1.5. 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.¹² At the same time, they defended orthodoxy and promoted orthopraxis, which, in their understanding, 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 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.

5. Criteria and Norms to Declare Someone a Father of the Church

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, holiness, orthodoxy, and ecclesiastical approval) does not reflect any previously approved norms

¹² Congregation for Catholic Education, *Instruction on the Study of the Fathers*, 9.

but evolved through what had happened in the history of the Church and in 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 norms based on which one is canonically recognised 'Father of the Church' are based on the holiness and doctrinal orthodoxy of the person.

6. Conclusion

In the light of all these developments as we enquire the criteria for declaring one as the Father of the Syro-Malabar Church, we deduce the following conclusions as norms:

1. Just as the Universal Church considers only those persons during the formative period of the early Church as Fathers, the SMC also can consider those persons of crucial importance throughout its *formative period* in modern times (*Antiquity*).
2. Only a canonized saint who took rather an out standing leadership in the spiritual, pastoral, and doctrinal realms in the SMC could be declared a Father of the Church (*Holiness and Leadership*).
3. The one who had the firm belief in the apostolicity of the SMC and showed much enthusiasm to take substantial efforts to protect the faith, received from Saint Thomas, the Apostle, even amidst oppositions

and difficulties, and to safeguard the unity of the Church. However, he should have shown the courage to fight for the lawful rights of the SMC (*Defender of Apostolic Faith*).

4. He should be a person who stood for the cause of the SMC, which are the unity of the SMC, communion of Churches, and faithfulness and obedience to the Holy See (*Cause of the Church*).
5. A Father of the SMC should be a person who has contributed uniquely, substantially and farsightedly for the building up of the Church and the renewal of the people at large (*Building up of the Church*).
6. He should have the zeal for the salvation of souls and the readiness to make sacrifices for the sake of Christ and the Church (*Zeal for Souls*).
7. He should have taken radical steps for the proclamation of the Word of God relevant to the people at all times (*Proclamation of the Word of God*).
8. He should be capable of disseminating faithfully what he had received, learned, and practised to the later generations through his authentic writings (*Writings*).
9. He should have a sense of the Divine Mystery which led him to lead a life of holiness, cultivating an attitude of piety, asceticism, humble and deep faith, as well as assiduous prayer and contemplation (*Mystical Experience*).

HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE SYRO-MALABAR CHURCH AND THE UNIQUE POSITION OF CHAVARA

Francis Thonippara CMI

1. Introduction

Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara of the Holy Family is a great saint of the Apostolic Church of the Saint Thomas Christians of the Syro-Malabar Church. Members of the Syro-Malabar Church preserve their Catholic faith despite the historical vicissitudes of the two thousand years. They retained and further developed communion with the Roman Pontiff and had to pay a big price to prove the orthodoxy of their faith and communion. Chavara was a great champion of the unity of the community and Roman communion. By the canonisation of this great son of the Syro-Malabar Church on 23 November 2014, the Universal Church officially recognised his sanctity. However, his contributions to the Syro-Malabar Church in general as its second founder and his theological contributions in particular are yet to be recognised both by the Syro-Malabar Church *sui juris* and by the Universal Church, which may be duly rectified by declaring him as a Father of the Syro-Malabar Church *sui juris* and Doctor of the Universal Church. The present work is an attempt to highlight these two possibilities in the case of Chavara. As the title indicates, the presentation will have two parts, namely, focussing on Chavara as a Father of the Syro-Malabar Church and then, as a Doctor of the Universal Church, with a clear focus on laying down certain criteria for both.

2. Historical Setting of the Syro-Malabar Church

For a better understanding of our discussion on the procedures to declare Chavara a Father of the Syro-Malabar Church (SMC) or a Doctor of the Universal Church, it is good to have a clear perception of the history of the Saint Thomas Christians from which the saint hails. SMC is an ancient apostolic Church founded by Apostle Thomas and is the largest Oriental Catholic Church next to the Ukrainian Church, numbering around five million members. It is the most vibrant Church in the Catholic communion blessed with innumerable religious and priestly vocations and many members of this ecclesial community are at the service of the Universal Church, transcending the ritual boundaries. SMC is a Church *sui juris* with Major Archiepiscopal status and, in 2017, recognising its missionary potential the all-India jurisdiction was restored to this Church. However, due to certain historical vicissitudes the Church could not produce many theological genius, till Chavara who lived in the nineteenth century, may be with an exception of Mar Joseph Cariattil who lived in the second part of the eighteenth century.

Hence, the possibility of declaring a member of the SMC as a Father of the Syro-Malabar Church and a Doctor of the Universal Church should be contemplated, explored, and analysed in the wider context of the tradition of the Universal Church and the adaptation of the same could be made in the context of the unique historical trajectories of the SMC. In order to enumerate the norms for declaring a member of the SMC as a Father of the Church or a Doctor of the Universal Church, we need a clearer understanding of the SMC, which may be facilitated by exploring the history of the Saint Thomas Christians in four periods of its development.

2.1. Apostolic and Post-Apostolic Period

The time limit of this period is between the first and fourth century from which we do not have many written documents regarding the history and ecclesial life of this ancient Christian community. However, the oral tradition of the apostolic origin, which is a living tradition and which is handed over from generation to generation, is associated with places, families, customs, and celebrations.

2.2. The Persian and Chaldean Period

This period spans between the fourth and the sixteenth centuries and the Church was ruled by bishops from Persia and the effective temporal administration of the Church was in the hands of Archdeacon chosen from among 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 rather peaceful ecclesial existence.

2.3. Latin or Western Period

Latin or Western period comprises of years between 1498 and 1896, precisely from 1599 with the Synod of Udayamperur. With the arrival of the Latin missionaries from Europe, the Indian Christians came in contact with the Western Latin Christians. In the beginning, the relationship was cordial. However, conflicts emerged due to the high-handed interferences of the European missionaries in the day-to-day affairs of the Indian Church. The identity, individuality, and autonomy of the Apostolic Church of India had been jeopardized by the consequences of the Synod of Udayamperur in 1599 and the subsequent

Coonan Cross Oath in 1653, which led to the division in the Church. The saga of efforts and struggles for protecting and living the apostolic and liturgical heritage, protest against the high-handedness of the missionaries, efforts to obtain Syrian bishops, efforts of Mar Joseph Cariattil and Fr. Thomas Paremmakkel for the reunion of Churches and to regain autonomy and identity of the Syrian Christians are prominent developments during this period. During the last phase of this period, under the able leadership of Chavara as the Vicar General of the community, gave a new life to the Apostolic Church by introducing all-round reform in the Church and by founding two indigenous religious congregations, one for men and the other for women. Members of the men congregation played a pivotal role in creating in the Community a new consciousness of the need for native leadership and regaining the lost identity and autonomy of the Community.

2.4. Syro-Malabar Period

The two Vicariates, Trichur and Kottayam, were erected by the Holy See in 1887 exclusively for the Syrian Christians, but administered by the Latin bishops. This jurisdictional arrangement was altered by the subsequent establishment of Trichur, Ernakulam, and Changanacherry Vicariates in 1896 and the administration was fully entrusted with the native bishops. Furthermore, in 1923, the Syro-Malabar hierarchy was re-established in view of regaining the identity and autonomy of Thomas Christians of India. Meanwhile, the life of the Church was revitalized by the foundations of various religious congregations, both for men and women. This led to the missionary expansion of the SMC outside Malabar where several Syro-Malabar centres and dioceses were established. The life of the

Church during this period was marked by enhanced liturgical renewal, pastoral apostolates, educational services, seminary education, theological developments, social ministries, etc. In December 1992, the SMC was raised to Major Archiepiscopal status with the Synodal structure and other canonical provisions. Taking the national and international migration of the Syro-Malabarians into consideration, pastoral care arrangements were extended to them resulting in the consequent establishment of Syro-Malabar dioceses within India and abroad. After long waiting and continuous requests, the All-India Jurisdiction was restored with the historic letter of Pope Francis on 9 October 2017 to the Indian Catholic bishops and with the establishment of the Eparchy of Shamshabad on 10 October 2017.

3. Unique Position of Chavara in the History of the SMC

At this juncture, we need to consider the appointment of a native clergy as Vicar General in 1861 exclusively for the Catholic Thomas Christians, which was the most crucial turning point in the evolution of the ecclesial identity of the SMC. This appointment was in the context of the Roccas Schism, which practically caused the loss of unity of the community and majority of the members of the SMC followed Mar Roccas, presuming that he was sent with the proper approval of the Pope. Chavara, through his charismatic leadership, could regain the lost unity of the community. This leadership of Chavara created among the members of the community a new sense of identity and a new phase of life. It is in this context that the seminal contributions of Chavara, the first Vicar General of the SMC, in view of regaining autonomy, identity, and overall unity of the Syrian Christians become vital. Reviewing the further

major developments in the nineteenth century in the context of the Malabar Church, Chavara's rudimentary pastoral, ecumenical, and administrative steps are considered the foundations of the future SMC, which continues to evolve. It is by taking these critical, significant, and creative ecclesial developments into consideration that we identify the nineteenth century as the formative period of the SMC as we have it today, with the Synodal structure and the Major Archiepiscopal status. Thus, there is a strong ground for recognising Chavara as a Father of the SMC and his unique leadership in the theological, pastoral, ecumenical, and spiritual realms may pave the way for declaring him a Doctor of the Universal Church.

Following points make Chavara a unique personality in the history of the Syro-Malabar Church and basing on these points we argue that Chavara is the Second founder of the Syro-Malabar Church and thus worthy to be declared him a Father of the Syro-Malabar Church and Doctor of the Universal Church. The Syro-Malabar Church of our discussion period was practically under the Varapuzha jurisdiction of the Propaganda missionary system and the Carmelites were the Vicars Apostolic and missionaries.

In order to consider Chavara the second founder of the Syro-Malabar Church, one should understand the unique role of Chavara in the establishment of the Mannanam monastery in 1831. One of the intentions of Chavara during the celebration of his first Holy Qurbana in 1829 was the earnest prayer for the realisation of monastic life among the Saint Thomas Christians.¹ The establishment

¹ *Positio super Introductione Cause et super Virtutibus ex Officio Concinnata*, Vatican, 1977, 401, n. 40.

of the monasteries reawakened the identity consciousness of the Syro-Malabar Community and the members of the CMI Congregation took the leadership in preparing the people to demand native bishops. One could with full certainty assert that the actual re-founding of the Syro-Malabar Church took place with the establishment of the monasteries under the charismatic leadership of Chavara.

Experiencing the urgent need of enlightened priests in the SMC, the founding fathers of the monastery at Mannanam opened a seminary at Mannanam in 1833 even before an organized community life was begun. Later on, seminaries were started at Vazhakulam in 1866, at Elthuruth in 1868 and at Pulinkunnu in 1872. Thus, monasteries became centres of learning and spirituality.

In the caste-ridden society of Kerala no proper attention was given to the mission work among the low castes till the nineteenth century. The Syrian Christians in general were not very much for undertaking mission work among the low castes, Dalits, etc. The catechumenate at Mannanam established in 1853 was a breakthrough for the missionary apostolate of the Syro-Malabar Church among the low castes. Even before establishing a monastery in Chethipuzha, efforts have been made to accommodate the new converts in the same premises.² There were catechumenates attached to the monasteries and through them the dormant missionary zeal of the Syro-Malabarians found new life and the rays of this enkindled missionary zeal is found among the members of the Syro-Malabar Church even today as we come across them all over the world as missionaries.

² Bernard, *CMI Sabha Adhya Dashakangalil*, 1908, Reprint 1989, Kochi: P.G. House, 181.

Chavara understood the importance of education in transforming the society and he was aware of the negative impact of the lack of English education for the members of the SMC. He had great desire for establishing a university college for promoting English education. He could be satisfied for the time being with the establishment of a Sanskrit school in 1846 at Mannanam. He sent circulars to all the parish priests to establish schools attached to the churches and thereby popularised education.

To deepen the knowledge of the faithful in the Sacred Scriptures and to spread the devotional literature, it was decided to start a printing press in Mannanam. The establishment of the printing press at Mannanam in 1846 and the publication of books and pious literature really helped the spiritual renewal of the Syro-Malabar Community. The first book printed in Mannanam was *Jnanapeeyusham*, which was a basic catechism text book for the Syro-Malabar Community.

The canonical foundation of the CMI Congregation in 1855 and the foundation of the first convent at Koonammavu for women in 1866 (CMC) by Chavara assisted by Fr Leopold Beccaro OCD had been landmarks in the history of the Christian religion in India.

Chavara was aware of the importance of the reunion of all the churches of St Thomas tradition as is clear from one of the letters he had written to the Prefect of the Propaganda Congregation in 1859. Here he suggested to separate the Syro-Malabar Catholics from Propaganda jurisdiction of Varapuzha Vicariate. One of the reasons he alluded to, was that it would facilitate the reunion of the

separated communities.³ The CMI fathers after sixty-two years took the lead in bringing back a section of Jacobites into the Catholic Church and finally in 1930 they reunited with the Catholic Church under the leadership of Mar Ivanios and thus the Syro-Malankara Hierarchy was established in 1932. Here it is worth quoting the popular saying among the St Thomas Christians: "If the Congregation (CMI) had been started two centuries earlier, the division of the Community into *Pazhayakoottukar* and *Puthenkoottukar* would not have taken place as a result of the Coonan Cross Oath of 1653."

Chavara himself had started a charitable organization in 1869 with the cooperation of the people of Chennankary parish at Kainakary and developed an institute called *Upavishala* (House of Charity) for the service of the poor, destitute and old people⁴.

The arrival of the Chaldean bishop Roccas in 1861 divided the Syro-Malabar Community and a good number of churches followed bishop Roccas believing that he was sent by the proper ecclesiastical authorities. The Vicar Apostolic of Varapuzha understood the unique influence and undisputed leadership of Chavara on the Christian Community and he was made the Vicar General to fight against Roccas and to bring unity in the Church. Chavara succeeded in his mission and in appreciation of his great achievement, there was a move even to make him the bishop of the Syro-Malabar Community, which remained a dream.

³ Bernard, *CMI Sabha Adhya Dashakangalil*, 22.

⁴ *175 Years, 1831-2006, Carmelites of Mary Immaculate*, Kakkanad: Chavara Hills, 2007, 24.

The aim of the founding fathers of the CMI Congregation was the spiritual renewal and the reawakening of the spiritually and socially dormant Syro-Malabar Church. For this purpose from the very foundation of the Mannanam monastery, the CMI fathers visited the parishes and preached the Word of God on Sundays and days of obligation and explained to the faithful the basic Christian doctrines and clarified their doubts. Bishop Ludvic Martin, the Vicar Apostolic of Varapuzha, appointed Chavara and the priests from the Mannanam monastery as retreat preachers both in the Syriac and Latin parishes. As the Vicar General, Chavara took keen interest in visiting the parishes and instructed to establish catechism school attached to each parish. Parishes were divided and put under different districts and a member of the CMI Congregation was responsible for each district.

Chavarul, Testament of a Loving Father, was written by Chavara in 1868 and it was addressed to the parishioners of Chennankari and its content is relevant to all the families. It is a *magna carta* of the theology of family life and it lays a solid and sound foundation to the family life of the children of God and for the renewal of families and the upbringing of the children. It offers a programme for the renewal and sustenance of Christian families. This Testament is relevant even in contemporary societies.

It is worth mentioning the titles given to Chavara by different authorities. "*Innu Malayalathinte Kodi Veenu*" (the flag staff of Kerala has fallen today). With these introductory words the prominent preacher of Kerala, Fr Mathai Kappil began the funeral oration of Chavara. In the CMC Chronicle at Koonammavu St Chavara is described as the "pillar of the Catholic Church". In the same Chronicle again we read,

“St Chavara as light and mirror”. In the words of Bishop Marcellin, Chavara is a “flower that blossomed at Mannanam”. Elthuruth monastery Chronicle describes Chavara as *Jnanadeepam*, beacon light of wisdom. Fr Leopold Beccaro OCD, the confessor of Chavara writes the following on the day of the death of Chavara: “O! Holy and beautiful Soul! Pray for me”. One biographer describes him as the “unordained bishop of the Syriac Christians.” Fr Kuriakose Eliswa Porukkara, the successor of Chavara depicts him as the “Ark of Noha of the Syro-Malabar Church”. The main reasons for these qualifications are the great work done by him to send back bishop Roccas and the resulting unity in the Church.

Mar Kuriakose Kunnacherry, the former Archbishop of Kottayam, compared Chavara to Saint Benedict and Mannanam to Monte Cassino, and affirmed Chavara as the pioneer of Indian monasticism and Mannanam monastery as the first Indian Christian monastery. On the occasion of the national thanksgiving ceremony held at Kakkanad, on November 29, 2014, Major Archbishop George Cardinal Alencherry said: “Saint Chavara played a unique role in the process of the restoration of the Syro-Malabar Hierarchy and the constitution of the Major Archiepiscopal Church. In this historical evolution Chavara is the last link.”⁵ Joseph Kallarangatt, an ecclesiologist and bishop of Pala, concludes his evaluation of the contributions of Chavara in the following words: “Saint Chavara, a holy, ascetic and scholar, is a great gift to the Syro-Malabar Church. He gave the leadership to the Church at a time when the Syro-

⁵ *Footprints of Holiness, Souvenir of the Canonization of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara & St Euphrasia Eluvathingal (23 November 2014)*, Kakkanad: CMI Prior General House & Thaikattukara: Mount Carmel Generalate, 2015, 16-17.

Malabar Church was undergoing a crisis and it was a critical period in its history. Chavara was a great bible scholar, linguist and an expert in liturgical matters. He was the first one to codify the breviary of the Syro-Malabar Church. Let us wish and pray that this great scholar and saintly religious may be declared a Doctor of the Church in the immediate future.”⁶

4. Conclusion

In the light of all these developments, as we enquire the criteria for declaring a member of the SMC as a Father of the Church, we may deduce the following conclusions as norms. Surprisingly, I never come across either in the Latin Code of Canons or in the Oriental Code any reference to the norms of declaring one a Father of the Church. In the *Pastor Bonus* of Pope John Paul II of 1988, Article 73 states: “The Congregation (for the Causes of Saints) is also competent to examine what is necessary for the granting of the title of Doctor to Saints, after having received the recommendation of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith concerning outstanding teaching.” In the Apostolic Constitution of Pope Francis *Praedicate Evangelium*, which replaces *Pastor Bonus* in Dicastery for the Causes of Saints Article 102 we read: “The Dicastery is also competent to make a determination regarding the granting of the title *Doctor of the Church* to a given saint, after having received the *votum* of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith concerning his or her outstanding teaching.”

⁶ Joseph Kallarangatt, “Ella Mekhalakalilekkum Kathipadarnna Atmeeya Tejassu,” (Mal.), in *Footprints of Holiness, Souvenir of the Canonization of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara & St Euphrasia Eluvathingal (23 November 2014)*, Kakkanad: CMI Prior General House & Thaikkattukara: Mount Carmel Generalate, 2015, 95-96.

In the *Particular Laws* of the SMC there are provisions for conferring honorary titles to the deserving candidates of the members of the SMC like *Vaidikaratnam* (for the priests who have rendered meritorious services in pastoral ministry), *Malpan* (for those priests who have made remarkable contributions in the field of sacred theology, ecclesiology, history, etc.), and Syro-Malabar *Sabhatharam* (for the laity who have done dedicated service and outstanding ministry for the Church).⁷ There is, however, no mention of someone declaring a Father of the Church or Doctor of the Church. It is the privilege and duty of the Synod of the SMC to exercise its real power as a Church *sui juris* with Synodal structure to declare Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara as a Father of SMC. Since Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara had contributed uniquely to the re-founding of the Syro-Malabar Church *sui juris*, there is every reason to appeal to the Holy Father to declare him a Doctor of the Universal Church.

KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA, A FATHER OF THE SYRO-MALABAR CHURCH

Francis Thonippara CMI

1. Introduction

The focus of this study is the life and activities of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara, a faithful and Spirit-filled son of the SMC, and to explore the possibilities of conferring on him the title 'Father of the Syro-Malabar Church *sui juris*' in the light of the criteria and outstanding features described in the previous entries. The whole analysis is divided into two parts. In the first part, the profile of Chavara and his socio-cultural and ecclesial background are explored. The second part constitutes the core of the analysis underlining his ecclesiastical, spiritual, and socio-cultural contributions. His insightful teachings and services enabled the SMC not only to keep up her own apostolic faith and traditions, but also to renew her life in accordance with the signs of the times. An overview of the profile of Saint Chavara is very pertinent since the saint was a strong pillar who spearheaded the formative period of the SMC in the nineteenth century, a crucial time in the quest to regain her identity and autonomy, while keeping intact the unity of the Church Universal.

2. Profile of Kuriakose Elias Chavara of the Holy Family

Kuriakose Elias was born on 10 February 1805 in the Chavara family at Kainakary. At the age of 13, he joined the Seminary at Pallipuram. During his seminary life, he lost his parents and his only brother, leaving him the sole

stem of his family lineage.¹ Although he was forced to leave the seminary in order to care for the family for a short period of time, he made arrangements for the maintenance of the family and resumed his priestly studies.

2.1. Chavara: A Servant of the Church

Kuriakose Elias Chavara was ordained a priest by Bishop Maurelius Stabilini at Arthunkal on 29 November 1829. Along with Malpan Thomas Palackal and Father Thomas Porukara, Chavara was involved in the establishment of a religious community for men at Mannanam on 11 May 1831. After the death of Malpan Palackal and Malpan Thomas Porukara in 1841 and 1846, respectively, Saint Chavara was the only survivor responsible for the canonical erection of the religious community at Mannanam on 8 December 1855. The life and activities of the members of this religious community under the leadership of Saint Chavara, providing pastorally oriented services revitalized the Church and society in Malabar, which, in turn, enhanced the regaining of her identity and autonomy in the formative period of the Syrian Christians in the nineteenth century. Apart from the monastery at Mannanam, seven more monasteries² were established (1857-1870) during the time of Saint Chavara in different parts of Malabar as requested by the parish priests and people of those areas.³

¹ Kuriakose Elias Porukara, *Karmalitha Nishpaduka Munnam Sabha-karude Adisthanakaranum Onnamathe Priorumaya Chavara Kuriakose Malpanate Charitram* (Life of Chavara), *Stapaka Pithâkkanmar* Mannanam, 1905, 31.

² Koonammavu, Elthuruth, Plassanal, Vazhakulam, Pulincunnu, Ampazhakkadu, and Mutholy.

³ A. Mathias Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2008, 110-126.

The arrival of a Persian bishop named Thomas Roccas from Bagdad created much confusion and turbulence in the Church. To tackle this situation, on 8 June 1861, Archbishop Bernadine Baccinelli, the then Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly, appointed Chavara Vicar General of the Syrians.⁴ In his capacity as the Vicar General, Chavara maintained not only the unity within the Malabar Church, but also had proper accord with the Vicar Apostolic and with the Holy See.

The foundation of the Third Order of Carmelites Discalced (TOCD), the first indigenous religious congregation for women in Kerala, at Koonammavu in 1866 by Saint Chavara, with the help of Fr Leopold Beccaro OCD, was another milestone in the history of the Malabar Church.⁵

On 3 January 1871, after a dynamic and fruitful life of 65 years, Chavara was called back for his heavenly reward. After completing the due canonical processes, on 23 November 2014, the Universal Church recognized the sanctity of Kuriakose Elias Chavara through his canonization in Rome by Pope Francis. In order to have a better understanding of the contributions of Chavara towards the spiritual and material rejuvenation of the Malabar Church, an overview of the state of the society and the Church in Kerala in his days is inevitable.

2.2. Socio-Cultural and Ecclesial Background of Chavara

In the nineteenth century, the Thomas Christians were living in a caste-ridden society of Kerala, which was not based on the principles of social freedom and equality.

⁴ *Positio*, 216f.; Mundadan, *Chavara*, 206.

⁵ Chavara Kuriakose Elias, *Complete Works of Chavara (CWC)*, Vol. I: *Nalagamam*, Ernakulam, 1981, 126; English translation (1990), *Chronicle*, 194; see also Mundadan, *Chavara*, 281.

Untouchability, social marginalization of women, economic inequality, and illiteracy deeply affected the social and religious life of the Kerala society.⁶ It is in this context the social reforms initiated by Saint Chavara stand as insightful and impactful with a prophetic resonance in the Malabar society.

Though the Church in Malabar was very proud of her apostolic origins, in her existence for nineteen centuries, she had made no significant progress in establishing her individuality. Saint Chavara enumerated the reasons for the same: (1) The unfortunate status of the local 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.⁷ (2) The lack of consecrated men and women who practised religious virtues and the absence of monasteries and convents caused the omission of immense good. (3) Spiritual blindness and lack of committed personnel to impart education by means of sowing the seeds of wisdom and nurturing the saplings of virtue through the glow of education, as a result of which the Church produced no canonized saints like some other Churches that received faith much later.⁸ With this critical state of the Church in mind, Saint Chavara prayed, practised mortification, worked extensively, and laboured day and night very zealously for her spiritual and temporal welfare.

3. Chavara: A Strong Pillar of the Malabar Church

Although a man of the nineteenth century, a great prophet, Saint Chavara had awakened not only that era but also the

⁶ Navya Maria, *Empowered Womanhood*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2014, 89-156.

⁷ CWC, Vol. I, *Chronicle* (1990), 146.

⁸ CWC, Vol. I, *Chronicle* (1990), 146.

twentieth century. Certainly, he continues to enliven the twenty-first century. Throughout his life, he laboured zealously for the spiritual and temporal welfare of the Church. Since all his apostolic services had the endorsement of his mystical experience, they still remain relevant to the Church and the society.⁹

3.1. A Man of God and a Mystic

Ecclesiastical history has recorded the fact that only those men and women who led a life encircled by the Divine Spirit could make remarkable and lasting contributions to the Church and society. The mystical experience of Chavara stems from his personal and unique vision of God and the humankind. For him, God is a loving father; he himself is a son of this loving Father and the fellow beings are his siblings. *Dhyanasallapangal*, one of his literary works, stands out to be the most expressive channel of his God-experience and contemplative dimension. In the work, he continuously addresses God and Jesus as *appa* (father), *enteappa* (my father), which has the endearing and intimate meaning of 'father' reserved exclusively to the children. Consequently, the Saint acclaimed with a gentle heart: "my heart, however, tells me to call you by no other name than my Father (*enteappan*)."¹⁰

⁹ The well-known Kerala historian, M.G.S. Narayanan, in his article "Navôthâna Pathayil Munpe Nadanna Nâyakan" (*A Renaissance Leader Who Walked before Time*) in *Chavarayachan*, John Mannarathara, ed., Kozhikode: Mathrubhoomi Books, 2014, 16-20, regrets that he did not make an elaborate study on Chavara's person and contributions. He writes that the life and achievements of Father Chavara cannot be restricted to the Catholic Church. They are relevant to all communities and to all times. It can be said that Chavara was a great personality born before the times.

¹⁰ CWC, Vol. III, *Colloquies*, 5.

The inner joy and serenity that Chavara experienced from this *abba* experience enabled him to spend long hours in the divine presence of the Eucharist without any inter-ruption.¹¹ However, his God-experience did not keep him away from his fellow beings; rather, it made him listen to their cries, see their sufferings and understand their hardships.¹² The longer the time he spent in mystical union with God, the greater was his dedication in selfless service to uplift the flock of the Father. His works were natural expressions and extensions of his intimate God-experience and lived-mysticism. Mystical experience is a mark of a person who is close to God in sanctity. It is worth noting that all the Fathers of the Church both in the East and the West were men of God although not all of them were mystics.

3.2. A Zealous Pastor and a Servant Leader

The life of Chavara, who started his pastoral life as an ordinary parish priest, made extraordinary achievements for the Church by means of his dynamic activities. He dedicated his life for the faith formation of the people of God. He fostered their faith, assured its protection, and served the people and brought about their spiritual revival. He was convinced that as an anointed priest, his primary concern was to be involved in the ministry of the Word of God. He initiated or reformed several aspects of the ecclesial life of his time. Some of them are the formation of the clergy, opening of catechumenates for the newly converted, foundation of religious communities for men and women, liturgical reforms,¹³ starting of schools for

¹¹ *Positio*, 541.

¹² Mundadan, *Chavara*, 252.

¹³ Thomas Kochumuttom, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bombay: St Pauls, 2014, 239-248.

public education of all sorts of people irrespective of caste and creed,¹⁴ development of print media,¹⁵ and charity home¹⁶ for the destitute. As a zealous pastor, he focused on the building up of the Church as well as the social, cultural, and economic development of the society based on the Gospel values.¹⁷ A detailed note on some of such efforts will disclose the love and dedication of Saint Chavara to the Church in Malabar.

3.2.1. A Preacher of the Word of God

Chavara was convinced that his fundamental mission, as a pastor, was the proclamation of the Word of God. He intensified the practice of sharing the Word of God on Sundays by means of sermons, which was initially started by Porukara.¹⁸ He organized retreats in parishes as a common feature in Kerala, which could not only reinvigorate their faith life but also facilitate settlement of many family disputes and quarrels between neighbours. This resulted in the conversion and renewal of life.¹⁹ Impressed by the effective proclamation of the Word of God preached by Saint Chavara and his confreres, and seeing the fruit that they bore, the Vicar Apostolic appointed the religious priests at Mannanam the formal preachers of the Word of God in his Vicariate.²⁰

¹⁴ Kochumuttom, *Chavara*, 249-250.

¹⁵ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 346-354.

¹⁶ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 161.

¹⁷ The letter that Archbishop Baccinelli wrote to Rome recommending the consecration of Chavara as the bishop co-adjutor attests to the pastoral zeal of Chavara that made the Archbishop to propose him as his successor. See Mundadan, *Chavara*, 229.

¹⁸ Joseph Kanjiramattathil, *The Pastoral Vision of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1986, 51.

¹⁹ Kanjiramattathil, *Pastoral Vision*, 52.

²⁰ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 119.

Chavara was a great preacher of the Word of God. He meditated over it, interiorized it so as to live and articulate its message powerfully for the common good of the faithful. As the Word was his food and drink, life and consolation, his preaching and writings were inspiringly saturated with the Word of God.

3.2.2. Seminary Formation and the Renewal of the Clergy

Chavara had received spiritual and intellectual discipline and directives for an effective pastoral life from Malpan Palackal. Based on his personal experience, he was aware of the importance and implications of an adequate seminary formation. He realised that “an uneducated priest was not only inefficient to do anything worthwhile in his pastoral work, but may be even detrimental to the salvation of souls.”²¹ He insisted that wisdom coupled with sanctity was inevitable for a fruitful priestly life. He knew that if priests were empowered by means of a suitable training and formation, they would contribute immensely towards the growth and spiritual uplift of the people of God.²²

The pioneering members of the monastery at Mannanam had established a seminary attached to the monastery in 1833.²³ Later, since the seminary at Mannanam was insufficient to cater to the needs of the Church, Saint Chavara, with the permission of the Vicar Apostolic, established seminaries attached to the monasteries at Vazhakulam (1866) and Elthuruth (1869).²⁴ It is notable that

²¹ Leopold Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Kuriakose Elias Chavara, Mannanam: Saint Joseph's Monastery*, 2003, 6; *Ciriaco Elia Chavara, Postulator*, Roma, 1974, 10.

²² Kanjiramattathil, *Pastoral Vision*, 38.

²³ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 68-76.

²⁴ Valerian Plathottam, *Vannya Divyasree Chavara Kuriakose Elisachan, Mannanam*, 1936, 87.

those priests who had their education in these seminaries were the ones who co-operated with Saint Chavara to confront the schisms. He reformed the ecclesiastical education according to the need of the hour.²⁵ It is a historical fact that at a time when the Malabar Church had no effective native leadership or headquarters of its own, the monastery at Mannanam and Saint Chavara stepped in to fill this ecclesial vacuum.

Hand in hand with the reformation of ecclesiastical education, the renewal of the clergy was also a pressing need of the time. Their on-going formation was ensured by him with special retreats preached for them. In addition, he made spiritual books and other literature available to them. Annual enlightenment retreats for the priests were organized at Mannanam every year.²⁶ In special cases, the bishop sent his priests to the monastery to make their retreats.

Chavara was hailed as the ambassador of reconciliation between the bishop and the priests and between priests and the people of God.²⁷ His life and example were instrumental for many vocations to monastic priesthood and the foundation of many a formation centre. In short, as priests are obliged to relentlessly strive to seek the good will and salvation of others, Saint Chavara considered their personal salvation and growth in virtue as his primary concern.

3.2.3. Founder of Indigenous Religious Congregations

Chavara often lamented the barren status of the Church in India, which despite its antiquity and apostolic connection,

²⁵ Kanjiramattathil, *Pastoral Vision*, 38-39.

²⁶ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 343-345.

²⁷ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 463.

had not produced even a single saint, whereas lands that received faith much later have produced them in great numbers.²⁸ Moreover, he was aware of the fact that “many a good thing was not done owing to the want of a religious house.”²⁹ It was in order to fill this spiritual vacuum that Chavara longed for a special arrangement in which individuals could withdraw from the society and lead a life that would nurture holiness. This dream of Chavara which he shared with two of his mentors, who had cherished similar dreams,³⁰ resulted in no less than three religious congregations – one for men and two for women.

3.2.3.1. Religious Congregation for Men

Despite the fact that Indian Church historians find several references to the existence of monastic life in India³¹ and among Saint Thomas Christians,³² the founding fathers of the indigenous religious congregation for men (CMI) had no extant monastic or religious models to build on;³³ they had to begin from the scratch. The initiatives for founding a religious congregation came from Fathers Palackal and Porukara.³⁴ They were mostly responsible for obtaining the necessary permission³⁵ and laying the foundation for the

²⁸ CWC, Vol. III, *Adhyatmika Kruthikal* (1981), 173f.; English translation (1990), 146.

²⁹ CWC, Vol. III, *Adhyatmika Kruthikal* (1981), 1; English translation (1990), 1.

³⁰ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 109. He notes that “these two were the first to have the inspiration and start work on the foundation.”

³¹ A.M. Mundadan, *History and Beyond*, Aluva, 1997, 157ff. See also *History of Christianity in India*, Vol. I (revised edition), Bangalore, 2001, 187ff.

³² Mundadan, *History and Beyond*, 158-161.

³³ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 67.

³⁴ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 75.

³⁵ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 77.

first religious house for men at Mannanam in 1831.³⁶ Regarding the event of the foundation of the religious house, Saint Chavara noted: "It was these two fathers who laboured most for this endeavour. But this writer, Chavara Kuriakose, who had decided to live according to the will of this Malpan... offered the first mass with the bishop after his ordination at Arthunkal for the fulfilment of this work."³⁷

Chavara's role in the formal establishment of the new religious community became prominent after the death of Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara in 1841 and 1846, respectively.³⁸ As the leader of the community, Chavara made several requests to the Vicar Apostolic for the canonical approbation of the community. Finally, the Primitive Rule of the Carmelite Order was given to the community with some changes made to suit the life in the land.³⁹ With this ecclesiastical recognition of the first indigenous religious community in place, on 8 December 1855, Chavara, the leading member of the community, made his first religious profession before Father Marcelline Berardi, the Delegate of the Vicar Apostolic, and the newly founded religious community was named "Servants of Mary Immaculate of Mount Carmel."⁴⁰ On the same day, the remaining members of the community made their profession before Chavara, as he was made the superior of the community and was called Prior and he continued in that office until his death in 1871.⁴¹

³⁶ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 67.

³⁷ CWC, Vol. I, *Chronicles*, 26.

³⁸ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 112-113.

³⁹ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 103.

⁴⁰ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 102, note 44.

⁴¹ CWC, Vol. I, *Chronicles*, 57, 77-78.

3.2.3.2. Religious Congregation for Women

With the religious community for men established and having relished the positive influence this community had on the Church and the society in Kerala, Chavara began to harbour thoughts about the possibility of a similar arrangement for women who might desire to live a life of consecrated commitment.⁴² However, a few attempts at such a venture did not have any lasting effect⁴³ and the attempts of Baccinelli himself seemed to have failed.⁴⁴ Meanwhile, on a certain occasion, Father Leopold Beccaro OCD, who was the spiritual director of Chavara, brought up the question regarding the possibility of a few women coming together to lead a life of prayer. Since the idea was a pleasant coincidence, Chavara whole-heartedly declared his support to the proposal. Leopold presented the matter to Archbishop Baccinelli, the Vicar Apostolic, and sought his permission for such a venture.⁴⁵

The episcopal permission having been granted, they turned to the practicalities. Owing to the scarcity of funds, they built a temporary bamboo shack in a small plot of land at Koonammavu, and sisters began to live there from 13 February 1866 onwards.⁴⁶ Kuriakose Porukara, the successor of Chavara as the Prior General and his first

⁴² Mundadan, *Chavara*, 281 indicates the possibility that the request that was placed before Archbishop Baccinelli included a vision for religious life both for men and women.

⁴³ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 343.

⁴⁴ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 283, 289-290.

⁴⁵ *Positio*, 558; P. Koyipallil, *A Short Biography of Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara of the Holy Family: The First Prior General of Our Congregation* (Malayalam manuscript AMSJ), 1929, 57.

⁴⁶ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 67; see also Kanjiramattathil, *Pastoral Vision*, 66-73.

biographer, testifies: "As there was no opportunity in this region for women to dedicate their virginity to God and to live in prayer, he (Chavara) wished them also to this happiness. Therefore, with the Provincial (Leopold) and others, trusting in God, received some women who were prepared to live this kind of life and accommodated them in a temporary house."⁴⁷ Eventually, thanks to the hard and tireless efforts of Chavara and Leopold, a permanent and proper house was built for the women to live in and to pursue their life of consecration.⁴⁸

The purpose of the foundation of the religious community for women was the empowerment and wellbeing of women of the area in general as well as the spiritual realization of its members. This was a time when women were largely denied even the basic rights of education, property, and proper clothing. They had no role in decision making in the family, the Church, and the society.⁴⁹ In this context, the founding of a religious congregation for women was certainly a step towards the empowerment of women through education and various other welfare activities that helped to raise the status of women.⁵⁰

3.2.4. Liturgical Renewal and Faith Formation

Chavara realized that a real renewal of the Malabar Church is possible only based on the Word of God and the Liturgy.

⁴⁷ Kuriakose Eliseus Porukara, *Stapaka Pithâkkanmar*, Mannanam, 1905

⁴⁸ CWC, Vol. III: *Adhyatmika Kruthikal* (1981), 138; English translation (1990), 115f.

⁴⁹ CWC, Vol. I, 84-85; Navya Maria, *Empowered Womanhood*, 145-146.

⁵⁰ Joseph Pathrapankal, "An Iconoclast in His Own Right," in *The Life and Legacy of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, John Mannarathara, ed., New Delhi: Viva Books, 2015, 241.

He learnt Syriac and Latin, the liturgical languages, with great zeal and enthusiasm. Ordering the rubrics of the Holy Qurbana, the codification of the Divine Office for the clergy, introduction of several para-liturgical practices such as Eucharistic adoration, way of the cross, rosary devotion, novenas to the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph, etc., brought about a revival in the spiritual life of the ordinary faithful of the Malabar Church.

3.2.4.1. The *Tukasa*

Chavara prepared the *Tukasa*, the 'Order of the Mass' to ensure the celebration of the Eucharist with devotion, attention, and order.⁵¹ He prepared and got it printed in 1868.⁵² It was a remarkable work, which was used by the Church for almost a century as the only means to bring about uniformity in the rubrics of the liturgical celebration.

3.2.4.2. Divine Office for Priests

The compilation of the Divine Office recited by priests was another notable service of Chavara. The prayers that were in use were gathered from four different sources, namely, *Hudra*, *Kaskol*, *Gaza*, and *Kala* and it was not easy to recite it in an orderly and uniform manner. The priests were inclined almost to ignore its use. Chavara took up the challenge of preparing a handy Divine Office.⁵³ Later, when he became the Vicar General, he revised it and sent it to Rome for approval, printed it, and made it available for the use of the priests.

⁵¹ Kanjiramattathil, *Pastoral Vision*, 56.

⁵² *Positio*, 308; Mundadan, *Chavara*, 267-268.

⁵³ Porukara, *Stapaka Pithâkkanmar*, 30; Podipara, *Nammude Ritu (Our Rite)*, Mannanam: Saint Joseph's Press, 1943, 132f.; Kanjiramattathil, *Pastoral Vision*, 57.

3.2.4.3. Divine Office for Sisters

Chavara was conscientious also in compiling the Divine Office for the use the sisters at Koonammavu. The Chronicle of the Convent at Koonammavu records that he compiled it in his own hand, marked it with different colours of ink to make them understand the order in which it was to be recited and gave them practice accordingly.⁵⁴

3.2.4.4. The Holy Saturday Service

Since there was no special liturgical service on Holy Saturday in the Syrian rite, he translated the Holy Saturday service of the Latin liturgy into Syriac for the use in Syrian churches. In this regard he wrote to Cardinal Simeon, the head of the Propaganda Congregation, in 1864: "Our churches remain closed on that day like the Jewish Synagogues. So, I request you to approve it for us and send it back as early as possible."⁵⁵

3.2.4.5. Forty-Hour Adoration

Chavara's love for liturgy emerged from his personal love and profound faith in the Eucharistic presence. He aspired intently that all should know the merciful love of Jesus present in the Holy Eucharist and that all should love him. As a great devotee and an apostle of the Holy Eucharist, with the permission of the Vicar Apostolic, he introduced the practice of Forty-Hour Adoration in various monasteries. It was initiated at Koonammavu in 1866.⁵⁶ Soon it became very popular in the Malabar Church as a powerful source of spiritual nourishment.

⁵⁴ CWC, Vol. IV, *Letters*, 22.

⁵⁵ CWC, Vol. IV, 1990, 11; 1982, 22f.; Mundadan, *Chavara*, 277.

⁵⁶ *Positio*, 282ff.; Mundadan, *Chavara*, 278.

3.2.4.6. Devotional Practices for Spiritual Revival

Popular devotions played a significant role in the spiritual revival of the Malabar Church. In order to revitalize the ecclesial life of the faithful, he adapted several popular devotions in the model of the ones found in the Latin tradition. He translated these devotions both from Latin and Tamil into Malayalam. The Way of the Cross, Eucharistic adoration, the rosary devotion, devotion to the Carmelite scapular, devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph are some of the devotions that he promoted.

3.2.5. Revolutionary Educationist

With the arrival of the CMS, LMS, and Basel missionaries in the nineteenth century, English education became popular in Kerala.⁵⁷ However, Catholics were not allowed to learn English language as the Catholic missionaries feared that study of that language would be an occasion for the Protestant ideas to infiltrate among the Catholics.⁵⁸ Chavara would not let this prohibition to shut the door of literacy before his people.⁵⁹ He would set in motion a process of literary formation of the people beginning with the foundation of a Sanskrit school at Mannanam in 1846; he introduced innovative educational methods like establishing schools attached to all the parishes in his

⁵⁷ V. Nagam Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol. 2, Trivandrum: Asian Educational Service, 1989, 474; *LMS Report, The Report of the Directors to the Members of the Missionary Society*. London: 1823, 70.

⁵⁸ K. S. Mathew, "Introduction," in *Indian Constitution, Education and Minorities in Kerala*, eds. K. S. Mathew and T. K. Sebastian, 1-29, Tellicherry: Institute for Research in Social Science and Humanities, 2009, 9.

⁵⁹ J. Kanjiramattathil, *Pastoral Vision*, 2, 83.

jurisdiction, which appealed to the general public and revolutionized the educational scenario of Kerala and, eventually, led to the spread of literacy in the state.

3.2.5.1. Education to the Deprived Classes

Chavara was born and lived in an era when education to the lower classes remained a far cry.⁶⁰ Chavara's social vision evinced that the integral development of a society can be brought about only by means of a common outlook on life by all members of the society. It was with this aim that he gave an impetus to the education of the deprived classes, which included even the untouchables.⁶¹ A school established solely for the Dalits, in 1865, at Arpukara,⁶² an area where the upper and lower classes could not be brought together, is an example of this kind of a venture of Chavara.⁶³

3.2.5.2. Mid-Day Meal to Promote Education

The Dalits and the untouchables were so bound to the basic exigencies of life that they could never dream of an education. Even if they did, most of them could not afford it on their own.⁶⁴ It is for such willing, but deprived children

⁶⁰ K.S. Padma, *Study on the Status and Role of Women in the Public Life of Kerala from 1850-1956*. PhD Dissertation, Thiruvananthapuram: University of Kerala, 2002, 34.

⁶¹ K.C. Chacko, *Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Mannanam, 1959, 72.

⁶² Mundadan, *Chavara*, 257; John Paul, ed., *Idaya Natakangal (Ecologues: Shepherd Plays) by Chavara Kuriakose Elias*, Thrissur: Kerala Sahithya Academy, 2014, 133.

⁶³ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 256; V. Plathottam, *Malankara Sabha Mathavinte Oru Veera Santhanam*, 37.

⁶⁴ H. Wingram, *A Commentary on Malabar Laws and Customs*, Madras: Higginbotham and Co., 1900, 100.

that Chavara came up with a scheme of mid-day meal. The children from a deprived background who were willing to come to school, were not only encouraged with education free of charge, but also were given mid-day meal as a perk.⁶⁵

3.2.5.3. The Sanskrit School

In the days of Chavara, the prospect of teaching the untouchables was unthinkable.⁶⁶ However, Chavara who would not leave any stone unturned when it came to the question of the common good of the society, would tactically find a way out. He established a Sanskrit school at Mannanam where children from all social classes were taught.⁶⁷ He appointed a *savarna* to teach Sanskrit that the teacher would act as a shock absorber between the two classes of the society.⁶⁸

3.2.5.4. The *Pallikkoodam*

As an ecclesiastical leader, Chavara opened the door of education to his people. However, his universal outlook on the extended ecclesial ministry to others impelled him to open the opportunity to the deprived classes too.⁶⁹ As a viable tool available to him to implement his educational scheme, he roped in all the parish churches and made them

⁶⁵ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 259.

⁶⁶ Mateer Samuel, *Land of Charity: A Descriptive Account of Travancore and its People*, New Delhi: Asian Educational Service, 1991 (Reprint), 29; V. Parappuram, *The Chronicles of the Monastery at Koonammaavu*, ASJM, Mannanam, 1474.

⁶⁷ Plathottam, *Malankara Sabha Mathavinte Veera Santhanam*, 137.

⁶⁸ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 256; *Alochanapusthakam* (Book of Consultation in the Monastery at Mannanam), 1864-1871, ASJM, Mannanam, 94-95, 26-27, 159.

⁶⁹ Kochumuttom, *Chavara*, 250.

forums of education where all could pursue their education.⁷⁰

3.2.5.5. The Publications

With the assistance of a carpenter, Chavara prepared and installed a hand-made printing press at Mannanam. The modest proliferation of the materials in print that came out of the rudimentary printing device (1846) that Chavara established, and eventually developed into a full-fledged printing press. This press brought in a publication revolution in the life of those people who would otherwise have neither opportunity nor resources to have access to such literary facilities.⁷¹ Home-made reading materials presented to them at an affordable cost gave this populace an opportunity to come in contact with letters.⁷² Moreover, those partially privileged ones, even among Christians, who were deprived of literature found a literary solace in the prayer books and other catechetical publications that Chavara eventually brought out from the press at Mannanam.

3.2.6. Social Apostolate

The Church can never be looked at as a monad that is detached from the world or apart from the society that the Church subsists in. It is in this perspective that the contributions that Chavara made to the society have to be taken into account. He considered his social life an integral part of his religious life. Hence, he said: "The days in which

⁷⁰ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 257. Mundadan also refers to the controversy regarding the origin of the idea and the circular enjoining the parish priests to establish a school adjacent to the churches.

⁷¹ Kanjiramattathil, *Pastoral Vision*, 86-87.

⁷² Mundadan, *Chavara*, 353.

you have not done a service to someone else will not be counted among the days of your life.”⁷³ There are many more pieces of advice of this kind that Chavara gave his confreres and parishioners. His concern for the elderly and terminally ill from among the poor and the deprived groups was materialized in the *Upavisala* at Kainakari (1869) and the Confraternity of Saint Joseph for Good Death at Kainakari (1869).⁷⁴

3.2.6.1. Social Implications of *The Testament of a Loving Father*

The testament that Chavara wrote to the parishioners of his home-parish is a code of conduct for the family, which, among other instructions, in a special way emphasized the need of an orderly upbringing of the children.⁷⁵ The testament and the instructions positively influenced the society both directly and indirectly:⁷⁶ directly, by means of the dissemination of the instructions among the Catholics throughout Kerala enhanced by the two wings of the Carmelites – men and women – that he co-founded; indirectly, the reflexive benefit that the society had through the social intercourse among the Christian children and their fellow students in the schools and neighbourhood emerged slowly, but certainly made significant advancement.

3.2.6.2. Empowerment of Women

The social action that Chavara set in motion was so comprehensive and ground-breaking for his time that it

⁷³ CWC, Vol. IV : *The Letters*, IX/6, “Kudumbachattom,” No. 13.

⁷⁴ CWC, Vol. IV: *The Letters*, IX/7.

⁷⁵ CWC, Vol. IV: *The Letters*, X/6, “Rules for a Family,” Nos. 10, 22.

⁷⁶ Kanjiramattathil, *Pastoral Vision*, 76-79.

touched all possible aspects of social life. Life of women in Kerala in the nineteenth century was far from a dignified one and education was far from realised.⁷⁷ This was the case both with the women who were *savarnas* and *avarnas*.⁷⁸ The tentacles of gender discrimination remained biased: all women of all religious allegiances were denied the basic rights and were deprived of the opportunities to become independent in any way.⁷⁹ Chavara addressed this dehuman-izing issue in two ways: Firstly, he empowered the women of the religious congregation that he founded in such a way that, in turn, as agents of change, they would, by means of various skill development programmes,⁸⁰ empower their fellow women in the society. Secondly, the convents that he established would have centres (*educandat*)⁸¹ for girl children to live and pursue their studies unhindered by the social pressure of whatever tag they bore.

3.2.7. In the Service of the Malabar Church

Chavara had the profound conviction that the Church was built on the precepts of the Apostles and the ensuing apostolic origin of the Malabar Church. Referring to the historical origin of monasteries and convents in Kerala, Chavara wrote: “This Malabar which had received the faith

⁷⁷ K. P. Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala*, 4 Vols. (Reprint), New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1982, 294.

⁷⁸ L. E. Sahanam, *The Contributions of LMS Missionaries in the Field of Education in South Travancore: A Historical Enquiry*, Bangalore: United Theological College, 1976, 24.

⁷⁹ K. K. N. Kurup and E. Ismail, *Emergence of Islam in Kerala in 20th Century*, New Delhi: Standard Publishers, 2008, 52.

⁸⁰ CWC, Vol. IV: *The Letters*, VII/6 (language) and CKC, Vol. I, 11-12 (fine skills in handicrafts).

⁸¹ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 308.

from Saint Thomas, the Apostle, confesses the true faith from ancient times.” Chavara continued: “We, the Nazarenes, are Christians of ancient origin...”⁸² The zeal with which he advanced to keep the Church from Roccas and to protect it from the possible division makes him an avid defender of the Church. He was very proud of the antiquity of his faith and tradition.

3.2.7.1. Promoter of Indigenous Ecclesial Leadership

Although the Malabar Church was an apostolic Church, at the time of Chavara, it was under the jurisdiction of foreign prelates and the desire for a native leadership was acute among the faithful. After the appointment of Chavara as the Vicar General, the efforts for a native bishop gathered momentum. Enumerating the benefits of such an arrangement, especially for the sake of the stability of the Church, Chavara appealed to the Holy See to appoint native bishops in the Malabar Church.

Chavara wrote to Cardinal Alexander Bernaba, the head of the Propaganda Fide: “We are Mar Thoma Christians who have received our faith from Saint Thomas. For the past many years we had no bishop of our own. But those who have received their faith in very recent times have a bishop of their own. Provoked by such envious thoughts when they get an opportunity they will go to Babel, saying ‘Let us resort to Babel for getting a bishop of our own rite.’ Hence, Your Eminence, I am placing before you a suggestion... It is good to have two bishops here: one for the Latin Church, and the other for the Syrian Church.”⁸³

⁸² CWC, Vol. IV, *Letters*, 1990, 14.

⁸³ CWC, Vol. IV, *Letters*, 1990, 14.

3.2.7.2. Chavara, the Vicar General

On 8 June 1861, Monsignor Bernardine Baccinelli, the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly, appointed Chavara the Vicar General of the Malabar Church.⁸⁴ It was a recognition that Baccinelli gave Chavara for the leadership that he was giving already to the faithful. Ever since the canonical inception of the religious community at Mannanam, he was leading it as its Prior.⁸⁵ The human qualities that he displayed at the parish church at Lalam,⁸⁶ the polite but stern manner in which he received Denha, a Chaldean priest at Mannanam,⁸⁷ and the prudence that he exhibited in refusing to kiss the ring of Roccas, an unauthorized Bishop from Babylon,⁸⁸ would have sent signals to the Vicar Apostolic that there was no leader in Malabar more fit to lead the Church than Chavara.

The appointment of Chavara was the result of the urgent resolve of Baccinelli “for the spiritual progress of the faithful and to fight the schism more effectively.”⁸⁹ What is note-worthy is the reason for the appointment: “On account of the difficulties, which we feel for a long time, in the administration of the churches under our jurisdiction, and on account of our advanced age, and ... ill health, and above all, since I do not find the desired spiritual fruits either among the priests or among the laity ... hereby I nominate you vicar general ... of the Syro-Malabar Church under our jurisdiction.”⁹⁰ The personal credentials of

⁸⁴ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 206; 224-229.

⁸⁵ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 148ff.

⁸⁶ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 155.

⁸⁷ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 155.

⁸⁸ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 155.

⁸⁹ Kanjiramattathil, *Pastoral Vision*, 96.

⁹⁰ *Positio*, 216; Mundadan, *Chavara*, 206.

Chavara for this un-pre-cedented consideration are enumerated by Baccinelli: "I am convinced that you have the fortitude, ability and the virtue necessary to carry out this office."⁹¹

3.2.7.3. Church Administration

The credit for the great uplift that Malabar witnessed in the nineteenth century is mainly to be attributed to the zeal of Monsignor Baccinelli and Chavara, his Vicar General, who was granted "the authority and privileges, which the common law acknowledges," and granted him "all those privileges, which I am entitled to impart in accordance with my patent letters ... by which you will be able to administer the spiritual matters to the priests and laity included in the Syro-Malabar Church under my jurisdiction and thus to govern the churches."⁹² The administrative ability of Chavara was evident in the reforms that he had brought about. "It is worthy to mention that at this time, the whole of the Syrian Church was divided, by the Vicar General, into four districts, each being entrusted to one of the Fathers of the Congregation. These Fathers were known, so to say, as the 'plenipotentiaries' or 'deputies' of the Vicar Apostolic, each in his district. They had special charge over the clergy and the laity; they supervised school work, conducted catechetical institutions, settled naughty disputes and quarrels and transacted other works of importance. Thus, the members of the congregation, directed by Father Cyriac Elias (Chavara), visited, from the beginning, all the Churches of Malabar, preached retreats and missions, corrected abuses, and even discharged

⁹¹ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 206.

⁹² Mundadan, *Chavara*, 206.

parochial work, when the peculiar circumstances of a parish required it."⁹³

3.2.7.4. Financial Security of the Vicariate

There was a time when the Vicariate was facing a serious financial crisis.⁹⁴ To tide over it, the members of the community at Mannanam suggested to the Prior that the problem could be solved by pooling one tenth of the income of each church into the common fund. However, the Vicar Apostolic brought it down to five per cent.⁹⁵ Accordingly, Chavara prepared a decree, which directed each parish to deliver, together with the annual statement of the accounts, five per cent of the total income of the parish to the episcopal curia. The Vicar Apostolic signed this decree, got it printed at Mannanam and sent it to all the churches.⁹⁶

In the same line, Chavara introduced the collection of *pidiyari*⁹⁷ and *kettuthengu*.⁹⁸ He asked all the families that were able to afford it, to set apart a handful of rice as they began to cook for the day and set apart the produce of a coconut palm for the upkeep of the Church. Though simple in its execution, this practice became very popular in the course of time in the whole of the Malabar Church and, to a great extent, the dioceses met some of its expenses from this contribution from the faithful.

⁹³ P.Podipara, ed., *The Carmelite Congregation of Malabar 1831-1931*, Mannanam, 1932, 58-59; Mundadan, *Chavara*, 312, 313.

⁹⁴ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 246.

⁹⁵ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 247.

⁹⁶ CWC, Vol. III, *Chronicles*, 44ff.

⁹⁷ V. Parappuram, *Chronicle 1902-1905* (History of the Roccisian Schism, Malayalam, Vols. 1-2).

⁹⁸ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 250.

3.2.7.5. Catechumenates

The spread of the Kingdom of God depends upon the growth of the Church and those who are willing to embrace it must be prepared adequately to receive the faith. However, the only school for the training of the catechumens was attached to the headquarters of the Vicar Apostolic. Considering the significant number of those who wanted to receive faith, in 1864, a catechumenate was opened at Mannanam, attached to the Monastery.⁹⁹ The expenses incurred for the daily running of the catechumenate were sourced from the above-mentioned contributions of the faithful that Chavara had organized. This facilitated the conversion of the Dalits and the marginalized in the society.¹⁰⁰ Eventually, almost all the monasteries of the Congregation imitated the mother-house in opening catechumenates attached to them.¹⁰¹ In these, many adults and infants were cared for, instructed, and baptized every year. The effect of the ecclesial vision of Chavara, the Vicar General, was so far-reaching that between 1866 and 1931, more than 2,000 people were baptized in these catechumenates.¹⁰²

3.2.7.6. Defender of the Unity of the Church

In the absence of a native leadership, some of the Malabarians, dissatisfied with the Carmelite Vicars Apostolic, turned to Chaldea in the hope for a Chaldean bishop. In response, the Chaldean Patriarch Audo sent

⁹⁹ Podipara, *Carmelite Congregation of Malabar*, 56.

¹⁰⁰ CWC, Vol. III, *Chronicles*, 30.

¹⁰¹ Podipara, *Carmelite Congregation of Malabar*, 57.

¹⁰² M.M. Palakunnel, *Chronicle* (Malayalam), ed., P.J. Sebastian, Changanassery, 1971, 114.

Roccas Thomas, a Chaldean bishop, as visitor. The Church in general, assuming that he was sent with official authority, gave him a warm welcome. Out of the 154 parish churches, 86 of them completely and 30 partially followed the Chaldean bishop.¹⁰³

When Bishop Roccas began to exercise his episcopal powers, he was asked to produce his authorization letter. When he failed to do so, and when the situation was getting out of control on account of the following that he commanded, the Vicar Apostolic, who was convinced of Chavara's fortitude, prudence, and virtues, appointed him the Vicar General. His timely intervention saved the Church from a deep division and thereby kept the communion with the Holy See intact. The unity of the Church was always Chavara's primary concern. In his circular to the members of the parish churches warning them against Roccas, he wrote: "I tell you all this, my dear brethren, being desirous of your eternal salvation and lest you fall into the schism and incur the excommunication of the Pope and suffer the loss of your soul."¹⁰⁴ Having overcome the crisis and Roccas having left for Bagdad, it was Chavara who led most of those who had followed Roccas back into Catholic communion.

This section on the leadership role of Chavara in the ecclesiastical plain can be concluded with a note on the proposal that Archbishop Baccinelli made regarding a co-adjutor bishop immediately after the appointment of Chavara as the Vicar General. In his letter to the Propaganda Fide, dated 15 June 1861, the Archbishop proposed Chavara

¹⁰³ CWC, Vol. I, *Chronicles*, 1990, 148-176.

¹⁰⁴ CWC, Vol. IV, *Letters*, 1990, 99.

to the post of his successor as the bishop.¹⁰⁵ The practical objections he would have against his own proposal notwithstanding, what is worthy of consideration here is that in the plausible event of appointing a bishop of Malabar origin at the time, there would be nobody else worthy of the proposal.

3.2.8. Apostle of Literature and Print Media

In the nineteenth century, Chavara emerged as a leader of the spiritual and social renaissance in Kerala. In order to give a momentum to this ferment, he tapped the most powerful media available, namely, the printing press. The printing press that he established at Mannanam in 1846 was a milestone in the process of the renaissance in the religious and public education.¹⁰⁶ The first printed work was *Jnanapeeyusham (Spiritual Ambrosia)*, which was published from the new press in 1846.¹⁰⁷ The press gradually turned out to be the womb of the first Malayalam Daily *Deepika*, which shaped the social and political life of a large section of the society in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. When Chavara moved from Mannanam to Koonammavu, a branch of the press was established at Koonammavu as well.

¹⁰⁵ The Archbishop would also mention his minor reservation about his own proposal which was practical in nature. In comparison with the European bishops, Chavara would neither have the education nor the episcopal niceties. This is also to be read in conjunction with the objections made by Marcelline Berardi and Leopold Beccaro against the proposal (See *Positio*, 264, 265-269).

¹⁰⁶ P. K. Rajasekharan, "Vazhathada Revolution: Chavara and Indigenous Printing Technology" in *The Life and Legacy of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, ed., J. Mannarathara, Delhi: Viva Books, 2015, 58-73.

¹⁰⁷ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 353.

3.2.8.1. Apostle of Christian Literature

Chavara was a man of reading and reflection. In one of his letter to the sisters at Koonammavu, he wrote: "The time you save after your proper work and recreation should be spent in spiritual reading. Read the books that give you knowledge and devotion; if you love reading, you will love solitude. When a soul delights in solitude Jesus Christ will come to converse with it in solitude and begin communing with it."¹⁰⁸

Chavara was a prolific writer who wrote in the vernacular as did some of the fathers of the Church in their time. His writings were heterogeneous, consisting of historical notes (Chronicles), Letters, Poems, Hymns, Dramas (Ecologues), Colloquies, Prayers, and Exhortations. Whatever may be the nature of the writing, one can notice in it a biblical, salvation historical, and mystical flavour. The writings reveal the very personal and spiritual experiences, outlooks and insights of the author.

3.2.8.2. Historical Writings

Chronicles that Chavara recorded throughout his life and the letters that he wrote to various individuals on various occasions are considered here. He had a very keen sense of history and the ability to record with great accuracy. These pieces of literature illustrate the socio-political life of Kerala and the history of the Church of his time. These writings reflect his historical consciousness, farsightedness, honesty in recording events, and the sense of justice.

¹⁰⁸ CWC, Vol. IV, *Letters*, 1990, 85.

3.2.8.3. Spiritual and Literary Writings

Some of the works of Chavara are grouped together in spiritual and literary works on account of their nature. *Atmanutapam* is a poetic work.¹⁰⁹ In this work, he reminisces his early life and outpours his sense of gratitude for the ineffable love and mercy of God. At the same time, he laments over his own shortcomings. *Parvam/Pana (Dirge/Song of Mourning)* is Chavara's reflection on death, resurrection, and eternal life. A canto for the use in a bereaved family at the demise of a loved one (*Marana Veetil Paduvanulla Pana*)¹¹⁰ notes the importance of a life focused on the heavenly bliss. *The Martyrdom of Anastasia*, the first Malayalam spiritual lyric (*khanda-kavyam*), composed in 1861,¹¹¹ is the story of a courageous virgin martyr of the early Church who enthused the community to remain firm in faith. In the context of the Roccas episode, it meant to encourage his people to uphold loyalty to the one Holy Catholic Church. *Dhyanasallapangal* expresses the God-experience and contemplative dimension of Chavara between 1866 and 1868.¹¹²

His most intimate feelings reveal his childlike innocence. *Chavarul* is *The Testament of a Loving Father*, written towards the end of his life, meant to transform the family, the domestic Church, into a heavenly abode according to the plan of the Creator. He wrote it for his own parishioners

¹⁰⁹ See Z. M. Moozhoor, *Atmanutapam: Gadyavishkaranam* (Malayalam), Thevara: Janata Books, 1990.

¹¹⁰ CWC, Vol. II: *Compunction of the Soul, Dirge, Anastasia's Martyrdom*, 1989, 129-161.

¹¹¹ CWC, Vol. II: *Compunction of the Soul, Dirge, Anastasia's Martyrdom*, 1989, 163-172; Mundadan, *Chavara*, 366-368.

¹¹² CWC, Vol. III: *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 1990.

as a sign of his indebtedness and concern for them.¹¹³ It gives inspiration and guidelines to families and it has a lasting relevance. *Ecologues* are pastoral dramatic plays (1855-1856),¹¹⁴ the first of its kind in Indian literature. These depict the Paschal Mystery in art form meant to deepen the spirituality and to impart the Gospel message among young people. All these literary works played a significant role in awakening and nurturing the spirituality of the Malabar Church.

4. Conclusion

From the above descriptions, it is clear that Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara, as in the case of most of the Fathers and Doctors of the early Church, was very much involved in the building up of the Malabar Church that was in the process of regaining her autonomy and identity in the formative period of the nineteenth century. Hence, he is eligible to be declared a 'Father of the Syro-Malabar Church *sui juris*'.

¹¹³ Chavara, *Testament of a Loving Father*, Kakkanad: Chavara Central Secretariat, 2014.

¹¹⁴ John Paul, *Idaya Natakangal (Ecologues: Shepherd Plays) by Chavara Kuriakose Elias*, Thrissur: Kerala Sahithya Academy, 2014.

CHAVARA, DOCTOR OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

Francis Thonippara CMI

1. Introduction

“O blessed doctor, light of the holy Church and lover of God’s law, pray to the Son of God for us.” This antiphon – to be recited or sung at the beginning and end of Our Lady’s hymn, *The Magnificat*, during vespers for the feast of a Doctor of the Church – was one of the distinguishing marks of the common prayers of the Divine Office (in the Latin tradition) for such feasts which were introduced into the liturgy by Pope Boniface VIII (1294-1303) in 1298. The antiphon underscores the connection of a Doctor of the Church with light and love, with God’s law, with the Church and with the Son of God.

2. Nature and Relevance of a Doctor of the Church

The title ‘Doctor of the Church’ was given to only thirty six prominent ecclesiastical writers of the Church in the two thousand years’ history of the Church and they were honoured with this title on account of the great advantage the Church had gained through the life and writings of these authors.

There are three essential requirements, besides many other things, to declare someone a Doctor of the Church: (i) great sanctity, which is recognised with the canonisation; (ii) eminent learning, and (iii) proclamation as a Doctor of the Church by a Pope or Ecumenical Council.

There are eminent writers and teachers like Origen and since they are not canonised, they are not declared Doctors. This requirement indicates that the title is not concerned exclusively with a person's ability to expound the faith. It also presupposes that one's exposition of the faith is effective in radiating the supernatural character of the faith that draws humans to God; hence, the need for sanctity in a Doctor of the Church. In this connection, the following passage from the Bible is relevant here: "This is eternal life, that they may know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (Jn 17:3). Their writings are true and timeless and the title 'Doctor of the Church' is an official designation in recognition of the outstanding contribution a saintly person has made to the understanding and interpretation of the Sacred Scripture and the development of the Christian doctrine. All these Doctors of the Church advanced the knowledge of God through their writings on theology, spirituality, mysticism, or through their defence of the faith in the face of heresy and schism. In his announcement that John of Avila would be a Doctor, Pope Benedict XVI declared: "The declaration that a saint is a Doctor of the Universal Church implies the recognition of a charism of wisdom bestowed by the Holy Spirit for the good of the Church and evidenced by the beneficial influence of his teaching among the People of God."¹

3. A Brief Historical Note

If we go through the history of the declaration of the Doctor of the Church one notices that it was Pope Boniface VIII

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, "Apostolic Letter Proclaiming Saint John of Avila, Diocesan Priest, a Doctor of the Universal Church" (7 October 2012), 7.

(1294-1303), in 1298, for the first time declared a few Doctors of the Church, that too belonging to the first six centuries of the Christian era. The Pope selected the best four from the West and the East, respectively, and they all were already recognised as Fathers of the Church. These Great Doctors of the Church are Saints Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome, and Gregory the Great from the West and John Chrysostom, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Athanasius from the East. They lived after the period of persecution and, therefore, they were not martyrs. At present, there are thirty six Doctors of the Church, twenty-seven from the West and nine from the East, out of which four are women. The last one added to the galaxy of Doctors is Saint Gregory of Narek, a monk of the tenth century from the Armenian Church. Pope Francis, in 2015, declared him a Doctor of the Church.

Interestingly, one observes the active involvement and initiative of the Popes in declaring a saint a Doctor of the Church. It is particularly true in the case of the last three, mainly because of the personal interests of Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis. Now, two more are in the waiting, Saint Pope John Paul II and Saint Oscar Amulfo Romero Y Galdamez, martyr Archbishop of San Salvador. In October 2019, the Polish Catholic Bishops' Conference formally petitioned Pope Francis to consider making Saint Pope John Paul II Doctor of the Church in an official proclamation, in recognition of his contributions to theology, philosophy, and Catholic literature, as well as the formal documents, encyclicals, apostolic letters, bulls, *Motu Proprio* documents, homilies, speeches that he had issued. Also the Archbishop of San Salvador, El Salvador has petitioned Pope Francis to name Saint Oscar Romero a Doctor of the Church. Still others in the making include Saint John Henry Newman,

Saint Faustina Kowalska, and Saint Theresa of Kolkata. Thus, we see fluidity in the process of declaring a Doctor of the Church. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) wrote on Cardinal Newman: "The characteristic of the great Doctor of the Church, it seems to me, is that he teaches not only through his thought and speech but also by his life, because within him, thought and life are interpenetrated and defined. If this is so, then Newman belongs to the great teachers of the Church, because he both touches our hearts and enlightens our thinking."²

The brief description about the Doctors of the Church is given above in the context of the proposal of the Synod of the Syro-Malabar Bishops to make efforts to declare Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara a Doctor of the Church. The development in history and the positions taken in the recent past clearly indicate that the proposal of the Synod can be substantiated by the life and teachings of Saint Chavara himself.

4. The Course of Action

The first pre-requisite to begin the process is to make available a critical edition of the complete works of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara and the formal request to the Pope from the part of the National Bishops' Conference (CBCI) and in our case a strong endorsement from the part of the Synod of the Syro-Malabar Bishops. The whole critical work together with the petition is sent to the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, which Dicastery sends the writings of the Saint to the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith. Once the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith gives *nihil*

² Joseph Ratzinger, *First Centenary of the Death of Cardinal John Henry Newman*, 27 April 1990.

obstat, the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints studies the matter thoroughly and refers the matter to the Pope for final approval. Here below I note down certain norms to declare a saint a Doctor of the Universal Church.

1. Reception of the teachings of a saint declared to be a Doctor of the Church should be quick, universal, and constant.
2. Powerful intercession of the saint and the universal character of the devotion of the saint.
3. Petition from the part of the faithful, episcopal conferences, national, regional, and Church *sui juris* to the Roman Pontiff is very important.
4. Focus and project on one dominant character of the teachings of the saint, as in the case of Saint John of God, a Doctor of mystical theology.
5. As sign of the ecclesiastical reception, the teachings of the doctoral candidate appear in the teachings of the ordinary Magisterium of the Church, like Catechism of the Catholic Church, teachings of the ecumenical councils, papal documents, etc.
6. Visit of the ecclesiastical higher authorities, including Pope, to the tombs, shrines, and places associated with the saint is another requirement to facilitate the official declaration of someone as a Doctor of the Church.
7. The frequency of the Papal pronouncements in public audiences regarding the uniqueness of the teachings

of the saint is another norm to declare a saint a Doctor of the Church.

8. The attributions and qualifications made by ecclesiastical authorities starting with Pope about the saint. For example, in the case of Saint Therese of Lisieux, Pope Pius X said that she was the greatest saint of modern times and Pope Benedict XV described her as the teacher of life. Pope Pius XII described her doctrine as the one which penetrated into the very heart of the Gospel.
9. Presence of religious societies, orders, congregations founded and named after the saint or inspired by the teachings of the saint, is another norm to consider a saint a Doctor of the Church.
10. Ecclesial movements inspired by the life and teachings of the saint (for example, the Little Way Association, in the case of Saint Therese of Lisieux).
11. Continuous petitions by the laity and group of lay associations who are great promoters of the saint to the ecclesiastical authorities to declare the saint a Doctor of the Church.
12. Another norm or criteria is the frequency of the Bible quotations, both Old Testament and New Testament, teachings of the Fathers of the Church in the writings of the saint.
13. The petitions of the study groups who dedicate themselves for the promotion of the teachings of the saint constitute another criterion to declare someone a Doctor of the Church.

14. The popularity of the writings of the saint in different languages and their dissemination is another requirement to declare a saint a Doctor of the Church.
15. The teachings of the saint should reflect a passionate love for the Word of God and a deep and in-depth experience of the Word of God.
16. Writings of the saint in inspiring the Church teachings on Mother Mary.
17. Influence of the writings of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church in the theological, mystical, spiritual, and doctrinal evolution of the writings of the saint.
18. Care should be taken to identify any unique reference made by Pope in the documents of beatification and canonisation and during the sermon of the Pope or ecclesiastical higher authorities in the ceremony of beatification or canonisation.
19. What is very popular or unique with the teaching of the saint has to be focussed upon and in the case Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *sentire cum Ecclesia*, to feel with the Church, is a key to interpret his life and teachings.
20. The saint becomes a living icon of that God who, according to the Church's prayer, "shows his almighty power in his mercy and forgiveness" (Roman Missal, Opening Prayer, 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time).
21. Permanent communion with the Roman Pontiff and filial devotion to the See of Rome and to the successor of Saint Peter.

The arguments mentioned above in declaring Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara as a Father of the Syro-Malabar Church are valid also in the case of presenting the topic of declaring him a Doctor of the Universal Church.

5. Conclusion

A preliminary effort has been made to highlight the not so easy task of declaring someone a Doctor of the Church. We need further study and research to go ahead with the project of declaring Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara a Doctor of the Universal Church.

When the person and mission of Saint Chavara, reviewed in the context of his socio-historical milieu and in the very historical evolution of the Syro-Malabar Church, the requirements or the criteria evolved could be seen fulfilled in him so as to consider him eligible to be declared a Father of the Syro-Malabar Church *sui juris*. The eventual declaration of Saint Chavara a Father of the Syro-Malabar Church *sui juris* will render the apostolic Church more visibility and consequently more contributive to the communion consciousness of the Universal Church. Moreover, declarations of this sort would be affirming the *sui juris* nature of the Apostolic Church of Saint Thomas Christians and her legacy.

Syro-Malabar Church being an Apostolic Church enjoying synodal structure, the members of the Holy Synod could exercise its power by declaring Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara a Father of the Syro-Malabar Church, thereby, paving the way for the eventual declaration of Saint Chavara a Doctor of the Universal Church, taking into account his unique contributions in the building up of the Syro-Malabar

Church in the nineteenth century, especially by preserving the unity of the Church, by maintaining the communion with the successor of Saint Peter and by revitalising the Christian life of the Church. In the true sense, Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara may be considered the re-founder of the Syro-Malabar Church.

PART TWO

THE ANTIQUITY

*Learn the art of loving Jesus, stay constantly
in his presence, walk along with him and
converse with him continuously.*

- Chavara

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 the meaning of the term is and how it has to be contextually defined. We also see the appropriateness of the universal application of the term. The purpose of the study in this part of the work is to see how Saint 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.

Today, a fuller understanding of faith can be obtained only with an active reference to the writings and works of those who consolidated the theological foundation of our faith. In necessarily new ways, an in-depth reading of the works of Chavara, will give us a glimpse into the way faith was understood, taught, followed and lived as a specific structure was evolving in the St Thomas Christian Church in Kerala.

A research on the entire writings of Chavara would expose the spiritual extend of Chavara's theological

contributions and the various spiritual disciplines to which they appeal, and the contextual methods that he utilizes. These are like the fruits that we gather from his knowledge of St Thomas Indian Christian Antiquity. This work focusses on the question of how Chavara, in his own right, stands out as a stalwart figure in the formative years of his Church of apostolic foundation.

To assess the contributions of Chavara, we need to recall what the picture of the Church and society had been in history, and particularly in the 19th century. In the ancient Indian Church history, we need to make a chronological journey through the grey area of the first few centuries,¹ which has not been mapped, then the homocephalous period guided by the prelates from Bagdad, followed by the heterocephalous period dominated by the European prelates and then comes the autocephalous period in which the St Thomas Christian Church of India could have a local leadership.

The usually recognized western periodization in the case of the Fathers of the Church is highly disadvantageous to the St Thomas Christian Church which, although is as old as both the Roman and Greek Churches, took a long time to develop and come to a position to produce literary works as the Greek and Roman Churches did. However, these literary expositions on faith and morals produced during the formative ecclesial period defined by the Europeans, have become one of the characteristic features of the Fathers of the Church.

¹ Navya Maria, *Empowered Womanhood*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2014.

In the 17th century, the Protestant historian Christoph Cellarius² in Halle introduced the division cutting up history into epochs: ancient, medieval and modern. Later, J. A. Möhler³ applied the threefold scheme to Church history, and since then it has dominated historical writing as a whole. However, doubts about its objective adequacy are everywhere. In today's ecumenical thinking, the threefold division, designed mainly to fit the European West, seems inadequate.

Certainly, in order to facilitate a survey of the whole of the historical past, it is necessary to arrange the available material into epochs. However, it has been quite impossible to shape the total picture of the past since the principles of division that have been proposed have been proved inadequate. The continuous flow of history recognizes no pauses. If one divides epochs based on the changes that have taken place in the world, one needs to keep in mind the fact that when changes take place in the world, they never involve the whole of the globe, but only certain areas of the world. And the total history of the world is a confluence of many single streams of local history and when the division is made, nobody should suffer a disadvantage on its basis.

² Christoph (Keller) Cellarius was a German classical scholar and Church Historian. Although the Ancient-Medieval-Modern division of history was used earlier by earlier Italian scholars, Cellarius' work titles *Universal History Divided into an Ancient, Medieval, and New Period* helped popularize it. After him, this tripartite division became standard among historians.

³ Johann Adam Möhler was a German Roman Catholic church historian whose theories on and efforts toward uniting the Catholic and Protestant churches made him an important source of ideas for the ecumenical movement in the 20th century.

The period of Chavara who set the theological and scholarly foundation of St Thomas Christianity in India, from the point of view of that particular Church, is the formative period. For these reasons, we think it is necessary to review the periodization relative to the formative period of the given Church, i.e., St Thomas Christian Church of Malabar.

In connection with the formative days of a particular Church in its antiquity, one need to take into account the consolidation of prayer and liturgy of the Church. The official prayer of the Church and the liturgy were given shape in the formative period and what was subsequently called for is the timely renewal of these forms of worship. Considering the contributions that Chavara made towards the *Tukasa* and that the members of the community that he founded towards the adaptation of the liturgy of the hours to be used by the St Thomas Christians, would point to the fact that the formative years stretched longer time in this Church. This could further be applied to the catechesis, initiation into the sacraments, or still other dimensions of St Thomas Christian life. In the light of these factors, it could be largely profitable to reflect more broadly on the point of periodization.

Additionally, we need to take into account the fact that there was no one in the St Thomas Church of Kerala prior to Chavara who could be dubbed a writer. The scanty but significant works that predate Chavara come from the scholarly bishop Joseph Kariyattil who wrote as short expose on faith titled *Vedatarkangal* and Paremakal who wrote his travelogue (*Vartamanapustakam*). The historical period of Chavara could indeed be considered the antiquity of the St Thomas Christian Church of Malabar.

THE NOTION OF ANTIQUITY AND ITS FLUIDITY

Benny Thettayil CMI

1. Introduction

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.

2. Progenitors in the Church

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

¹ J.H. Crehan, “Fathers of the Church,” in *A Catholic Dictionary of Theology* Vol. 2, Melbourne: Nelson, 1967, 289.

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

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).

5. Emergence of the Fathers

It is true that all early Christian pastors and catechists "fathered" their particular portion of the flock during their

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, 10.

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

⁵ J. Chapman, "Fathers of the Church," in *The Catholic Encyclopaedia* Vol. 4, New York: Gilmary Society, 1913, 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].

and Theodoret of Cyrrihus⁸ 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 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),

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

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

⁹ J.H. Crehan, “Fathers of the Church,” 288.

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.

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 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

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.

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.

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-

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

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 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

¹³ Cyriac Elia Chavara, *Positio*, Vatican: Typis Polyglotis, MCMLXXVII, 491ff.; *CWC (Complete Works of Chavara)* Vol. 4, Chavara, *Alochanakal*, 1982 edition, pp. 83-85; 1990: p. 57; Mundadan, *Chavara*, 182.

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

¹⁴ P. Podipara, ed., *The Carmelite Congregation of Malabar 1831-1931*, Trichinopoly, 1932, 58-59. See also, Mundadan, *Chavara*, 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 lived at Kuravilangad until his death on 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.

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 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 into 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 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

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

¹⁷ CWC, *Chronicle*, 1990, 146.

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

11. 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 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.

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 Paremakkal Thoma Kathanar but though extensive, it is limited to a travelogue.

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 because the notion of antiquity is relative to the formative years of the Church and its contingency is to be acknowledged. 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*, 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.

CHAVARA: FATHER OF THE EASTERN CHURCH

Biblical and Theological Perspectives

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1. Introduction

The Fathers of the Church are those revered men who gave leadership in the early Church, especially in *defending*, *expounding* and *developing* Christian doctrines in their formative years. For the first two centuries, most of these leaders were bishops. However, later, certain eminent priests and deacons were also recognized as Fathers for their contribution to the Church. In the following pages we discuss the biblical and theological perspectives on the Father of the Church and see how, in that light, St Kuriakose Elias Chavara could be considered a Father of the Eastern Church.

2. The Tradition of the Fathers

Jesus gave the twelve disciples, the Apostles, the power of *ruling*, *teaching* and *sanctifying* as he appointed them to continue his work on earth once he moved away from the scene. The Twelve bequeathed to their own disciples the faith, experience and the teachings that they had received from the Lord. The earliest leaders of the Church *after* the Twelve Apostles and *within* two generations of the Twelve are usually called the Apostolic Fathers since tradition describes them as having been taught by the Twelve. The significant Apostolic Fathers include Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch and Polycarp of Smyrna.

Following the period of the Apostolic Fathers come the Church Fathers who are ancient and generally influential Christian theologians, some of whom were eminent teachers. The term is used of writers or teachers of the Church not necessarily 'saints'. For instance, Origen Adamantius and Tertullian are considered Church Fathers but are not saints.

Generally, in order to recognize someone as a Father of the Church in the West, four major conditions are to be met and certain characteristics are to be exhibited in his life and works. These are *antiquity*, meaning that he lived before the eighth century;¹ doctrinal *orthodoxy* in teachings; personal *sanctity*; and *approval* by the Church.

3. The Biblical Perspectives on the *Father*

The Church, the family of God, is among other things, a divinely ordained society and as in all societies there must be an authority whose word is final if chaos is to be avoided. The Jews, for example, had patriarchs, judges and the then kings as well as prophets to carry out this function in various ways. Ordinary human experience shows that the need for authority is primary. However, the justification for the existence of authority is neither that it works perfectly, for the authorities are human beings; nor that it never makes mistakes, but simply the rule, that in the absence an authority, there is no orderly society. This authority in most society is exercised by a father-figure.

¹ The death of St. John Damascene in around 750 AD is generally regarded as the close of the age of the Fathers in the Western Church. The Oriental Churches seem to be flexible with regard to this deadline.

The Bible is the written record of the reflection on the self-revelation of a God who is essentially revealed, understood and proclaimed as father.² However, the modern world has a place for a group of individuals with its own ethical norms based mainly on hedonism that inadvertently aims at establishing a world of brotherhood and sorority without a father or mother. Based on the experiences of the biblical fathers and mothers for whom family life provided the means of exercising authority in a spirit of love, and in contrast with the objectionable manner in which others with a different ethical standard, transferred these human realities to their gods, the people of the Old Testament reveal the love and authority of the living God mainly by means of the images of father and spouse.³ The Old Testament abounds in these images that are attributed to God. To a great extent, the spirituality of the Old Testament was based on the relationship the people had with God whom they considered to be their creator, Father. This understanding of the creator God as the Father had a history of evolution as is seen in the following discussion.

4. The Pentateuchal Patriarchs

The story of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob the three Patriarchs in the Book of Genesis is an interrelated story of the first three generations of people⁴ whom God was trying to mould into an example of a nation that would bring glory to His name. The overall message of the Holy Scriptures

² We will not consider the patriarchal baggage the terminology carries.

³ We consider the fact that images are, however, only means of understanding and expressing an idea and as such, they are extremely limited.

⁴ In this analysis, we do not go into a discussion on the actual relationship between these three patriarchs. There is a possibility that they were heroes of the past whom they employed as they reconstructed their story as a family.

depends on the essential features of the three Patriarchs who allowed themselves to be used by God, in order to lay a foundation to the “people of God.”

4.1. Patriarchal Features of Abraham

Abraham could not only hear God’s voice (Gen 12:1), he could see God (12:7) and he was willing to obey (12:4) trusting that God would reward him as promised in the Covenant (12:2-3). Paul considers the Abrahamic Covenant as based totally on God’s grace as he uses the expression “according to grace” (Rom 4:16). Abraham was the recipient of an unmerited grace of God (Lk 1:72-73) because God chose him to move to Canaan, a fertile land almost as if God was giving him the opportunity to establish his family in a reinstated blessing of creation in a land like the Garden of Eden.⁵ Because he could see and hear God, Abraham was obedient and trusting.

Abraham had agricultural skills and the ability to manage his servants and he became wealthy (Gen 13:1). He was a good warrior and his wealth enabled him to have hired hands enough to defeat several hostile kings (14:13-17). His prestige had grown and he was declared “blessed” by the mysterious Melchizedek, King of Salem and priest of the “most High God” (14:18-20). Abraham became great, because he was a man to be reckoned with even in kingly affairs (14:17-18). By giving a tithe to Melchizedek, and refusing to accept gifts from the king of Sodom (14:20-23), Abraham foreshadowed and authenticated David’s rule in Jerusalem (Ps 110), and later Jesus’ role as High Priest and King (Heb 7).

⁵ P. N. Tarazi, *The Old Testament an Introduction: Volume 1 Historical Traditions*, Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003, 10.

Even though Abraham's faith sometimes wavered (as in the matter of Sarah's barrenness), he believed God's promises, and that was "counted unto him as righteousness" (Gen 15:6). Abraham obviously loved his favoured son Isaac (22:2), nevertheless was obedient to God by his willingness to sacrifice even what was dearest to him (22:2-11). He set a very high standard for faith even in the Church (Heb 11:8-10), an example for the subsequent prophets and apostles to follow for centuries.

Other essential features of Abraham were that he was hospitable to strangers (18:3-8), courageous when dealing with the Lord, advocated for less faithful persons (18:23), was kind and just to the oppressed as he dealt with Hagar (20:14) and compassionate even to sinners in Sodom (18:23-32) and Abimelech (20:17). Despite family rivalry inflamed by Sarah and Hagar, both of his sons respected him so much that they came together to honour and bury their father when he died (25:9). No wonder, Abraham heads the list of the patriarchs as he became an example of a father both in faith and action.

4.2. Patriarchal Features of Isaac

Isaac is the only Patriarch who was born and died in Canaan. He never left it. His life typified Christian believers more than either his father or his sons (Rom 9:6-8). Isaac respected and obeyed his father to a fault. As a youth,⁶ he

⁶ Although the English translations use the word "boy" to describe him, the Hebrew word can mean anything from an infant to a young man of military age (see 1 Chron 12:28). While the text does not give the age of the boy Isaac, we know that he was big and strong enough to carry enough firewood intended to burn a body the size of a ram (22:6), so he must have been at least a teenager and Abraham an old man of at least 113 years.

willingly accompanied his father to Mount Moriah where he was to be sacrificed (22:3-11). It was said that while Abraham passed this test of faith, Isaac passed this test as well. Isaac remained at home while his father's servant went to find him a wife, who he first married and then loved (24:67). Unlike his father and sons, Isaac did not try to "assist" God in fathering a proper heir.⁷ When he was 60 years old and his wife still seemed barren and he "pleaded with the Lord" (25:21) for Rebecca to conceive. In a way, his faith in the promise of the Lord seems stronger than that of Abraham, his father.

Although Isaac was wealthy (26:13) he was a peaceful man, less of a warrior than his father and did not instigate conflict like his son Jacob, using diplomacy to resolve quarrels (26:22-32). Like his father, Isaac was a man of his word. He refused to withdraw a blessing that was extorted out of him by Jacob and his mother by deceit (27:33). To keep peace and safety in the family, he commanded his son Jacob, to flee to the safety of his extended family in Padan Aram where he hoped Jacob would find a suitable wife (28:1-5). Isaac understood that God's promise of blessing consisted in fully sharing God's earth with the original inhabitants of Canaan, which was his homeland and he would not leave it! As a patriarch, he lived in relative peace, silence and obscurity compared to his more illustrious father and more industrious son whose story we consider below.

4.3. Patriarchal Features of Jacob

Jacob, the younger son of Isaac is shrewd and crafty. He is not as controlled by his impulsive passions as his brother

⁷ The reference is to Hagar who gave Abraham a son and Bilhah and Zilpah who gave Jacob two sons each.

Esau who sold his birth-right for a bowl of soup (25:32-34) and married against his parent's wishes (26:34). Jacob obviously placed a higher value on the birth-right and blessing from his father. His mother must have seen some quality in Jacob that made him a better candidate for the blessing and primogeniture.⁸ In spite of the craftiness and conspiracy, Jacob is not a total villain. During his flight away from home, he had a vision of Heaven and angels and a repetition of the Covenant made to Abraham and Isaac (28:12-15). This put the fear of God into him (28:17). Assuming that God needed a house, he lays a foundation stone of a temple. He further promises to build it at this site of Bethel on the condition that God would keep his side of the bargain (28:18-20). Through various experiences, God taught Jacob to obey (Is 66:1-4) and follow his ancestors' ways with God.

In Haran, despite Laban's trickery, Jacob remains righteous (30:33). Jacob becomes the father of many sons (29:31 - 30:24). He is a means of blessing to Laban (30:27, 30) as per the promise to Abraham, his grandfather. He becomes wealthy despite Laban's swindling (30:25-43). Yahweh protects him from Laban's anger, transforming them into a covenant brothers (31:17-55). Upon leaving him, Jacob acknowledged the help of God (31:9-13, 42).

Back in the Promised Land, Jacob became a softer and kinder father. However, he had to pay a heavy price for his life of deceit which resulted in so much sibling rivalry (37:3-4). His heart is broken by the loss of his favoured son Joseph (37:34-35). Going into Egypt, Jacob's

⁸ The conspiracy to trick Isaac was shocking by its impudence. It almost seems as if the story of Jacob is included as an example of how not to be a Patriarch.

fortunes turned around. He had the honour of blessing the powerful Pharaoh (47:10) indicating that his name had become respected and great. His deathbed scene is set with an individual prophetic blessing for each of his twelve sons (Gen 49). Through various ups and downs in life, the beginning of the fulfilment of the promise of a nation takes place in Jacob, as in his children he laid the foundation for the future history of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, as the *fathers* of the people of God, were pioneers in many respects. Biblically, since the Mosaic Law was still a concern of the future, God expected His people living under the Abrahamic Covenant to live righteous lives. Obedience to the Law did not earn eternal salvation under the Abrahamic Covenant (see Rom 4:1-22). Instead, their faith was demonstrated by their obedience to God (Jam 2:21-22). On this obedience, the future law would be founded.

All the three Patriarchs struggled against obstacles to the realization of God's covenantal promise, but their most essential feature was their faith in God's Covenant. The three of them are considered patriarchs for they were able to lay a foundation to the morality of a people and a tribal social structure. Above all, they believed that God was with them. The promise of blessing, of land, of increase, of God's presence, and the respect of the nations was not merely based on the Patriarch's achievements, but the grace of God.

For the reasons given above, the ancestors were revered among the people of Israel. The long line of the ancestors, according to the reconstructed history of the people of Israel, was headed by these patriarchs *par*

excellence, in whom the race was founded. These ancestors were considered to be so powerful materially and spiritually that the blessings and curses from them counted. For instance, although prior to Abraham, the curse on the son of Ham included the subordination of the Canaanites to the sons of Shem. In like manner, the greatness of Israel in various levels was already present in the election and blessing of Abraham (Gen 9:20-27; 12:2). The lives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the revered patriarchs of the people of Israel, were marked by the promise of innumerable descendants and a fertile country. The early history of the people of Israel was written in the intricate details of their lives, activities and sojourns, which became normative for the people. In the same way, the history of the neighboring people was written into the history of Lot and his daughters, Ishmael and Esau who were also patriarchs on their own rights, but were excluded from the promises for various reasons (Gen 19:30-38; 21:12f.; 36:1). This methodical inclusion and exclusion of individuals from the ancestral lines was also pedagogical for the people. As a theocratic society was being formed, this process taught the members what was acceptable as a norm in religion and society and what was not.

5. The Shifting Perspectives on the *Father*

Since there is a vital relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament based on continuity, the latter takes up the image of the father and perfects it. Standing in the Jewish tradition, Jesus takes the concept of the fatherhood of God a step further by revealing his own unique sonship. The New Testament goes ahead with the unheard of notion that this filiation of Jesus secures the paternity of God for all human beings everywhere at all

times. The transference of the meaning of the *father* from the physical to the social and then to the spiritual sphere could be followed in the ensuing discussion.

5.1. The Fathers: the Vertical Plane

In order to have a notion of the biblical base of the *Father of the Church*, it is crucial to understand the vital functions of the father in a Hebrew family, which, as we have seen above has a critical relationship to the way God also was understood in that society. On the vertical plane,⁹ the father was head of a line of descendants and the link with the line.

Biblically speaking, fatherhood was the only way a man could perpetuate his name. Thus the concern for male heirs was a primary element in biblical narratives (1Sam 1). By procreating, he perpetuated himself (Gen 21:12; 48:16); he contributed to the continuance of his race, assuring that the family possessions would go to his issue (15:2f.). If he died without a son, he was considered as having been punished by God (Num 3:4; 27:3f.).

In the patriarchal worldview of Israel, the father was the fulcrum of family life, and his house was the basic unit of the biblical society, in which the family was called *beth ab*, "father's house" (Gen 34:19). Since the father wielded the ultimate power in the family, the wife recognized him as the master (*ba'al*, Gen 20:3) and lord (*adon*, Gen 18:12). This honour was given to him since he was considered to

⁹ When we consider the two planes – vertical and horizontal – we do not refer to the two-fold human relationship: the human and divine. Here both these planes refer to human relationship. Here, horizontal plane refers to the social connotation of the father, which is not essentially and strictly related to a family of filial relationships.

be pivotal point in the family, for upon him the future of the family depended. The responsibility of the father included the education of the children – often exclusively boys (Sir 30:1-13). It was a father's central religious duty to see that his son was circumcised into the covenant (Lev 12:3) and instructed properly in the Torah (Deut 11:19). He negotiated the marriage settlements (Gen 24:2ff; 28:1f) by means of which he ensured the stability of the family.

In the Hebrew society, the father exercised absolute authority over his children. Sons were expected to refrain from any conduct that shamed their fathers (Lev 18:7-8). Disrespect of any kind, physical violence, arrogant speech, or a rebellious attitude towards the father carried severe punishment including death penalty (Exod 21:15; Lev 20:9; Deut 22:18-21). He was responsible for the freedom of the girls (Ex 21:7) who did not have as many rights as the boys and whose status within the household was often inferior and sometimes precarious (2 Sam 13). He supervised the behavior (Num 12:14) of the women who lived within the *beth ab*. They returned to his control if they were widowed without children. If their behavior shamed him, they deserved death (Gen 38:24; see also Judg 11:35-36). In short, in the Old Testament milieu, the entire life of the children (Gen 38:24; 42:37) depended on him as in him the whole family was incarnate. Above all these, he was looked upon as the assurance of the unity of the family (Gen 32:11).

Subsequently, when Israel became a tribal confederacy, each tribe attributed to its ancestor of the same name the responsibility for its place at the tribal meetings (Gen 49:4). In the various family trees that are found in various parts of the scripture marked the place of each ancestor. However, while expressing relationships other

than or more complex than ties of blood (Gen 10), these genealogies systematized the paternal lineages and stressed the importance of ancestors whose actions had involved the future and the rights of their descendants. The Hebrew family tree (Gen 5:1) orders the sequence of the generations in relationship with the divine election and salvation by showing a continuity between Adam himself (creation) and the patriarchs (election).

5.2. The Fathers: the Horizontal Plane

On the horizontal plane, the father who was considered to be the uncontested head of the family, by analogy began to be applied to relationships that are beyond familial. First of all, somewhere in the evolution the people of God, the term *house* began to denote an entire clan (Zech 12:12ff.) like “the house of Joseph.” Secondly, an expanded notion of *house* was seen in an important fraction of the people like “the house of David” (Ps 122:5), which included the entire kingdom of Judah. Finally, the term referred even the entire people as in the expression of “the house of Israel.” In all these, the authority of the leader of these groups was conceived analogically in the image of the *father* of the family (Jer 35:18).

Outside of the tribal set up in Israel, the term *father* was equivocal. To begin with, in various monarchies, the monarch was considered as the “father” of the nation that he ruled (Is 9:5). Then, the name of *father* was applied to priests (Jg 17:10; 18:19) who in the ancient societies stood next in line to the monarch. Again, the term referred to the royal counselors (Gen 45:8; Esth 3:13f.; 8:12) on account of the sagacity and influence that they wielded. Yet again, the term was applied to the prophets of Israel (2 Kings 2:12) based on the word of God they employed in order to

instruct the people. Finally, on account of their authority as educators, whose teachings affected the daily life of the people, the wise men of the society (Prov 1:8, Is 19:11) were acclaimed as *fathers*. By their influence on the horizontal plane, all these five kinds of *fathers* contributed immensely in various ways and in various capacities to prepare the people of Israel as a unique people to receive God's salvation. Most of them also made their contribution towards preparing the people to recognize God as the *Father*.

5.3. The Fathers: Beyond the Racial Race

In the pages above, considering paternity on both vertical and horizontal planes, we limited our discussion to the *children of Abraham*. Although the patriarchs were the fathers *par excellence* of the chosen people, yet, eventually, it was not only by reason of their physical paternity that they were considered fathers, but also because of the promises that God made to them from time to time. These promises had their implications far beyond the considerations of race. Since Abraham was the Father of Faith, what was promised to him could be attained ultimately by all who imitate his faith, irrespective of their racial roots. The stress begins to shift from an exclusive race to an inclusive holy nation which might include people of other races as well. The people of Israel were gradually, but with some difficulty, led to this belief by means of the haggadic Book of Jonah. This teaching was perfected by Paul for the New Israel as he held that their paternity "according to the flesh" (Rom 4:1) was only the temporary condition of a spiritual and universal paternity based on the permanence and coherence of the salvific plan of a God unceasingly at work from the election of Abraham until the glorification of Jesus (Exod 3:15; Acts 3:13).

The gloss of the earlier rosy picture of a pure Israelite race of the pure blood of Abraham, had faded in the more critical prophets. Ezekiel wonders: Is not the race of Israel impure from the beginning according to the lineage of the fathers as well as the mothers? (Ezek 16:3). Moreover, the author of the Chronicles himself admits the relationship of some of his people with pagan clans (1Chron 2:18-55). Some of the prophets hint at the possibility of the proselytes joining the people of the promises (Is 56:3-8; see also 2Chron 6:32f.). Gradually, in spite of the several nationalist uprisings, the salutary paternity of Abraham and the great ancestors was actualized no longer by race but by faith and the corresponding works.

Perhaps it is because of the exposure that the Greek translators (the Jews in the Diaspora) of the Hebrew Bible received in Alexandria that instead of magnifying the chosen race, they (the translators of the LXX) suggest the idea that all the nations in the universe will one day share in the blessing of Abraham because all are blessed in him. This tendency of the universalist streams was given a great momentum in the New Testament times by John the Baptist and Jesus. John's message is clear: "From these stones, God can raise up children to Abraham" (Mt 3:9). Jesus clearly taught that the Kingdom of God would welcome a spiritual posterity of believers (Mt 8:11) for if there is a filiation with Abraham that is necessary for salvation, it is the imitation of the faith of the patriarch (Jn 8:33, 39f.).

5.4. From Fathers to the Father

The notion of the *father* expanded as the horizon of the understanding the people of Israel broadened. From the familial through the tribal, racial and national, the notion

took a climactic connotation as it reached the universal. This happened when the fatherhood of the ancestors began to be conceived as something spiritual. The seed of this notion was already found in the scripture as it indicated with regard to Abraham whose name meant “father of a multitude” of peoples (Gen 17:5). Moreover, the promise of Gen 12:3: “Through you will all the nations of the earth bless themselves” as mentioned already, becomes in the Greek translation: “In you will be blessed ...” (Sir 44:21; Acts 3:25; Gal 3:8).

Paul is the theologian of the broad understanding of the spiritual paternity. The idea was prepared in the Old Testament, during the exile and especially in the latter prophets. The deportations, especially, the Babylonian one was a bolt from the blue. It played havoc in the lives of the people of Israel and called their ancestral assumptions into question. They began to shift the attribute of fatherhood to a higher plane. God never appeared so clearly as the one *Father* of His people as He did in those times when the heritage of the physical ancestors (Ezek 33:24) had been appropriated by the intruders. To the stunned and disillusioned Israelite exiles, Abraham and Jacob seemed to forget their posterity (Is 63:16). In the midst of and partly as a result of this traumatic trial, a “qualitative Israel” was being formed, an Israel to which not all the sons of Abraham according to the flesh belonged. Only those who imitated his search for justice, his hope (Is 51:1ff.) and his faith belonged to this Israel. In him the metaphor is extended to include the Lord’s creation of Israel as a wider people (Exod 4:22; Deut 32:6; Is 63:16; 64:7). This understanding of God as *father* became a motive for observing the law (Deut 14:1) and for seeking divine compassion and forgiveness (Ps 103:13; Jer 3:19; 31:9, 20; Hos 2:1).

6. The Apostles and their Successors as Fathers

Almost as it is in the horizontal plane where the prophets and sages and counsellors and others came to be considered as fathers, in the New Testament era, the apostles and their successors also, for similar reasons, came to be considered as fathers. In the following discussion, we consider how the early church understood apostles and elders and how the title was applied to various people throughout the history of the Church.

The view of Paul regarding the structure of the Church and the role of the apostles is found in his words to the Ephesians: "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone" (Eph 2:19, 20). Towards the end of the apostolic period, in 97 AD, Clement of Rome wrote a letter to the Church at Corinth in which he mentions the succession in the Church. He notes that the apostles have preached the Gospel to us from the Lord Jesus Christ who has done so from God. Christ was sent forth by God, and the apostles were sent forth by Christ. Both these appointments, then, were made in an orderly way, according to the will of God.¹⁰

Having received their orders, and being fully assured by the resurrection of the Lord, and been established in the word of God, with full assurance of the Holy Spirit, the apostles went forth proclaiming the Good News that the kingdom of God was at hand. Preaching through countries and cities, they appointed the first-fruits

¹⁰ <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1010.htm>; accessed on 23.05.2022.

of their work, having first proved them by the Spirit, to be *elders* of those who would afterwards believe.¹¹

The apostles knew, that here would be strife in the Church on various issues. For this reason, inasmuch as they had obtained a perfect fore-knowledge of this, they appointed those ministers and gave instructions,¹² that after them, other approved men should succeed them in their ministry. This instruction has been followed in the Church to this day.

By 97 AD, the authorities in the Church were not apostles and prophets, but elders who had been appointed according to the standards laid down by the apostles. The qualifications for apostles were that they must have seen the risen Lord and have been appointed directly by Him. The apostles provided qualifications for the elders, and these qualifications would apply to future generations.

Those who were appointed by the apostles, or afterwards by other eminent men, with the consent of the whole Church, and who have blamelessly served the flock of Christ in a humble, peaceable, and valiant spirit, and have for a long time led the Church courageously and have possessed the good opinion of all, are considered heroes of the Church. Some of them, in the history of the Church, are those blessed presbyters who, having defended, taught

¹¹ A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, A. C. Coxe, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. I: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*. Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997, 16; First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians chapter 42.

¹² Paul gives instructions on the qualifications and roles of the elders (Acts 20:28-31; Tit 1:5-9; 1 Tim 3:1-7) and provided for their continuation (2 Tim 2:2).

and guided the Church, finished their course in a heroic manner and have obtained a title that points to their role as the Fathers of the Church.

7. Theological Implications

In theological perspective, which has its foundation in the scripture, a significant ancestor who was considered as the patriarch, and various men of God who were called fathers and the apostles who were who were revered as fathers, in whose line, the fathers of the Church are considered today, had certain characteristic features, which could be found in Chavara as he lived in and for the Church.

7.1. Mandate from God

Fatherhood in this scheme must be part of God's call to spearhead a movement and protect, cherish and promote it valiantly and to become a blessing for oneself and for as many people in the future as possible. When one considers such functions as works of God, they become channels of grace. Depending upon the blessing that God grants, the initiative would have far reaching effects beyond the wildest imagination of the one who launches it. In so doing, they enter the *Father's work* of creating, sustaining, redeeming, and consummating and cooperate with it. As studies have proved, Chavara received the divine mandate to accomplish the foundations of the religious congregations that he co-founded.

7.2. Correspondence to God's Purpose

God's purpose is not that human beings should become angels, or even religious, but that they should become fully human. One becomes fully human by relating to God,

building both the human community and the faith community, and thus becoming a blessing the nations. Chavara's personal future was not exclusively to be a saved immortal soul in heaven *up there* but to be a fully resurrected person in a totally renewed cre-ation in a new heaven and new earth (Rev 21), which was brought about by means of the transformation of the society of his time.

7.3. Virtuous Undertaking

Faith, hope, and love are the main virtues, often repeated as a triad in scrip-ature and mentioned singly dozens of times. Practicing these theological virtues heroically and seasoning one's life with the cardinal virtues, one lights up the paths of others. The following are some of the criteria for considering what made Chavara's work good, humane, or virtuous.¹³

7.3.1. The Criterion of Objectivity

One is immersed heart and soul, in the project undertaken as per the mandate given to him by the Lord, until it is realized. In order to strengthen the Church by means of literacy, and publication, Chavara would leave no stone unturned until he got what he positively desired to accomplish.

7.3.2. The Criterion of Worth

The *fathers* contributed to the advancement and adornment of human existence, often at a crucial turning point in the life of the Church. The innovative social and spiritual

¹³ See K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 4 Vols., Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1936-1961, Vol. 3, 535.

projects that Chavara launched for the uplift of the families and the communities that he founded in order to enhance the quality of life both in the society and religion proved to be of immense value at the time and ever since.

7.3.3. The Criterion of Humanity

Any work that uses people as mere instruments is excluded in this scheme. Every human being is intrinsically valuable. It is because Chavara knew the real worth of humanity that he took upon himself the all-round development of human being in his society. He envisioned a society where education and other facilities did not come to a member on account of his high birth, which was usually the case. Everyone was valuable.

7.3.4. The Criterion of Reflectivity

Since the *father* is in constant relationship with the divine, the internal exercise of reflection and contemplation and the expression of some of it in literature must not be excluded. Chavara's contemplative life reflected in his apostolic activities enriched his prayer life. They were mutually so complementary that one wonders how he could integrate the mysticism that he practiced and the projects that he undertook and further, could put it the experiences into black and white.

7.3.5. The Criterion of Universality

Since the Church is universal, the work undertaken by a leader of the Church in one part of the world has universal ecclesial implications. Although Chavara belonged to a ritual tradition, when it came to relate to the fellow humans,

he went beyond the boundaries of rites. Ecclesiastically speaking, for instance, although he wrote to Rome requesting for indigenous bishops for the particular Church that he was part of, his outlook was so universal that he was generous enough to incorporate the pious practices of another particular Church in order to enliven the faith-life of the faithful.

8. Conclusion

In the event of the canonization of Kuriakose Elias Chavara, the universal Church has deigned to recognise the sanctity of his life and the orthodoxy of his faith and teachings. On this occasion, having scrutinized his life, works, and contributions to the life of the Universal and particular Churches, the society, religion, and politics we deem it highly opportune to explore the possibility of considering Chavara as an Eastern Church Father for the following reasons: to honour the saint with a deserving title at the high point of the saga of studies, prayers, and symposia on the life, activities, and writings of the saint; to let the Christian Churches in the East hear the tales of the luminary and his likes in the East that set their skies ablaze; to honour the original vision that held a particular Church together in peril; for various voices in the East to be heard when they raise them for a reason as Chavara did; to make this voice officially available to those who would like to listen to them; and to celebrate the scholarly and valuable studies and research done on the Person and contributions of Chavara, a true Father of the Church.

CHAVARA: ANTIQUITY IN HIS ECCLESIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Benny Thettayil CMI

1. Introduction

Fathers and mothers are remembered by their children. Great fathers and mothers are remembered by generations of children. Some of these fathers and mothers are made immortal in the memory for what left for the posterity to hold and to cherish in perpetuity. They influence lives beyond their geographical and temporal horizon. The main concern of this study on the life and activities of St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara, a patriarch and a faithful and Spirit-filled son of the Malabar Church is to see how, in various ways, his life, activities, teachings and writings have left a mark in the history of the Church. Our focus in this exploration is these various aspects of his life seen from the perspective of antiquity as he/she has been part of the beginnings.

2. Chavara in the Ecclesial Formative Period

Living in the 19th century, Chavara awakened not only his time, but also the 20th century and left a legacy for the 21st century. Throughout his life, he laboured zealously for the spiritual and temporal welfare of the Church. Since all his apostolic services had the endorsement of his mystical

¹ The well-known Kerala historian, Sreethara Menon, “Kalathinumunpe Nadanna Navôdhâna Nâyakan,” (*A Renaissance Leader Come before Time*), in *Chavarayachan*, 2004, 16-20, regrets that he did not make an elaborate study of Chavara’s person and contribution. He writes that the life and achievements of Fr Chavara cannot be restricted to the Catholic Church. They are relevant to all communities and to all times. It can be said that Chavara was a great personality born before the times.

experience, they still remain relevant to the Church and the society.¹

2.1. Pathfinder of Indian Christian Mysticism

The history of the universal Church records that only those men and women who led a life encircled by the Divine Spirit could make remarkable and lasting contributions to the Church in its formative years. Standing in a great line of Christian mystics, Chavara had a unique vision of God and humankind. *Dhyanasallapangal* enshrines his God-experience and contemplative dimension. He wrote of this experience: "My heart however, tells me to call you by no other name than my Father."² The joy he experienced from this *abba* experience enabled him to spend long uninterrupted hours in the divine presence of the Eucharist.³ His works were natural expressions and extensions of his intimate God-experience and lived mysticism. Mystical experience is the mark of a person who is close to God in sanctity. It is noteworthy that all the Fathers of the Church in both East and West were men of God although not all of them were mystics.

2.2. Pastoral Awakening

Kuriakose Elias Chavara, who was a diocesan priest, made extraordinary achievements for the Church by means of his dynamic activities. In the formative years of the Church in Malabar, he dedicated his life for the faith formation of the people of God. He fostered their faith, protected it and brought about a spiritual revival among the people. Some of the areas that he brought about the reformation were the

² CWC, *Colloquies*, 5.

³ *Positio*: 541.

formation of the laity and the new converts, foundation of religious communities for men and women, liturgical reforms, schools for public education for all strata of the society,⁴ development of print media⁵ and charity home⁶ for the destitute. A zealous pastor, he focused on the building up of the Church as well as the social, cultural and economic development of the society based on the Gospel values.⁷

2.3. Formation and Renewal of the Clergy

Chavara lived at a time when the native Church was animated by a group of clergy who were ill-prepared for the ministry. He knew that “an uneducated priest was not only inefficient to do anything worthwhile in his pastoral work, but may be even detrimental to the salvation of souls.”⁸ He taught that if the clergy were empowered in formation, they would contribute immensely towards the spiritual uplift of the people of God.⁹ Hence, the monastery

⁴ T. Kochumuttom, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Mumbai: St Pauls, 2014, 239-248; 249-250; M. Mundadan, *History and Beyond*, Aluva: 1997, 169.

⁵ A.M. Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bangalore: Dharma ram Publications, 2008, 346-354.

⁶ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 161.

⁷ The letter that Archbishop Baccinelli wrote to Rome recommending the consecration of Chavara as the bishop co-adjutor bears attests to the pastoral zeal of Chavara that made the Archbishop to propose him as his successor. See Mundadan, *Chavara*, 229.

⁸ L. Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Mannanam: St. Joseph's Monastery, 2003, 6; *Ciriaco Elia Chavara*, Roma: Postulator, 1974, 10.

⁹ J. Kanjiramattam, *Pastoral Vision of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara, the Co- founder of CMI Congregation*, Kottayam: Deepika, 2012, 38.

¹⁰ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 68-76.

¹¹ V. Plathottam, *Vannya Divyasree Chavara Kuriakose Elisachan*, Mannanam: Publisher Unavailable, 1936, 87.

at Mannanam had a seminary attached to it in 1833,¹⁰ and the monasteries at Vazhakulam (1866) and Elthuruth (1869) followed suit.¹¹ Special retreats were preached for them, spiritual books and other literature were made available to them.¹² In various ways, he reformed the ecclesiastical education according to the need of the hour.¹³ The alumni of these seminaries were with Chavara later to confront the divisive challenges the Church faced from various quarters. Along with his confreres, Chavara stepped in to fill the vacuum that was created in the Malabar Church by the absence of effective native leadership.

2.4. Foundation of Indigenous Religious Congregations

Chavara belonged to a Church that was in a comma. The leadership of the European missionaries maintained it but without any vigour. He had often lamented the slumber and the barren state of the Church in India, which despite its antiquity and apostolic connections, had not produced even a single saint, whereas lands that received faith much later have produced them in great numbers.¹⁴ This state of slumber had descended on the Church “owing to the want of a religious house.”¹⁵ In order to level this void, together with two of his mentors, who had had shared his vision,¹⁶ he paved the way for the foundation of no less than three religious congregations – two for women and one for men.

¹² Mundadan, *Chavara*, 343-345.

¹³ Kanjiramattam, *Pastoral Vision*, 38-39.

¹⁴ CWC, Vol. III: *Adhyatmika Kruthikal* (Spiritual Works), Ernakulam (and Mannanam): 1981 (Malayalam), 173f.; English trans. by Jose Chittilappilly, Ernakulam: 1990, 146.

¹⁵ Vol. III: *Adhyatmika Kruthikal* (Spiritual Works), Ernakulam (and Mannanam): 1981, 1; English trans. Jose Chittilappilly, Ernakulam: 1990, 1.

¹⁶ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 109, would note that “these two were the first to have the inspiration and start work on the foundation.”

Despite the several references to the existence of Christian monastic life in India and among St Thomas Christians, Chavara and his companions had no extant monastic or religious models to build on; they had to begin from the scratch. They laid the foundation for the first religious house for men at Mannanam in 1831.¹⁷ The Primitive Rule of the Carmelite Order was given to them in 1855, and they became “Servants of Mary Immaculate of Mount Carmel.”¹⁸ Chavara animated them as their Prior until his death in 1871.¹⁹

The Malabar Church was lopsided. With no religious life for women, and none of them in ecclesial leadership, the Church was almost chauvinistic. In order to remedy this situation, Chavara also facilitated a similar arrangement for women.²⁰ This initiative was made at a time when they were largely denied the basic rights to education, property and proper clothing, a role in decision making in the family, in the Church and society.²¹ A few attempts at such a venture in the past, including the attempts of Archbishop Baccinelli, the reigning European prelate over the whole Church of

¹⁷ Mundadan, *History and Beyond*, 157ff; *History of Christianity in India*, Vol. I (revised edition), Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2001, 187ff; Mundadan, *Chavara*, 158-161, 67.

¹⁸ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 102, n. 44, 103.

¹⁹ CSK (*Chavara Sampoorana Kruthikal*), Vol. I, 57, 77-78.

²⁰ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 281, indicates the possibility that the request that was placed before Arch Bishop Baccinelli included a vision for religious life both for men and women.

²¹ CKC, Vol. I, 84-85; Navya Maria, *Empowered Womanhood*, Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2014, 145-146; J. Pathrapankal, “An Iconoclast in His own Right”, in J. Mannarathara, ed., *The Life and Legacy of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, New Delhi: Viva Books Private Limited, 2015, 241.

²² Mundadan, *Chavara*, 283, 289-290, 343.

Kerala seems to have failed.²² Chavara and Fr Leopold Beccaro OCD, an Italian missionary set out for such a venture.²³ They built a temporary bamboo shack²⁴ and “received some women who were prepared to live this kind of life and accommodated them in a temporary house”²⁵ in February 1866. Eventually, a permanent house was built for them.²⁶ The first convent for native religious women came into existence.

2.5. Ecclesial Revitalization

A lethargic church with little life was reinvigorated by Chavara. He brought about a renewal of the Malabar Church based on the Word of God and the Liturgy. He learnt Syriac and Latin, the liturgical languages of the time and organized the rubrics of the Mass, codified the Divine Office for the clergy²⁷ and the nuns,²⁸ introduced several paraliturgical practices such as Eucharistic adoration,²⁹ Passion week liturgy,³⁰ way of the cross, rosary devotion, novenas to the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph and effected a revival in the spiritual life of the faithful of the Malabar Church. In addition to these, he prepared the

²³ Positio, 558; P. Koyipallil, *A Short Biography of Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara of the Holy Family: The First Prior General of Our Congregation*: (Malayalam manuscript AMSJ), 1929, 57.

²⁴ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 67; Kanjiramattam, *Pastoral Vision*, 66-73.

²⁵ Porukara, *Stapaka Pithâkkanmar*, 39.

²⁶ CKC, Vol. III: *Adhyatmika Kruthikal* (Spiritual Works), Ernakulam (and Mannanam): 1981, 138; English trans. Jose Chittilappilly, Ernakulam: 1990, 115f.

²⁷ Porukara, *Stapaka Pithâkkanmar*, 30; P.J. Podipara, *Nammude Ritu* (Our Rite), Mannanam: St Joseph's Press, 1943, 132f.; Kanjiramattam, *Pastoral Vision*, 57.

²⁸ CSK Vol. IV, 22.

²⁹ *Positio*: 282ff; Mundadan, *Chavara*, 278.

³⁰ See CWC Vol. IV, 1990, 11; 1982, pp. 22f.; Mundadan, *Chavara*, 277.

³¹ *Positio*: 308; Mundadan, *Chavara*, 267-268.

‘Order of the Mass’ and got it printed in 1868³¹ to ensure uniformity in the celebration of the Eucharist with devotion and order.³² This remarkable work was used by the Church for almost a century.

2.6. Educational Revitalization

There was an irrational fear in the ecclesiastical authorities about English education that was introduced by the European Protestant missionaries in the 19th century.³³ The fear prevented Catholics from getting educated and it was disadvantageous to the Catholics. Opening the door of literacy before his people in his own alternative way,³⁴ he opened a Sanskrit school in 1846. He offered education to the commoners and the deprived classes like the untouchables through the parishes in his jurisdiction.³⁵

³² Kanjiramattam, *Pastoral Vision*, 56.

³³ V. N. Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol 2, Trivandrum: Asian Educational Service, 1989, 474; *LMS Report, The Report of the Directors to the Members of the Missionary Society*, London: 1823, 70; K.S. Mathew, “Introduction,” in *Indian Constitution, Education and Minorities in Kerala*, K.S. Mathew and T. K. Sebastian (eds.), Tellichery: Institute for Research in Social Science and Humanities, 2009, 1-29, 9.

³⁴ J. Kanjiramattam, *The Pastoral vision*, 83.

³⁵ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 257. Mundadan also refers to the controversy regarding the origin of the idea and the circular enjoining the parish priests to establish a school adjacent to the churches. K.C. Chacko, *Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Mannanam: The Vice Postulator, 1959, 72. See also Mateer, *Land of Charity*, 29; V. Parappuram, *The Chronicles of the Monastery at Koonammavu*, ASJM, Mannanam: 1474; V. Plathottam, *Malankara Sabha Mathavinte Veera Santhanam*, Mannanam: St. Joseph’s Press, 1939, 137; T. Kochumuttom, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 250.

³⁶ Mundadan, A. M. *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*. Bangalore: Dharma ram Publications, 2008, 256; V. Plathottam, *Malankara Sabha Mathavinte Oru Veera Santhanam*, 37. See Mundadan, *Chavara*, 256; *Alochanapusthakam* (Book of Consultation in the Monastery at Mannanam), 1864-1871, ASJM, Mannanam, 94-95, 26-27, 159.

Owing to the resistance in an area where the upper and lower classes could not be brought together,³⁶ he established a school at Arpukara, solely for the Dalits in 1865.³⁷ Not only did he make education affordable to them,³⁸ and in some cases free of charge, but also provided the mid-day meal as an incentive.³⁹ As a follow up, he made print media and literary facilities accessible to the people.⁴⁰

All these accomplishments made by Chavara and his companions were initiatives that awakened a church that is still reaping the benefits of his vision. The lasting effects of the many reforms that he brought about are still felt in the Church. The far-reaching results of his innovative moves would place him in the formative period of the Church in Malabar. He was at the head of the renaissance and reformation that was happening to the Malabar Church at the time.

3. Chavara the Patriarchal Figure

Chavara was convinced of the Apostolicity of the Church in general and that of the Malabar Church in particular. He wrote: "This Malabar which had received the faith from St. Thomas, the Apostle" confesses the "true faith from ancient times... We, the Nazarenes, are Christians of ancient

³⁷ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 257; J. Paul, *Idaya Natakangal, (Eclogues – Shepherd Plays) by Chavara Kuriakose Elias*, Thrissur: Kerala Sahithya Academy, 2014. 133.

³⁸ H. Wingram, *A Commentary on Malabar Laws and Customs*, Madras: Higginbotham, 1900, 100.

³⁹ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 259.

⁴⁰ Kanjiramattam, *Pastoral Vision*, 86-87. See also Mundadan, *Chavara*, 353

⁴¹ CWC Vol. IV, *Letters*, 1990, 14.

origin..."⁴¹ His zeal to keep the Church away from Roccas and to protect it from the possible division, come from his conviction of the apostolicity of the Church. He took this stance at a time when he could have become the leader of the dissidents, which would have brought him laurels that the missionaries found him unworthy of. His decision made him an avid defender of the Church. He was very proud of the antiquity of his faith and tradition.

3.1. Local Ecclesial Leadership

Although the Malabar Church was an apostolic Church, at the time of Chavara, it was devoid of native leadership. The European missionaries had neither found a local leader nor did they want to hand the leadership down to any native hands. The dissent that developed within the Church in the aftermath of the arrival of Roccas forced the missionaries to find a solution in Chavara. After the appointment of Chavara as the Vicar General, the efforts for a native bishop gathered momentum. Enumerating the benefits of a native ecclesial leadership, for the sake of the stability of the Church, he appealed to the Holy See to make provisions to appoint native bishops in the Malabar Church:

We are Mar Thoma Christians who have received our faith from St. Thomas. For the past many years we had no Bishop of our own. But those who have received their faith in very recent times have a Bishop of their own. Provoked by such envious thoughts when they (believers) get an opportunity they will go to Babel, saying 'Let us resort to Babel for... a Bishop of our own rite. Hence, Your Eminence, I am placing before you a sugge

⁴² CWC Vol. IV, Letters, 1990, 14.

stion ... It is good to have two Bishops here: one for the Latin Church, and the other for the Syrian Church.⁴²

Such an appeal did not produce any immediate positive effect. On the contrary, a few of his confreres were chastised as they demanded a local leadership in the Church. However, eventually, such efforts bore fruit. Ironically, though posthumously, Chavara himself was sought after to be appointed the first native Bishop of the Malabar Church.

3.2. Vicar General for the Malabar Church

In 1861, Chavara was appointed the Vicar General of the Malabar Church. As the Prior of his religious community at Mannanam, he was already giving leadership to the faithful. He had great human qualities; he was prudent, polite but stern,⁴³ and there was no leader in Malabar more fit to lead the Church than Chavara “for the spiritual progress of the faithful and to fight the schism more effectively.”⁴⁴ The reason Baccinelli gave for the appointment of Chavara as the Vicar General is: “On account of the difficulties... in the administration of the churches under our jurisdiction, and on account of our advanced age... ill health, and above all, since I do not find the desired spiritual fruits either among the priests or among the laity... hereby I nominate you vicar general... of the Syro-Malabar Church under our jurisdiction.”⁴⁵ On the personal credentials of Chavara, Baccinelli writes: “I am

⁴³ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 148ff; 206; 224-229; 155.

⁴⁴ Kanjiramattam, *Pastoral Vision*, 96.

⁴⁵ *Positio*: 216; Mundadan, *Chavara*, 206.

⁴⁶ Mundadan, *Chavara*, 206.

convinced that you have the fortitude, ability and the virtue necessary to carry out this office."⁴⁶

3.3. For the Unity and Growth of the Church

The European Vicars Apostolic neither had he linguistic ability to understand and converse with the natives nor the time to learn the culture. Dissatisfied with the European leadership, some members of the Malabar Church turned back to Chaldea for a bishop.⁴⁷ In response, the Chaldean Patriarch Audo sent Thomas Roccas, a Chaldean bishop, as a visitor. The Church in Malabar, assuming that he was sent with authority, gave him a warm welcome. However, when Roccas was asked produce his authorization, he failed to do so. But, by the time, 86 out of the 154 parishes completely and 30 partially followed him⁴⁸ and he began to exercise his episcopal powers as if he had jurisdiction over Malabar Church.

In the ensuing sticky situation of prolonged raucous between the majority who followed Roccas and the minority who did not, Chavara was appointed the Vicar General. His timely intervention saved the Church from a

⁴⁷ Before the arrival of the missionaries, the Malabar Church was given spiritual leadership by the bishops from Chaldea, whereas the temporal leadership remained with the Archdeacon who was a native priest.

⁴⁸ CWC Vol. I, *Chronicles*, 1990, 148-176.

⁴⁹ The Archbishop would also mention his minor reservation about his own proposal which is practical in nature. In comparison with the European Bishops, Chavara would neither have the education nor the episcopal niceties. This is also to be read in conjunction with *Positio*: 264; 265-269, where the objections made by Marcelline Berardi and Leopold Beccaro against the proposal are enumerated. Also see Paul Pallath, *Vicariate Apostolic of Verapoly and the St Thomas Christians in 1896: Kuriakose Elias Chavara Unworthy of Episcopate?*, Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2018, for reasons why Chavara was found an unworthy candidate by the subsequent missionaries.

division. Subsequently, taking his contributions into consideration, Archbishop Baccinelli proposed to nominate him the co-adjutor bishop.⁴⁹ What is worthy of consideration here is that at the time, in the plausible event of appointing a bishop of Malabar origin, there would be nobody found worthy of nomination except Chavara.

Placid Podipara would surmise the outcome of the appointment and the activities of Chavara for the growth of the Church in Malabar:

... at this time, the whole of the Syrian Church was divided, by the Vicar General, into four districts, each being entrusted to one of the Fathers of the Congregation. These Fathers were known, so to say, as the "plenipotentiaries" or "deputies" of the Vicar Apostolic, each in his district. They had special charge over the clergy and the laity; they supervised school work, conducted catechetical institutions, settled naughty disputes and quarrels and transacted other works of importance. 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.⁵⁰

4. Teachings of Chavara and the Fathers

One of the reasons we study the Fathers of the Church is to have a familiarity with their life, which makes us acquainted with Christian doctrine as it developed in the early centuries. By studying their writings in the context of their

⁵⁰ P. Podipara, ed., *The Carmelite Congregation of Malabar 1831-1931*, Mannanam, 1932, 58-59; Mundadan, *Chavara*, 312, 313.

lives and the times in which they lived, we learn the history of the Church in its formative years and the various challenges it confronted. Not only were the Fathers some of the greatest minds in the history of the Church, for the most part, they were also saints, and immense spiritual value is derived from their writings.

Through their writings, the Fathers speak to us with considerable authority on matters of Christian life and doctrine. St John Henry Newman writes eloquently on the significance of the teachings of the Fathers in the second of the Four Lectures on The Patristical Idea of Antichrist: “When they speak of doctrines, they speak of them as being universally held. They are witnesses to the fact of those doctrines having been received, not here or there, but everywhere. We receive those doctrines, which they teach, not merely because they teach them, but because they bear witness that all Christians everywhere held them. As honest informants, they are an authority too.”⁵¹

Similarly, Newman, in his Advent Sermon I on the Times of Antichrist speaks of the obligation of the believers to listen to the Fathers:

Doubtless, no man has any right to impose his own deductions upon another, in matters of faith. There is an obvious obligation, indeed, upon the ignorant to submit to those who are better informed; and there is a fitness in the young submitting implicitly for a time to the teaching of their elders; but, beyond this, one man’s opinion is not better than another’s. But

⁵¹ J.H. Newman, “Four Lectures on The Patristical Idea of Antichrist,” in www.newmanreader.org/works/arguments/antichrist/lecture1.html; accessed on 18.12.2019.

this is not the state of the case as regards the primitive Fathers. They do not speak of their *own private* opinion, but in matter of fact it is held, and has ever been held, by all the Churches, down to our times, without interruption, ever since the Apostles.⁵²

Most of the Church Fathers have made immense literary contributions for which they are known today.

5. Chavara in the Light of the Fathers

The Fathers of the Church have been a vital source of wisdom and inspiration for countless saints, popes, peasants, converts and believers throughout the history of the Church. They have expressed their thoughts on a wide variety of spiritual, religious, historical and even secular themes. In the light of what we have seen above, in the following discussion, we make an attempt to see how Chavara fits into the great tapestry of the patristic galaxy.

5.1. *Didache* and the *Testament of a Loving Father*

The *Didache* is a brief anonymous early Christian treatise, dated back to the first century. The text, parts of which constitute the oldest extant written catechism, has three main sections dealing with Christian ethics, rituals such as baptism and Eucharist, and Church organization.⁵³ The opening chapters describe the virtuous way of life and the wicked way of death. Among other contents of the *Didache*, the Lord's Prayer is included in full. In a similar way, *Chavarul, The Testament of a Loving Father*, written towards

⁵² J.H. Newman, "Advent Sermon I on the Times of Antichrist," in <http://anglicanhistory.org/tracts/tract83.html> accessed on 18.12.2019.

⁵³ O'Loughlin, *The Didache: A Window on the Earliest Christians*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2010, 46-104.

the end of Chavara's life, became central to Christian life at the time. In order to transform Christian families, into a heavenly abode according to the plan of the Creator, practical teachings were explicitly formulated in order to assist early disciplinary formation in the family.

The multi-genre character of the *Chavarul* accounts for the multiple levels of interpretation that it produces. Approaching a fairly old text like *Chavarul* through the lens of the biblical Proverbs and Ecclesiasticus enables us to hear the multiple voices encoded in them for the sake of the family and the formation of children.⁵⁴ The stories and anecdotes that are found in the *Chavarul* point to the many ideological and religious imaginations of Chavara that have produced them for the society and the Church.

5.2. Ecclesiastical History and the Chronicles

The importance of the early ecclesiastical writers was well understood even by their contemporaries. Eusebius, in his fourth-century *Ecclesiastical History*, lists all the Christian writers and writings of which he knows, including quotations, many of the sources of which are no longer extant. In many cases, we only know of these writings from the work of Eusebius. Similarly, much of the contemporary historical details regarding the Church and society in Malabar are derived from the Chronicles that Chavara and his confreres kept.

⁵⁴ Chavara, *Testament of a Loving Father*, Kakkanad: Chavara Central Secretariat, 2014. See also George Kaniarakath, "St Kuriakose Chavara, a Teacher of Family Theology: A Reading in the Light of Ben Sira," *Herald of the East* 13, 2 (July-December 2017), 165-182, who makes a comparative study of *Chavarul* and Ecclesiasticus.

5.3. Theology and Poetry

Saint Ephrem the Syrian was a gifted and prolific poet of the fourth century. He also is a saint and Doctor of the Church who eloquently defended Christian Orthodoxy during a great upheaval. As a deacon, Ephrem taught through insightful hymns and poems for which he is famous. At Edessa, a city filled with Arians, Marcionites, Manicheans and Gnostics, he excelled in defending Orthodox, Nicene Christianity in the face of a myriad of adversaries. Hymns became one of his most effective weapons against heresy. He was a master of music and is still known as the “harp of the Holy Spirit.” Ephrem’s favourite subject in the hymns was the Blessed Virgin Mary. Like many other Early Church Fathers, he knew that a proper understanding of Mary and her role was inseparable from a proper understanding of Christ’s humanity and divinity, his relationship with the Father, and the nature of our redemption in him. Like Ephrem, Chavara engaged with contemporary religions and philosophies. He often used terms borrowed from the Indian literature to explain and illustrate Christian ideas.⁵⁵ Both Ephrem and Chavara use the terminology of vision to describe the way in which Christ dwelt in Mary, filling her with beauty, transforming her for a great purpose.⁵⁶

5.4. Literary and Linguistic Considerations

Jerome, in addition to the biblical projects, was concerned to catalogue the existing Christian literature, in order to show the non-believers that the Christian intellectual

⁵⁵ Jojo Parecattil, *Tattuvasikkoru Chavarabhashyam*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2017.

⁵⁶ Cf. Ephrem, *Hymns on the Church* - 112; Chavara, *Kanakenam*.

tradition was far from negligible. Jerome included some secular and Jewish writers such as Philo, Josephus and Seneca in his list and introduced what was good in them to Christianity. In a similar way, some of the genres of literature was introduced to the society and the Church by Chavara. For instance, though, semi-spiritual, with its implicit articulations, the *Eclogues* are pastoral dramatic plays (1855-1856),⁵⁷ that were altogether a new introduction to the literary society in his context. It was the first of its kind in Indian literature.

The primitive language of the patristic literature was Koine Greek. The Greek Fathers and ecclesiastical writers of the 4th and 5th centuries were outstanding representatives of Atticism, which is a form of elegant Greek. Basil and John Chrysostom were admired by Libanius, the great Sophist for their style and content of writing. Greek was gradually supplanted in the East by the national languages, especially Syriac, Coptic, and Armenian. Ephrem the Syrian wrote his hymn and the bulk of other materials in Syriac. This ancient language came to Malabar Church through the Chaldean Church and was still in use at the time of Chavara. Most of the correspondence that he had, especially with Rome, was in Syriac, the ecclesiastical language of St Thomas Christians of Malabar at the time.

6. Conclusion

The insightful teachings and services of Chavara enabled the Malabar Church not only to keep up her own apostolic faith and traditions, but also to renew her life in accordance with the signs of the times. In these testing times, when the

⁵⁷ J. Paul, *Idaya Natakangal (Eclogues – Shepherd Plays) by Chavara Kuriakose Elias*, Thrissur: Kerala Sahithya Academy, 2014.

Malabar Church is in need of another renewal, an overview of his life profile is very pertinent since the saint was a strong pillar who spearheaded the formative period of the Malabar Church in the 19th century, a crucial time in her quest to regain her identity and autonomy, while keeping intact the unity of the Universal Church.

Syro-Malabar Church is a Church *sui Iuris* with a synodal structure and it has many powers that it can exercise canonically because it has autonomy, for which Chavara and his confreres worked. Since the Syro-Malabar community does not have an officially declared Church Father,⁵⁸ and there is no other contender in the community who deserves this title, and as the Syro-Malabar Church Synod has the power to do it, the Synod ought to declare Chavara *a Father of the Syro-Malabar Church*.

⁵⁸ In this context, St Thomas the Apostle who brought to the Church in Kerala the gift of faith deserves our consideration. There are opinions raised that St Thomas is *the* Father of the Syro Malabar Church. However, we need also to consider the fact that no Apostle is called Father of the Church because the Apostles cannot be relegated to such a rank. Even Paul who claims that in Christ Jesus he became the father of the Corinthian church through the gospel (1 Cor 4:15), is never referred to as the Father of the Church.

THE PIONEERING PATRIARCHAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF CHAVARA

Benny Thettayil CMI

1. Introduction

Like a patriarch, at the beginning of a movement, Kuriakose Elias Chavara spearheaded several innovative and normative practices in the Church which, in the subsequent years of the existence of the Church would have a great impact both in the Church and in the society.

2. The Patriarchal Contributions of Chavara

A closer look at the life of Chavara reveals that, like the fathers of old, as a pioneer in many of his undertakings, Chavara possessed most of the traits of the biblical patriarchs in one form or another. In addition to these, in the following discussion we look at how, based on his contributions that are ecclesial, spiritual and social, he can be considered a unique Father of the Eastern Church.

2.1. The Ecclesial Liturgical Contributions

Chavara realized that a real renewal of the Malabar Church is possible only based on the Word of God and the Liturgy. He learnt Syriac and Latin, the liturgical languages with great zeal and enthusiasm. Ordering the rubrics of the Holy Qurbana, the codification of the Canonical prayers for the clergy, introduction of several para-liturgical practices such as Eucharistic adoration, way of the cross, rosary devotion, novenas to the Blessed Virgin Mary and St Joseph, etc., brought about a revival in the spiritual life of the ordinary faithful of the Malabar Church.

Chavara prepared the *Tukasa*, the 'Order of the Mass' to ensure the celebration of the Eucharist with devotion, attention and order. He prepared and got it printed in 1868.¹ It was a remarkable work, which was used by the Church for almost a century as the only means to bring about uniformity in the rubrics of the liturgical celebration. The compilation of the Divine Office recited by priests was another notable service of Chavara. The prayers that were currently in use were gathered from four different sources, namely, *Hudra*, *Kaskol*, *Gaza*, and *Kala* and it was not easy to recite it in an orderly and uniform manner. The priests were inclined almost to ignore its use. Chavara took up the challenge of preparing a handy Divine Office.² Later, when he became the Vicar General he revised it and sent it to Rome for approval, printed it and made available for the use of the priests. Chavara was conscientious also in compiling the Divine Office for the use the sisters at Koonammavu. The Chronicle of the Convent at Koonammavu records that he compiled it in his own hand marked it with different colours of ink to make them understand the order in which it was to be recited and gave them practice accordingly.³

Since there was no special liturgical service on Holy Saturday in the Syrian rite, he translated the Holy Saturday service of the Latin liturgy into Syriac for the use in Syrian churches. In this regard he wrote to Cardinal Simeon, the head of the Propaganda Congregation in 1864: "Our churches remain closed on that day like the Jewish

¹ *Positio*, 308; *Mundadan, Chavara*, 267-268.

² Porukara, *Stapaka Pithâkkanmar*, 30; P. J. Podipara, *Nammude Ritu* (Our Rite), Mannanam: St Joseph's Press, 1943, 132f.

³ CSK Vol. IV, 22.

Synagogues. So I request you to approve it for us and send it back as early as possible.”⁴ Chavara was a man of reading and reflection. In his letter to the sisters at Koonammavu, he wrote: “The time you save after your proper work and recreation should be spent in spiritual reading. Read the books that give you knowledge and devotion, if you love reading, you will love solitude. When a soul delights in solitude Jesus Christ will come to converse with it in solitude and begin communing with it.”⁵

2.2. Literary Contributions in Spiritual Writings

On account of their nature, the works of Chavara are classified as spiritual and literary works. In the poetic work titled *Atmanutapam*, he remembers his childhood and speaks of his indebtedness towards God for his immeasurable love and mercy and laments over his personal limitations. *The Martyrdom of Anastasia* is the story of a courageous virgin who through her martyrdom, enthused the community to live a life of faith.⁶ *Pana* is his reflection on the experience of death and the teleological rewards of resurrection and life eternal. *Dhyanasallapangal* finds expression of the contemplative dimension of his life.⁷

The *Ecologues* that Chavara composed are pastoral plays which had shepherds as the leading characters.⁸ Perhaps, the style was a European adaptation, but it was the first of its kind in Indian Literature. *Chavarul*, which

⁴ CWC Vol. IV, 1990, 11; Mundadan, *Chavara*, 277.

⁵ CWC Vol. IV, *Letters*, 1990, 85.

⁶ CWC Vol. II, *Compunction of the Soul, Dirge, Anasthasia's Martyrdom*, 1989, 129-172; Mundadan, *Chavara*, 366-368.

⁷ CWC Vol. III, *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 1990.

⁸ J. Paul, *Idaya Natakangal (Ecologues: Shepherd Plays)* by Chavara Kuriakose Elias, Thrissur: Kerala Sahithya Academy, 2014.

was written towards the end of his life, was composed in the style of a testament drawn up by a loving father. The objective of the composition meant for his own parishioners was to transform families into heavenly abodes.⁹ The testament has a lasting relevance as it gives inspiration and guidelines to families to live a virtuous and joyful life.

Chavara was the first writer of the St Thomas Christian Community to have engaged in such prolific writing. He wrote in the vernacular as did some of the Fathers of the Church in their time. Although his writings were heterogeneous in style, we notice the biblical, salvation historical and mystical flavour that makes his works worth reading.

2.3. Social Contributions

Chronicles that Chavara recorded throughout his life and the letters that he wrote to various individuals on various occasions are considered here. He had a very keen sense of history and ability to record with great accuracy. These pieces of literature illustrate the socio-political life of Kerala and the history of the Church of his time. These writings reflect his historical consciousness, farsightedness, honesty in recording and the sense of justice. They are a window to the great personality that Chavara was as could be deduced from the following discussion on his contributions at various levels.

2.3.1. Chavara as a Pioneer

In the St Thomas Church in Malabar, social outreach of any kind was unheard of at the time of Chavara. The time of his

⁹ Chavara, *Testament of a Loving Father*, Kakkanad:Chavara Central Secretariat, 2014.

social intervention and the extent of what he did for the entire society, cutting across religions would undoubtedly make him the first of the many social reformers in Kerala who kindled the light of renaissance in the society and brought about numerous social changes that had a great impact in the society.

On account of the visual effect of the glowing trail that a shooting star leaves in the dark sky, it is also called a trailblazer. Analogically, the term is used for such rare personalities who, on account of their great contributions to the society, in a particular walk of life or several of them. They are also called trailblazers, for they blaze 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 rather than trailblazers. It is easier to be trailers of that which pulls you. It helps escape responsibility and security is guaranteed by that object that does the pulling. Chavara was such a trailblazer doing exciting work that could shape various fields of activities for decades and centuries to come.

2.3.2. Chavara as a Pace-Setter

Social mobilization for the sake of the uplift of the poor was not heard of until the time of Chavara. For the first time in the society, he was able to conscientize his people to be considerate towards the less privileged people. An innovative programme of fundraising was set in motion by means of which many an underprivileged family was saved from hunger.

An innovator in any field of endeavour is one of the first to introduce into reality something better than ever

before. This introduction, in turn, opens up new areas for others to follow suit. Such a person lives and moves in a society, which gradually begins to revolve around him because he is able to provide end-to-end solutions to the issues that he confronts in the society and helps members of the society bring their imaginations into reality. Often, an innovator is a very active consumer of and contributor to the cultural riches of a society and his novel and innovative ways reflect cultivated tastes for upscale standards.

With dogged tenacity Chavara worked in pursuit of that which he saw in the eye of his mind. Very often he was successful and sophisticated. He showed how the energy inherent in people could be put to new or better uses in order to expand opportunities for or enhance the present status of the society. Like the shooting stars, innovators are few and far between but, that part of the society that was touched by the effect of this star eventually begins to feel the change from within. However, the world is full of imitators who for the right reason look up to the innovators like Chavara, for inspiration and direction.

2.3.3. Chavara as a Moderniser

Availability of materials of for the dissemination of information, ideas and inspiration is at the root of mass modernization. On the one hand, the prolific literature that he produced touching various aspects of life with implications on social, religious and familial fronts contributed to the uplift of the literacy of the general public. On the other hand, he put in place the facilities for the mass publication and distribution of the materials produced with the help of the printing press that he established.

A trendsetter in any field, like Chavara, is an early adopter, who visualizes and brings into existence, and further into use, a fashion or trend before most other people begin to think of it. Subsequently, everyone else follows him. Trends are usually long lasting and indicative of a broader cultural shift as exemplified by the broad adoption of the educational initiatives in the nineteenth century South India by Chavara, in response to the educational initiatives of the Catholic Church. Sometimes trendsetters are so unconventional that their words, deeds, and innovations are not based on the well-accepted standards of the society. Chavara, the trendsetter was so versatile that he offered enough flexibility to suit the needs of the times. This flexibility helped him form a cushion between two generations whose merge is often uneasy and jolting. He worked and accomplished missions faster than his historical average.

2.3.4. Chavara as an Educational Beacon

Having assessed, like a *pater familias*, the low educational standard of the members of his Church, which was his family,¹⁰ he put in place facilities that were essential to raise the standard. The Sanskrit School opened for the untouchables and the decree that he circulated asking all the parishes to open a school attached to them must be seen in this light.

Patriarchs, as pioneers, start popular movements for the sake of the family with implications for the society. Their place is in the heart of the society. Often, they do the

¹⁰ His "Testament of a Loving Father", written to the members of his family, which was the local parish, is to be taken and read in this light.

fundamental work that will spawn future innovations and set new trends. The breakthroughs that the pioneers achieve in various fields will be taken up by tomorrow's leaders who share the vision of the pioneer. Often, they take charge of the situation because they are people with high self-esteem. Since their resources from within are abundant, they exhibit motivations in high degrees.

Chavara was not only a leader who brought about this kind of change in the society, but he was also most receptive to new ideas. Certainly, the seminal idea of the advancement of the education in his society came from the foreign non-Catholic missionaries who had opened schools in those places where they were active. He implemented the idea in his society in his own unique way. His vision in conceiving a movement, courage in pushing it to the limits to get it off the ground and persistence in keeping its momentum, left a trail for others in the field.

2.3.5. Chavara as an Originator

From his social engagements, Chavara derived the conviction that the basic needs of the poor people of his society must be fulfilled in order to push for the secondary, but loftier needs of the society. Hence, he organized meals for the children who attended the schools that he opened. This would not only entice children but also satisfy their hunger without causing a burden on their parents.

Like an innovator, Chavara set in motion a process which not only benefited people of his society at the time, but also came to be adopted by the public administration much later. Inventors are those who identify a need of the society and are bent on meeting the need by finding a

solution in remarkably novel ways. They are often immersed in presenting the society with something new. The passions and creations of Chavara reflect a cultivated taste for finer things in life – more refined and more perfect than that of the past generations. What is invented by him carries a mark of his taste, because the invention is the externalization of his independence and personality. Despite the fact that he was among the emerging leaders in a given area of taste, he continued to seek and meet challenges. Versatility is his hallmark that his life is characterized by variety.

2.3.6. Chavara the Visionary Patriarch

Abraham, the first of the patriarchs, set out with the vision of the nation with the countless subjects and the land that lay far in the future. In faith he laid foundation to a nation and became the progenitor of that nation (Heb 11:8ff). Much in a similar manner, Chavara was able to foresee in his vision that the future of his Church would be bright one day far in the future and with his confreres, laid the foundation for that future that eventually was realised.

Visionaries are those farsighted people, who, for the sake of the society, are able to gaze into the future and are able to visualise cutting-edge initiatives and solutions for the vexing issues that the members of the society are grappling with. Thanks to the experiences of engaging with the challenges he encounters, a visionary is able to engage with a wide cross section of the society where there is an opportunity to interact with raw realities of life. Chavara visualised dynamic platforms to bring together people with a similar vision, from various walks of life, to have a unity in purpose and encourage integrated action that matches

the complexity of the issues that the society faces. Each section of the society was his concern that he either launched or became instrumental in launching initiatives that promoted women and the marginalised and ensured the participation of individuals and groups, men and women in the social and spiritual development and change.

3. Conclusion

This Indian priest spearheaded an impressive number of initiatives, including a publishing house, several institutes, and two religious congregations – all aimed at maintaining and promoting the cultural and social present and preservation of Catholicism in the modern world. He intervened on behalf of the Church in Kerala at several turning points in her history. The interventions that he made at the arrival of an unauthorised Bishop, a request that he made for a separate bishop for the Church of Malabar and the liturgical practices that he implemented in the Church speak not only of leadership but also the vision that he had for the Church in Malabar. As one of the greatest scholars of his age, his educational initiatives that addressed the challenges of the formal education system offered a viable alternative that enhanced the access to quality education for people from low-resource backgrounds.

Chavara reportedly drew his strength from the hours he had spent in contemplation each day. The secret of his intense and busy life is found in the long hours he gave to prayer. He preferred to pause before the Blessed Sacrament, to gain spiritual fortitude and return to gaining people's hearts, to bring them back to the sources of life by means of fresh pastoral initiatives. Engaging himself socially, spiritually, and intellectually in his society, Chavara

became a true herald of the good times to come, a Father of the Church.

Kuriakose Elias Chavara was one of the luminaries that appeared in the overcast skies over India and left a well-defined trail for many a man and woman of the following generations to find paths that are answers to the burning issues of faith and morals that they faced in their locale, time, and society. The manner in which he left his mark on various areas of life, lighting up the ways for generations to come, would invite men and women not only to continue the various humanitarian projects that he undertook and the spiritual pursuits that he made, but also to be blazers of new trails in responding to the needs of the present time whose exigencies and priorities are very different from those of his times.

PART THREE

THE THOUGHT

The Church is our Mother who nourishes us
with the sacraments and guides us in truth.

Stay faithful to her teachings and
partake in her sacramental life.

- Chavara

The Church Fathers are considered the authentic witnesses of Christian life and faith. Apostolic Fathers were closest to the time of the Apostles and were the earliest noncanonical witnesses to the Church's understanding of the Christian Scriptures. Subsequently, as the Church grew in number and became more noticed, it also became the target of criticism and needed to be defended against the charges that often discredited it. Questions were to be answered, defences had to be given against allegations made against Christian beliefs, and explanations were to be provided for the practices of the believers. This work was done by the learned witnesses of the subsequent generations who are later named Church Fathers, the Christian Apologists.

When the Church grew and spread abroad, it gathered into its flock people of different cultural backgrounds. This necessitated the development of various schools of thought in various Christian centres and there, teachers with sound interpretations of faith laid the foundation of theology as a separate branch of academic science as Greek Philosophy came to the aid of theological formulations and doctrinal articulations. These teachers, both in the Christian East and West, manifested the strength of Christian truth and the power of Christian life in their writings that this period was marked by concerted learning on matters of faith and morals and the resultant literature that was prolific in nature.

The core of the teaching of the early Church Fathers was the rule of faith, a brief, creed-like summary of doctrine. Even though the wording varied from place to place, the formula was remarkably consistent in content. They proclaimed what the apostles had taught in a lot of words.

The crude form of the creed: that God had become man in Jesus Christ, whose life had been foretold by the prophets; was born of the virgin, lived and died, rose from the dead, and is now glorified. Eventually, centuries of refinement caused these formulas develop into the uniform baptismal creeds that we have today.

We attempt to map the theological renewal of the 19th century emphasizing its rich fecundity for the life of the St Thomas Christian Church of Kerala. Just as the Fathers of the Church, in the formative years of the Church borrowed concepts from the Greco-Latin world in order to articulate the primary content of the confession of the Christian faith, Chavara, in the formative years of his Church, although in a very different way, illuminated the Christian anthropological, ecclesial, theological and ethical concepts and deepened them through the various kinds of works that he left behind. Christology and Trinitarian doctrine held a significant place in his writings. Rather than refuting heterodox positions on these subjects, meditating on the Scriptures and the lives of the saints, he met the catechetical and pastoral needs of his time and guided the community of his time to a deeper understanding of the Christian mystery.

Around the time of Chavara, catechumenates gave intensive catechetical teaching to the new aspirants to faith. They must have used the most basic formula as their course outlines. They would teach the new Christian candidates the Lord's Prayer, walking petition by petition through the Our Father. They would teach them the Creed, explaining article by article of the Creed. They would drill them on the most basic rules to be followed to belong to the people of God by clarifying commandment by commandment in the Decalogue. In all these, in a rudimentary manner, as

the times demanded it, they remarkably conveyed a constant sense of the divine origin of the doctrine, even as they spoke frankly of its practical consequences for everyday living as members of the Church.

Catechesis of the new Christians after baptism focused on the sacramental rites, introducing them step by step and explaining the meaning of the symbols, words, postures and gestures. In this kind of mystagogical teaching, theology of the Sacraments was given to the people.

Like the early Fathers the Church, much of Chavara's theological convictions came through the varied works that he has left behind. The celebration of the liturgy and the sermons that he preached, and the various writings became a vehicle to reach his popular theology to them.

As a Malpan, officially appointed by the Bishop, at an early age, Chavara was a teacher of theology. He would prepare a candidate for his ordination. What he taught, he lived and what he lived is reflected in his writings. In this section, our attempt is to glean his theological contributions that are found strewn throughout his literary works.

ORTHODOXY OF DOCTRINE AND DEFENCE OF FAITH IN SAINT CHAVARA

Sophy Rose CMC

1. Introduction

In the Catholic Church, there are many canonically declared saints; some of them are acknowledged as “Fathers of the Church” and a few others are recognized as “Doctors of the Church.” According to the *Instruction* given by the Congregation for Catholic Education¹, the fourfold criterion based on which a saint is declared “Father of the Church” are antiquity,² sanctity, orthodoxy and ecclesiastical approval. Meeting these criteria are mandatory for the purpose.³ Although, the universal Church now considers only those persons who have met these criteria as the Father of the Church, history shows that the title “Father of the Church” was not applied to anyone based on a canonical process or a set of previously approved norms but evolved through what had happened in the history of the Church and in and through her lived faith. The so-called Fathers of the Church are the ones who lived during the formative period of Christianity and contributed to the spiritual, doctrinal, theological, and pastoral building up of the Church.

¹ At present, the office is known as the Dicastery of Culture and Education.

² Those persons who lived until the eighth century

³ Congregation for Catholic Education, “Instruction on the Study of the Fathers of the Church,” *L’Ossevatore Romano*, Weekly Edition (English), 15 January 1990, pages 8-15.

The title “Doctor of the Church”⁴ has been attributed since the Middle Ages to certain saints whose writing or preaching is outstanding for guiding the faithful in every age. Three requirements are to be met for the recognition of a saint as a Doctor of the Church: (1) Great Sanctity: Only those who have already been declared to be saints by the Church may receive this title. (2) Eminent Learning: Those who are declared Doctors of the Church are known to be great teachers of the Faith. (3) Declaration by the Church. The saints who complement the sanctity with eminent theology and depth of doctrinal insight are eligible to be considered Doctors of the Church. They penetrate the mysteries of faith deeply, explain them with exceptional clarity and unfold their implications for the life of the Church. They also provide an extensive body of writings which the Church can recommend as part of the authentic Catholic Tradition. Hence, Pope John Paul II described “a Doctor of the Church as one whose writings not only conforms to the revealed truth, but also shed new light on the mysteries of the Faith.”⁵ The Church often names someone a Doctor of the Church because that individual found a special way of expressing the Gospel message that is ideally suited to meet the needs — and cure the moral, spiritual, and intellectual ills — of the People of God. In other words, they are “doctors” not only in the sense of manifesting deep theological knowledge, but also in the sense of knowing how to apply that knowledge to the needs of souls. They are doctors not only in an abstract theological

⁴ The Doctor of the Church is a title given to individuals having been of particular importance, particularly regarding their contribution to theology or doctrine.

⁵ John Paul II, “St. Therese of Lisieux proclaimed a Doctor of the Church: homily,” cited in Steven Payne, *St. Therese of Lisieux: Doctor of the Universal Church*, New York: St. Paul’s, 2002, 3.

way but in a medicinal-spiritual way. Here arises the question relevant to this discussion: Is Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara, the earliest saint of the Syro-Malabar Church, such a theologian and is eligible to be declared a Doctor of the Church?

2. Theological Vision of Chavara

In the following pages, we bring to light in a systematic way the doctrines that are implied in the writings of Kuriakose Elias Chavara exploring them from a theological perspective to establish the theological orthodoxy in the writings of various kinds that he has left behind. Although these are not theological treatises, in these writings of Chavara, there are doctrines, dogmatic teachings, theological visions and insights that expose his theological orthodoxy. In his writings, we come across abundance of Scriptural insights,⁶ traditional theological vision,⁷ references of doctrines,⁸ and dogmas,⁹ insights from the writings of the Fathers of the Church,¹⁰ and saints.¹¹ In addition to these, his writings anticipate theological insights from Vatican Council I¹² and Vatican Council II¹³, and papal teachings.¹⁴ All these indicate that he was a man of insight

⁶ Literal quotes as well as ideas from the Scripture we find in almost all his writings.

⁷ Example: Teaching about the purgatory in his *Maranaveettil Padunnathinulla Pana/Dirge*.

⁸ Doctrine on the Trinity in his *Atmanuthapam*.

⁹ Christological as well as Marian Dogmas in his *Atmanuthapam*.

¹⁰ St Clement of Rome's vision of Ecclesiastical jurisdiction in his *Letters*.

¹¹ Quotes from St Ephrem, St Ambrose, etc., in his *Letters*.

¹² Primacy of the Pope in his *Letters*.

¹³ Equality of the Churches in his *Letters*.

¹⁴ Teaching of Pope John Paul II on Family and Lord's Day in his *Letters* especially in the *Chavarul*.

and foresight who had his theology anchored in the Scripture, Tradition and had his thoughts conformed to the *Magisterium* of the Church. Our attempt here is to systematize his doctrines, theological visions and insights in the framework of the contemporary theological discipline.

2.1. Theology of the Triune God

First of all, let us explore God-vision of Chavara. His writings, especially *Atmanuthapam*, his epic poem, provides an orthodox *theology*, i.e., the Trinity. Pope Benedict XVI wrote in the *Foreword* of his own book *Jesus of Nazareth* as follows: “It goes without saying that this book is in no way an exercise of the *magisterium*, but is solely an expression of my personal search ‘for the face of the Lord’ (cf. Ps 27:8).”¹⁵ Paraphrasing the words of the Pope and applying them to Chavara, we see that *Atmanuthapam* is in no way a dogmatic treatise on God, but solely an outpouring of the faith experience of Chavara, who longed to see the splendor of the incarnate Son of God’.

In *Atmanuthapam*, we see a gradual unfolding of the mystery of God along with his understanding of the role played by Mary the Mother of God and the autobiographical notes of his own life. He contemplates the Eternal God, who has no beginning creating the universe out of nothing, and himself as the son of Adam in the image and likeness of God. He presents the incarnation of Christ who came to save the humanity, especially the sinners. Hence, God is, on the one hand, the un-originate origin of all beings and on the other hand, the redeemer of

¹⁵ Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, New York: Doubleday, 2007, xxiii.

all beings. He presents the mystery of God who is transcendent and at the same time as the mystery that is revealed and involved in the history of human beings for their salvation. The appellations or the titles of God that we come across in *Atmanuthapam* express his vision of both the transcendent God and the God who revealed himself and involved in the very life of human beings. The appellations are purely biblical and most of them are attributes of God, and they express the very nature and attributes of God. They are: God Almighty (Canto I, 1), Lord Eternal (Canto I, 4), Omnipotent (Canto I, 9), Perfect One (Canto I, 13), Holy Lord (Canto I, 29), Almighty God Supreme (Canto II, 62), Being Immortal (Canto II, 162), Infinite Great (Canto II, 162), Eternal Good (Canto II, 338), the Supreme God-head (Canto IV, 5), God the Trinity (Canto XI, 488), Glorious God (Canto XII, 31), etc. These appellations shed light into his understanding of the Godhead, who is beyond our human comprehension. He speaks of this God, a *God in itself*, an 'Immanent Trinity', as the 'Inseparable Trio' in the following way:

An Inseparable Trio, Father

Son and Spirit, Triune God (Cantos XI, 443-444).

2.2. The Economic Trinity

In the *Atmanuthapam*, however, Chavara narrates also how the Triune God has become *a God for us* and *a God with us*, *the Emmanuel*. As the fulfilment of the promise made by God, the second person of the Trinity incarnated in the purest womb of Mother Mary and became the Emmanuel. He is the Eternal Son of God. However, except sin He made himself identified with the humanity in order to elevate us from sin to the right hand of God. He writes:

Of God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit
 The Son Incarnate in Mary's purest womb
 (Cantos I, 71-72)

The Almighty, the fountain of all goodness
 The King of kings, Omniscient Lord of All
 The second person of the Holy Trinity
 The Lord borne by the Queen of the world
 (Cantos IV, 29-32)

Though born on earth as man
 Though from Eternity the Father's Son
 Though as man he took upon Him
 The full human nature, all
 Except the original stain of sin
 A grace to match it, there was none.
 (Cantos XI, 187-192)

To elevate us to the Right hand of God
 You the perfect, became man
 (Cantos III, Appendix, 47-48)

In order to address the "*God for us*" and the one who showed His infinite mercy and compassion towards human beings, Chavara makes use of some other titles. There are titles that he used to address or to describe the God who became the part of history indicate his personal relationship and experience of God. Some of those titles are: Infinite mercy (Canto I, 4), God of unbound kindness (Canto I, 29), Sea of Mercy (Canto I, 30), Fount of Mercy (Canto I, 33), My Lord My God (Canto I, 37), God the Father, Son and Holy

Spirit (Canto I, 71), God my Father (Canto I, 86), My Lord (Cantos I, 99; II, 75, 82, 307, 339), God of love and goodness (Canto I, 99), Lord of Mercy (Canto II, 1), God of Mercy (Canto II, 43), my Goodness infinite (Canto II, 92), God of all creation (Canto II, 159), Giver of peace (Canto II, 160), My God (Canto II, 344), Infinite Goodness (Canto IV, 37), Fountain of Compassion (Canto IV, 37), my Loving Father (Canto IV, 201), God our Father (Canto XII, 69), etc.

Chavara is presenting a 'God for us', an *Economic God*, who revealed himself and involved in the history. He had an integrated understanding of God as Immanent as well as Economic. He was not speaking about a God, the Trinity, as 'locked up in itself and unrelated to us' but as 'a self-communicating God in the person of Christ and the activity of the Holy Spirit'.¹⁶

2.3. Trinity in *Atmanuthapam*

Chavara speaks verbally more on the Trinity after the resurrection of Jesus and in relation with the assumption, honouring Mother Mary in heaven. The crucial idea he presented here is that the role of Mary in the redemptive act of God and is willed and planned by the Holy Trinity. Hence, through the mouth of the Son, the poet acknowledges Mary's role in His redemptive work and His intention to place her with Him. The author writes:

Hearing the Son's decree, the Father
 And the Holy Spirit rejoiced
 (Cantos XII, 291-292).

¹⁶ Cfr. C.M. LaCunga, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*, San Francisco: Harper, 1991, 2.

Before her assumption into heaven, the blessed Trinity provided an appearance to Mother Mary. In that context also Chavara speaks very vividly about the Holy Trinity:

The Blessed Trinity then appeared
 The mother at once fell prostrate
 The words from His presence Great
 Came down and was heard

“My beloved Queen, my Spouse
 My friend, your wish is all granted”
 God the Father proclaimed in joy
 My daughter through my love

Granted are your prayers now
 And your will shall be done
 Hereafter” The Father, Son
 And the Spirit affirmed the same”
 (Cantos XI, 425-436).

Again, regarding the enthronement of Mary in heaven with her Son, he writes:

The Triune God highly pleased
 The Father the chief of the Trinity
 A sound proclamation made
 For angels and celestial beings to hear

Behold the foremost of our creation
 This my daughter, know you for certain

Henceforth unto eternity shall reign
A spotless Virgin crowned as Queen
(Cantos XII, 308-316).

In short, Chavara was well aware of the dogmatic teaching of the Church on the Holy Trinity and he believed, taught and articulated it authentically even in the poetic form of his literature just as St Ephrem, the 'harp of the Spirit'. He did this not in an abstract way but based on the Economy of God that is revealed through the incarnated Son in the Holy Spirit in history.

2.4. The Incarnational Thought

In the writings of Chavara, especially, in *Atmanuthapam*, we find a profound theology of incarnation. According to it, the second person of the Trinity, the Son, assumed human form and was born from the Virgin Mary. Thus, the *God in itself* has revealed as a *God with us* and a *God for us*. In *Atmanuthapam*, the main thrust of Chavara's articulation is the *Economic Trinity*, who is a compassionate, merciful "God for us", a *God who became one with us*, the *Emmanuel*. So, with extreme brilliance and deep contemplation he presents the incarnation of the second person of the Trinity and the humanity of Christ. However, very passionately and meticulously he narrates in the poem the salvific involvement of this God for us.

The uniqueness of Chavara's presentation in *Atmanuthapam* is that he looks at the incarnation and the subsequent events 'with Mary, and in and through the eyes of Mary.' As the one who experienced, involved and the one who pondered over the mystery of incarnation and the subsequent events in deep silence and ecstasy, Mary is the paradigm for Chavara to contemplate and articulate the

experience of the *Emmanuel* in human terms. Chavara contemplated Christ with Mary as, much later on, Pope John Paul II asked in *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, his Apostolic Exhortation. In this Exhortation, the Pope depicts wonderfully how Mary contemplated Christ.¹⁷ Likewise, Chavara also contemplated the Christ event, especially the incarnation, with Mary. Similar to Mary's contemplation, the loving gaze and contemplation of Chavara is seen in *Atmanuthapam*.¹⁸ "In contemplating Christ's face we become

¹⁷ The Pope depicts beautifully how Mary contemplated Christ in this Apostolic Exhortation in the following words: "The contemplation of Christ has an incomparable model in Mary... No one has ever devoted himself to the contemplation of the face of Christ as faithfully as Mary. The eyes of her heart already turned to him at the Annunciation, when she conceived him by the power of the Holy Spirit. In the months that followed she began to sense his presence and to picture his features. When at last she gave birth to him in Bethlehem, her eyes were able to gaze tenderly on the face of her Son, as she "wrapped him swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger" (Lk 2:7). Thereafter Mary's gaze, ever filled with adoration and wonder, would never leave him. At times it would be a questioning look, as in the episode of the finding in the Temple: Son, why have you treated us so? (Lk 2:48); it would always be a penetrating gaze, one capable of deeply understanding Jesus, even to the point of perceiving his hidden feelings and anticipating his decisions, as at Cana (cf. Jn 2:5). At other times it would be a look of sorrow, especially beneath the Cross, where her vision would still be that of a mother giving birth, for Mary not only shared the passion and death of her Son, she also received the new son given to her in the beloved disciple (cf. Jn 19:26-27). On the morning of Easter hers would be a gaze radiant with the joy of the Resurrection, and finally, on the day of Pentecost, a gaze afire with the outpouring of the Spirit (cf. Acts 1:14). See John Paul II, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2002, n. 10.

¹⁸ The Lord of Mercy, the Son of God
His glorious splendour, I long to see
How he stayed for nine months
In the womb of His mother I long to see

open to receiving the mystery of Trinitarian life, experiencing ever anew the love of the Father and delighting in the joy of the Holy Spirit.” (RVM 9). This is what we see in Chavara as he contemplated on the mystery of the Holy Trinity. This presentation was not simply a dogmatic one, rather a mystical realization and description of the mystery of Trinity. In this manner, in his literary works, he presented a profound theology of Incarnation without making any detriment to the theology of the Trinity. He lived and expressed the essential dimension of faith as belief in the incarnation of the Son of God is the distinctive sign of Christian faith. As St John writes in the Epistle, “by this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God” (1 Jn 4:2). The same is found in the Pauline Letters also: “This is the mystery of our religion: he was manifested in flesh” (1 Tim 3:16). Such is the joyous conviction of the Church from her beginning.¹⁹ That is why Pope Benedict XVI said: “The *factum historicum* (the historical fact, i.e., incarnation) is not an interchangeable symbolic cipher for biblical faith, but the foundation on which it stands: *Et incarnates est* – when we say these words, we acknowledge God’s actual entry into real history. If we push this history

God becoming one with man
 “Emmanuel”, I long to see
 The holy child gazing at His mother
 With darling eyes I long to see
 The lips enkindled with a smile
 The fire of love, I long to see
 The mother fondly feeding the child
 With milk at her breast I long to see...

Like that his pondering over the Emmanuel goes on. The full text we find in Cantos III, 1-100

¹⁹ cfr. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 463.

aside, Christian faith as such disappears and is recast as some other religion.”²⁰

3. Christological Expressions in the Writings of Chavara

Several of the literary works of Chavara have significant Christological content. However, generally, Chavara is not an easy Christological reading because all his works are involved simultaneously in several different discourses. Ecology, theodicy, anthropology and ecclesiology are within reach even as he is discussing Christology. The peripheral allusions are always fascinating, but they are also distracting, especially because Chavara’s works do not travel in the train-like lines of conventional theological discourses. His Christology, grounded in the New Testament, often narrative rather than doctrinal. He does not follow the categories of systematic theology. Hence, we will have to search carefully, in order to find a few Christological statements.

3.1. The Hypostatic Union in Christ

The basis of Christian faith is the mystery of the Triune God who is the communion of three divine persons – Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. It is the Father who sent the Son into the world in order to redeem the world from sin and sent the Spirit to be with us always. Even so, it is through the Son that we reach God and approach the divine mysteries; for no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him (Mt 11:27). Jesus himself said: “No one comes to the Father but by me” (Jn 14:6b). Hence, as we said earlier, belief in the Incarnation of the Son of God is the distinctive sign of Christian faith.

²⁰ Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, xv.

Nevertheless, as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches, "The unique and altogether singular event of the Incarnation of the Son of God does not mean that Jesus Christ is part God and part man, nor does it imply that he is the result of a confused mixture of the divine and the human. He became truly man while remaining truly God. Jesus Christ is true God and true man" (CCC 464). Chavara was very much conscious of this faith of the Church, although he does not mention the name of the Council of Chalcedon that confessed and defined the Christological Dogma of *Hypostatic Union* against *monophysiticism* in 451. While narrating the incarnation of the Son who assumed human form, he writes in *Atmanuthapam* as follows:

Your promise to fulfil, came your Son
 Assumed human form, on the earth
True man and true God you came from above
 And on earth sojourned our Elder brother
 (Cantos II, 169-172).

Thus he clearly presented the basic Christological dogma, the divinity and humanity of Jesus in one person. While articulating this faith of the Church about Jesus Christ, as *True God and True Man*, he is not hesitant to say that, this Son who came from above is also our 'Eldest brother.' Most probably, while he was writing these lines, Heb 2:11 has been in his mind.

3.2. Consubstantiality of the Son with the Father

It is worth noting that according to Chavara, although the Son is incarnated and became a babe, He is neither inferior nor subordinate to the Father. With much conviction he writes: "The Baby Son is as great as the Father" (Canto V,

131). Again, the poet makes it clear when he narrates the passion of Christ that, even if the incarnate one, the Son is undergoing suffering and persecutions from the Jews and chief priests, He is not inferior to the other persons of the Trinity. Rather He is the “Eternal Son of God, *Co-existent* with the Lord of all and the Sovereign of mankind” (Cantos VII, 257-260).

From this we deduce the probability: Though Chavara was not acclaimed as a theologian, and there was no theological treatise written by anyone from his Church in his time, and had no possibility for him to have direct access to the Council teachings, he was very much conscious of the faith of the Church confessed and defined by the first Ecumenical Council of Nicea in 325. In the Nicene Creed, it is confessed that “the Son of God is “begotten, not made, of the same substance (*homoousios*) as the Father” (Cfr. CCC 465). What was available to him was the creed of the Nicea-Constantinople Councils (325 and 381 respectively) that was recited during the liturgical celebration and family prayers, that defined the *con-substantiality* of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit as a dogma. His faith was enlightened by the constant prayer he made (*lex orandi lex credendi*).

3.3. Titles of Christ and Christological Themes

In the writings of Chavara, in addition to the aforesaid dogmatic confessions, there are almost all the Christological confessions and titles pronounced by the early Church including the apostles and the writings of the Fathers. He imbibed also the faith confession of his Father in faith, St Thomas the Apostle: My Lord My God (Cantos I, 37; XII, 170). A close look into *Atmanuthapam* gives us the titles and

expressions that indicate the second person of the Trinity. Sometimes we come across one and the same titles to represent the Triune God as well as the incarnated Word Jesus Christ. It is only from the context that we can make out to whom he is addressing. This way of articulation we see mainly when he narrates the passion and death of Jesus. At times we see, the addressing or the articulation are coming not directly through his mouth, but he puts them either in the mouth of Mother Mary or of the heavenly Father.

The Christological titles that are found in his writings are: Son of God (Canto III, 1, 27), Redeemer of human kind (Canto III, 6), My Lord (Cantos II, 75, 87), Son Incarnate in Mary's purest womb (Canto I, 72), True man and true God (Canto II, 171), Our Elder brother (Canto II, 172), God-man (Cantos II, 241; VI, 162), Son of Man (Canto III, Appendix, 17), Son of Almighty God (Canto III, Appendix, 1), Saviour of man (Canto V, 141), Emmanuel (Canto III, 16), Christ (Canto I, 60), King of Kings (Canto I, 60; IV, 30; V, 76, 141; VI, 41), Son of Royal David (Canto IV, 170), Baby Son as great as the Father (Canto V, 131), My Lord the Blessed babe Emmanuel (Canto IV, 189), Lord of Mercy (Canto II, 1; III, 1; VI, 261), God of Mercy (Canto II, 43), Almighty God supreme (Canto II, 62), Good Shepherd (Canto III, 97), Goodness infinite (Canto II, 92), Lord of All (Canto III, Appendix, 57; Canto IV, 183; V, 25, 142; VI, 7; Cantos VII, 53, 265), O Lord of the Gospel, (Canto III, 95), Lord of Goodness (Canto III, 99), Redeemer (Cantos IV, 206; VI, 288), my Treasure (Canto IV, 206), God-born man (Canto V, 5), Saviour of all (Canto V, 28), my father (Canto V, 147), my maker (Canto V, 147), Shepherd Gracious (Canto V, 173),

Son of God (Canto VI, 7; Canto VII, 8), Lord of Lords (Canto VI, 7), and Son of the Most High (Canto VI, 41).²¹ In addition to all these, Chavara had some other special articulations regarding his Christ experience. They are: Christ is his *Appan*, Father and his *mathavu* (*thaya*) mother.

3.4. Christ as *Appan*, the Father

The basic God-consciousness of Jesus was this: God is his Father and He is the Father's Son. Chavara imbibed this experience of Jesus and articulated it in his writings: God is his father - *Appan* - and he is His son. This experience of the fatherhood of God and the sonship of himself are the

²¹ In addition to these, there are Christological references in the following tiles that Chavara has employed: The only begotten Son of God the Father (Canto VI, 45), Son of the Mighty God (Canto VI, 71), Lord of Justice (Cantos VI, 155; VII, 552), Lord and Master (Canto VI, 286), Lord of the world (Canto VI, 304), World's redeemer (Canto VI, 307), My Lord (Cantos VI, 309, 327, 333, 351; VII, 85, 141, 231), My Master (Canto VI, 333), Saviour (Canto VI, 333), My Hope (Canto VI, 333), Redeemer (Canto VII, 9), New Star (Cantos VII, 14, 20), God, king of the Jews (Cantos VII, 29; VII, 594), Lord God of the universe (Canto VII, 51), my master (Canto VII, 51), Author of all (Canto VII, 55), creator supreme (Canto VII, 93), Light of the World (Canto VII, 111), Son of the mighty (Canto VII, 124), O Lord my God (Canto VII, 214), eternal Son of God (Canto VII, 258), Co-existent with the Lord of all (Canto VII, 259), Sovereign of mankind (Canto VII, 260), royal Son of David (Canto VII, 260), My Father Beloved (Canto VII, 280), God of All (Canto VII, 280), I'm your Father benevolent (Canto VII, 286), I am He (Canto VII, 306), I'm the Creator (Canto VII, 315), I'm your Father, I your loving God (Canto VII, 332), my Father, my Creator, my Lord (Canto VII, 334), My loving Father I'm your son (Canto VII, 416), My God, my Love, my Master (Canto VIII, 1), O Loving God (Canto VIII, 6), my Father Beloved (Canto VIII, 15), my loving Father God Eternal (Canto VIII, 35), the Saviour (Canto VIII, 50), O my God, My blessed Father (Canto VIII, 61), My beloved Lord, my Father (Canto VIII, 66), Lord of the Triple world (Canto IX, 71), Christ our Lord (Canto XII, 62), My Son, beloved my Lord my God (Canto XII, 170).

most sublime aspects of Chavara's God experience and awareness. At the zenith of his God experience, he calls Christ also as *ente appa* (my Father). It is particularly when he meditates on the agony of Jesus that he calls Him 'Father' most affectionately. The following lines of *Atmanuthapam*, which describe the agony of Jesus standing before Pilot express this fact:

Many a query the villain made to you
 O God most pure, your blessed voice to hear
 But he, a sinner deserved not the grace
 "My Loving Father", I'm your son
 (Cantos VII, 413-416).

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

His words divine he recalled to his mind
 "I'm your Father, I'm your loving God
 Yet, you thrust this cruel spear in my heart"
 Alas, my Father, my creator, my Lord
 (Cantos VII, 331-33).

Eight times, Chavara calls Jesus as Father in the seventh Cantos of *Atmanuthapam* and twice in the eighth Cantos (Cantos VII, 223, 286, 343, 345, 416, 419, 532, 548. See also Cantos VIII 61, 63, etc).

When he meditates on the passion of Jesus, he calls Him "*Appa*" in the *Dhyanasallapangal*: "Oh merciful Father, I am unable to raise my eyes and look at your face. Lord, looking at your holy head, I feel frightened to think how it came to be pierced with thorns ... O my Father (*Ente Appa*),

how graceful; is your face! The rapturous Song of David in praise of the beauty of your face rings in my ears... But, my Father, my heart now gets heavy to look at your face.... Alas! I myself disfigured my Father's face, the beauty of which David the prophet sang plentifully (CWC, Vol. III, 6). The extraordinary style of addressing Jesus as the Father expresses his knowledge of the divine persons, than his ignorance. It is also an indication of his mystical union with the second person of the Trinity who himself says: "I and my Father are one" (Jn 10:30). It is noteworthy that when the saint contemplated on the passion of Christ, he addressed Jesus as Father. It may be because when he meditated on the passion of Christ, he experienced the intensity of God's indefinable love in its depth and perceived the manifestation of that love in the self-oblation of Jesus on the cross. This overwhelming love led him to a mystical realm that was beyond the categories of human mind and intellect. This may be the reason for him to ignore the distinction between Father and Son.

Another reason may be his consciousness about the revealed truth. It is through the redemptive death of Jesus and by his precious blood that the sinful humanity is saved, and the lost sonship of humanity is re-established. Hence, as the one who raised him again in the position of son, Chavara calls Jesus Christ as his *Appa*, Father.

3.5. Christ as Mother

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

You like a father patiently followed my trail
 Whispered unto my heart, "you are my love
 Mark you, my son, a good Father am I

And a *mother both*” – you filled my mind
(Cantos VII, 343-346).

There are clear references in the Scripture presenting God as a loving mother. For example, Prophet Isaiah says: “Can a mother forget her sucking child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even if she forgets, I shall not forget you” (Is 49:15-16). Again, Jesus says in the Gospel of Mathew: “Jerusalem, Jerusalem... How often I would have gathered your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not” (Mt 23:37). These texts highlight the maternal character of God’s love. Here, Chavara recalls the caring, forgiving, self-giving, tender and merciful maternal love of Christ who searched for him, carried his sins on the cross, healed his sickness and sacrificed His life for him. It is this heartfelt, sweet experience of the maternal love of Christ that enabled him to love others with utmost care and affection and made his life beautiful like a green pasture, fruitful like a vineyard, sheltering like a tree and dynamic like a running stream.

4. Theological Anthropology

Saint Chavara was convinced in faith that it was out of the mercy of the eternal God, that he was created a human being. More precisely, he was created a son of Adam (Cantos I, 1- 4; II, 163).²² When he acknowledges that he is

²² May be he is influenced by Gen 5:3. The beginning of the chapter says that when God created man (Human being) Adam, He made them in the likeness of God. When we come to verse 3, the Scripture says: “When Adam ... became the father of a son in his likeness, according to his image, and named him Seth.” It is very important to note that here the Scripture is not saying that Seth is created in the image and likeness of God; instead, in his (i.e., Adam’s) likeness and according to his image. Chavara who was well versed in Scripture might have understood the implication of this saying.

created a son of Adam, it implies that he is a sinful human being who has only the distorted image and likeness of God; because, the pristine image and likeness of God that Adam had in the initial stage is damaged on account of his sin. Here, the author is indirectly presenting the concept of "original sin."

Nevertheless, in the following lines, he acknowledges that God has created him truly great, *i.e.*, in the image and likeness of God the omnipotent; yet, due to his limitless unworthiness he is a sinner (Cantos I, 9-10). If we delve deep into these lines in the light of the Book of Genesis, we get profound insights. God created man/ Adam in his own image and likeness; that means, his existence was truly profound, blissful, spotless and graceful. But due to the disobedience he lost his ideal state and became a sinner. Every human being born as son of Adam, as Chavara said about himself (Cantos I, 2), has two states intermingled. First, though distorted, he has the image and likeness of God and second, the unworthy state of the sinned Adam. It is God's mercy that will raise human beings from the impoverished state to the highest of heaven. That is what Chavara writes in the following lines:

Omnipotent your will that me a sinner
You molded truly great in your likeness
O God, despite my limitless unworthiness
You did show in it, your mercy boundless...
A human being, me, impoverished you raised
To the highest skies, your abode
(Cantos I, 13-16).

4.1. Awareness of Unworthiness and Sinfulness

In *Atmanuthapam* and in *Dhynasallapangal*, Chavara presents himself as an unworthy son and a sinner. He admits his limitless unworthiness as “a sinner” (Cantos I, 9-11). He considered himself a son unworthy to stand before the Lord. This feeling of unworthiness was not the result of the sins that he committed, but because he had a true sense of God who is so holy and awesome. He has imbibed the attitude of the Psalmist who said with a deep sense of repentance: “For I know my iniquity, and my sin is ever before me” (Ps 51:5). Similarly, his disposition is reminiscent of the Prophet Isaiah having a vision of the Holy One in His glory and he cried out: “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips and I live among the people of unclean lips...” (Is 6:5). While reflecting on that stage of life between the age of 5-10, doing his elementary school under a non-Christian teacher together with non-Christian classmates, he presumes that he lost his childlike innocence and he regrets over the loss as follows:

Alas my Lord! God of love and goodness
 Joy and peace, since from me have fled
 My heart sore-pressed with sorrow and pain; I felt
 I was no more the privileged child of God!
 (Cantos I, 99-102).

As a man, Chavara was aware of the snares of evil and the possibility of sin. So, he took great care to avoid sinful situations and actions. Consequently, he maintained the purity of conscience and was able to confess the state of the purity of life on his deathbed. In this respect, Chavara is a glaring sign to the modern world where man suffers from the lack of sin-consciousness. The message from

Cardinal Peter Palazzini, the former Prefect of the Congregation for the Cause of Saints given during the Proclamation of the Beatification of Chavara in 1986 is very relevant here: “Even though he could declare on his death bed that he had always kept his baptismal innocence, he had a deep sense of sin. In this sense, he is a question mark to the modern world which seriously lacks the same sense of sin.”²³

4.2. Redeemed Sinner

When Chavara meditated on the holiness of God, he considered himself to be the greatest of sinners, but he also was a man of hope. He never lost his trust in the mercy of God. He acknowledged that it was out of God’s mercy that he received the grace and became God’s adopted son in the sacrament of baptism (Cantos I, 40-42). He considered himself a *redeemed sinner* or a saved son as he wrote:

O Fount of Mercy, in your crystal streams of grace
 Was my soul once cleansed and made spotless fair
 Beauteous, bright, bedecked in gems of virtue
 Through my Baptism, a boon, a day of days
 (Cantos I, 33-36).

Full worthy to be condemned though I’d been
 Through his infinite mercy was I saved
 (Cantos II, 45-46).

Gone are the days of innocence and of grace

²³ *Footprints of Holiness, Souvenir of the Canonization of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara & St Euphrasia Elavathingal*, 23 November 2014, Published by CMI-CMC Congregations 2015, 203.

In wilful vice, I plunged with light-hearted ease
 Anger and pride and every ugly sin
 Filled my piteous soul intolerable woe!
 (Cantos II, 115-118).

Though a sinner, my unworthiness He redeemed
 O wonder of wonders! "Grace Supreme"
 Your mercies will I sing forever and ever!"
 (Cantos I, 129-131).

The theological vision of Chavara on man is very profound and is rooted in the Scripture. What can be gleaned out of his several literary works are the following: God is his creator, and he is created in the world in the image and likeness of God as the son of Adam and due to his own unworthiness, he is a sinner. However, through the merciful love of God, he is cleansed and has become God's son through the sacrament of baptism, which is the fruit of the redemptive act of Christ. So, as a son of Adam he is a sinner, and as a son of God he is a redeemed one.

5. Eschatology

In the writings, especially in the *Maranaveettil Padanulla Pana (Dirge)*, we see the eschatological thoughts of Chavara. The poem deals with the four ends of human beings: death, judgment, heaven, and hell.²⁴ In this work, he speaks of the communion of saints and the three wings of the Church. As he refers to the purgatory, he also mentions the necessity of doing reparation for the deceased members of the Church by offering Holy Eucharist, prayer, penance, fasting,

²⁴ CWC, Vol. III, *Dirge*, lines, 205-214.

almsgiving, etc.²⁵ It reminds us also the urgency of doing good and practising virtues in view of a blissful heavenly life.²⁶ Nevertheless, as members of the body of Christ, Chavara exhorts the members of the militant Church to give spiritual help to the members in purgatory, since they are unable to do anything for themselves. This is a sign of the communion of the members of the mystical Body of Christ. He had the firm faith that all the members of the mystical body are redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. In the following lines we find the faith of Chavara referred to:

Behold am I a soul thus saved
By the precious blood of the Lord
It is by our hope in this blood
That makes our life there bearable.²⁷

6. Conclusion

From the aforesaid analysis of Chavara's writings it is clear that they are encumbered with theological insights and doctrines. Like mother Mary, he pondered on the Word of God and spent long hours in deep contemplation before the Eucharistic Lord. So the Lord revealed to him the divine mysteries. Otherwise, how can a man who had only very preliminary education until the age of 10 and a few years of clerical formation under the guidance of a native priest could write such a lot of literary works with much quality of language and theological insights!

Chavara was a man of the Holy Spirit, wisdom and practical knowledge; a man of vision and insights and was

²⁵ CWC, Vol. III, *Dirge*, lines, 1077-1078.

²⁶ CWC, Vol. III, *Dirge*, lines, 191-200.

²⁷ CWC, Vol. III, *Dirge*, lines, 339 – 342.

a mystic and a missionary. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he led his life and the same Spirit prompted him to articulate his divine experiences, doctrinal insights and theological visions as a natural outcome of his heart and mind. Hence his writings are worth as that of other learned men and have many theological and doctrinal insights. Although the writings of Chavara are rich in content, his prominent works are in poetic form. So, the insights that are implied in them are not yet brought out properly and thoroughly. Nevertheless, in this paper, we were trying to bring out certain salient theological insights and doctrines. We made it in the light of the Scripture as well as the magisterial teachings. Our search provides the impression that Chavara is a man of inspiration; he is a 'charismatic' writer, who was guided by the Spirit of Truth.

Thus, in the preceding pages we brought into light in a systematic manner the doctrines that are implied in the writings of Chavara and explored a few domains of his theology. As it is evident from the content, in his writings there are orthodox doctrines and dogmas on the Holy Trinity, on Christ, on Mother Mary, on the Church, on man and theological visions and insights about man's destiny. Although he was not a student of a theological college or a systematic and professional writer of theology and didn't intend to write theological treatises, in his writings we come across genuine theology. His writings contain abundance of Scriptural insights, traditional theology, doctrines, dogmas, theological highlights and insights of the Councils and the teachings of the contemporary Popes in anticipation. Hence, his writings are theologically rich, doctrinally sound and literally orthodox according to the Catholic faith. Consequently, he provides a deeper understanding of Christ's mystery and the mystery of the

Church; they conform not only to the revealed truth but also shed new light on the mysteries of faith. However, with prophetic vigour and fervour he defended the faith, unity and communion of the Church and showed unequivocal obedience to the Holy See. Thus the doctrines he professed and proclaimed through his life and writings can be a source as well as reference point to inspire the Church as a whole, each and every believer and the members of the hierarchy in particular and even the theologians. All these give the first hand impression that he is a profound theologian having the Orthodoxy of doctrine and defence of Faith.

MARIOLOGY IN THE WRITINGS OF CHAVARA

Sophy Rose CMC

1. Introduction

Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara speaks about mother Mary enormously in his writings, especially in *Atmanuthapam*. In it, he depicted the role of Mary in the 'Mystery of Christ' as well as in the 'Mystery of the Church', which, for Chavara, is the salvation history.¹ In the following pages, we bring out the contents of the Marian Dogmas and doctrines that are reflected in his writings.

2. Dogmas about Mary

The Catholic Church pronounced four Dogmas regarding Mother Mary: Virginity of Mary, Mother of God (*Theotokos*), Immaculate Conception and Assumption of Mary. Although theological writings in a language that is intelligible to Chavara were not common during his lifetime, he had kept himself abreast with the theological developments in the Church. His writings are filled with the teachings of the Church. The first two dogmas were declared in the 5th and 7th centuries respectively. The dogma of Immaculate Conception was defined during his lifetime. However, what is surprising is that the pronouncement of the Dogma on the Assumption of Our Lady happened about 80 years after his death. Yet, he speaks elaborately about the 'taking up of Mary into heaven' and her coronation

¹ Exactly the same way of presentation we find in *Lumen Gentium* Chapter 8.

as the 'Queen' of heaven and earth. Let us have a glance at his presentations regarding the content of the Marian Dogmas.

2.1. Mother of God (*Theotokos*)

Although the Latin missionaries attributed Nestorian heresy to the St Thomas Christians of Malabar, in reality, they were not heretics. Their faith, life and practice were not Nestorian as they were accused. The living experience and tradition of the community can be traced from the teachings of Chavara that he imbibed from his own mother, who is a representative of the ordinary faithful of the St Thomas Church of Malabar. For example, in *Atmanuthapam* Chavara makes a reflection on a certain event that influenced his spiritual life very much along with the religious education he received from his mother. The event is his dedication that his mother made to the Mother of God at the church at Vechoor whose principal patron was the Mother of God. In the narration of this event, Chavara quotes his mother's words of dedication: "Holy Mary, *Mother of God* and *Virgin Mother*, I offer the fruit of my impure womb at your feet; accept him and protect him as your servant" (Cf. Cantos II, 4-8). The way his mother, - a simple, ordinary and village woman, addressed Mother Mary in this prayer of dedication reveals the faith that prevailed in the St Thomas Church of Malabar. In the context of the Nestorian heresy, the faith of the Church was expressed in two defined dogmas concerning mother Mary - the Virginity of Mary and Mary the Mother of God (*Theotokos*), a title that was given to Mary by the Council of Ephesus (431). In his writings, we see repeatedly the title 'Mother of God' (Cf. Cantos I, 60; II, 255; V, 140; VII, 86, 90; X, 335 etc.).

2.2. Perpetual Virginity

The second dogma, the Perpetual Virginity of Mary, means that Mary was a virgin before, during and after giving birth to Jesus, the second person of the Trinity. From the first formulations of faith, especially in the baptismal formulas or professions of faith, the Church professed that Jesus Christ was conceived without human seed, but by the power of the Holy Spirit. The early baptismal formula (since the 3rd century) stated Mary's virginity without explaining it, but there is no doubt about its physical meaning. The later statements in this regard were more explicit. The Council of Lateran in 649² pronounced that Mary conceived "without any detriment to her virginity, which remained inviolate even after his birth."³ Chavara addresses and invokes her as Virgin many times. For example: "Oh virgin mother (Cantos II, 245; VII, 117; IX, 1; Concluding prayer, 1), Spotless Virgin mild (Canto IV, 35), Virgin, star of the Sea (Canto VI, 36), Holy Virgin (Canto XI, 1), Spotless Virgin crowned as Queen (Cantos XII, 316), etc. He explains this virginal birth with a beautiful allegory as follows:

Filled with joy unprecedented
 To overflowing, her holy soul
 Gazing up at the Father, thus
 In utter humility prayed:

"O Father, Sea of Mercy your Spirit
 The Lord took birth in my womb
 The blessed Gem of your Son I pray
 Place in my arms that men may see"

² This council does not belong among the 21 Ecumenical Councils.

³ www.google.com The Four Marian Dogmas, catholicnewsagency.com; accessed on 28-4-2019.

Thus prayed she, and humbly bowed
 Her son, she saw lying before her
 Quietly as the Sun's ray penetrates glass
 Delivered without defiling her virginity
 (Cantos V, 39-50).

In addition to all these with firm belief he wrote in a very clear-cut terms, the testimony of the angels in heaven, when he narrated the taking up of the Virgin mother into heaven as follows:

All who came to sang in joy
 A Virgin before and after conception
 Chaste at the time of nativity
 Chaste forever" so acclaimed
 (Cantos XII, 208-210).

2.3. Immaculate Conception

The third dogma about Mother Mary is her Immaculate Conception. Pope Pius IX, in *Ineffabilis Deus*, the Apostolic Constitution, proclaimed this dogma on 8 December 1854. It states that "the most Blessed Virgin Mary from the first moment of her conception by a singular grace and privilege from Almighty God and in view of the merits of Jesus Christ was kept free of every stain of original sin." This pronouncement happened during the lifetime of saint Chavara. It is on the first anniversary of the declaration of the Dogma that Chavara made the religious profession canonically in the newly erected religious Congregation, *viz*, "Servants of the Mary Immaculate." With regard to Mary's Immaculate Conception the poet writes:

The presentation in the temple
 Her holy birth free from sin
 Her nuptials with her chaste spouse
 Her Immaculate Conception
 (Cantos XI, 177-180).

Mother mine, supreme among women
 The stain of sin was never in you
 When the Triune God pronounced you His own
 And loved you from your birth
 With resounding words, he joyed His Mother
 And said, "You my lovely queen
 Full pure you are, all bright
 You alone, unstained by sin"
 (Cantos XI, 213-220).

When Chavara speaks about the Immaculate Conception, he makes a very solid theological statement and presents it in a paradoxical way; that is, Mary was born as a child of Adam. Nevertheless, she does not have any stain of sin. See for example:

Though you were born as a child of Adam
 No trace of sin the cause of every woe
 Shall ever taint you good lady pure
 Your sacred feet, the serpent's head did crush
 Woman accursed by her deadly sin
 She will conceive and give birth in pain
 But you, untainted by like misfortune

Will pass your days in grace and glory gain
 From the moment of your conception holy
 Nothing shall ever befall you except joy
 (Cantos XI, 205-206).

The Great God rend erring her Immaculate
 Raised her for begetting Him
 She was born sinless to her Son
 The same privilege was given
 (Cantos XI, 211-212).

2.4. Assumption of Mary

The fourth and the last dogma about Mother Mary is her Assumption. This was declared by Pope Pius XII on 1 November 1950 through his Encyclical *Munificentissimus Deus*. The dogma states that “Mary, immaculate Mother of God ever virgin, after finishing the course of her life on earth, was taken up in body and soul to heavenly glory.” Among the four dogmas, the assumption of Mary was pronounced as we have already mentioned, about 80 years after his death. But the ‘faith of the faithful’ in this regard is very ancient and is very explicit in the writings of Chavara. In *Atmanuthapam*, he solemnly and vividly presents the entry of the Immaculate Mother, who is the beloved of the Holy Trinity, the pride of her Son and the joy of the heavenly choir into heaven. He speaks elaborately about this as a Trinitarian event:

Then the heavenly sire ordered
 To lead her to the throne
 And a signal voice she heard
 My love, ascend to the skies (Cantos X, 75-78).

And lo one day as she stood praying
With her angels, her son appeared
Into a chariot lifted her
Unto the bosom of the Father
The mother now fell prostrate
And adored God the Father
The Son to the angels gave command
To seat her by His left Hand
The great God rendering her Immaculate
Raised her for begetting Him
For the grace, she gratefully offered thanks
With her Son, Holy Trinity she praised
God immovable in heaven's region
Established firmly, irrevocably
She was born sinless; to her son
The same privilege was given
Mother mine, supreme among women
The stain of sin was never in you
When the Triune God pronounced you His own
And loved you from your very birth
With resounding words, he joyed His mother
And said, you my lovely queen
Full pure you are, all bright
You alone, untainted by sin
Hearing this, the court of Heaven
Praised God and acclaimed with glee
All angels clapped their hands
With harps and timbrels thus sang
"Mary mother immense born holy

Fair without stain of sin"
 Then she the holy people sees
 In Heaven, all look akin
 (Cantos XI, 197-228).

The insight here is that the privilege of being taken up into heaven is given to Mary due to her immaculate birth and the love that the Triune God showered upon her due to her full co-operation and participation in the redemptive work of the Trinity, especially, in the salvific act of her Son Jesus Christ.

3. Marian Doctrines

In addition to the Marian dogmas, the following Marian Doctrines and theological insights regarding Mother Mary are found in the writing of Chavara.

3.1. Mary, the Woman Promised

Chavara presents Mary as the 'Woman' and Jesus as the 'offspring' promised by God at Eden as we see in the Book of Genesis 3:15. Here he presents Mary as the 'crown of womankind' and through her the promise of God to humankind is fulfilled. Since she fulfilled God's words regarding the curse pronounced by God to the serpent, that is, "I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers; He will strike your head..." generations hail her as blessed. On this role of Mary, Chavara writes in *Atmanuthapam* as follows:

Mother benign, O crown of woman kind
 Through you was God's promise to man fulfilled
 Since Eve, the First parent, the mother of all

Was deluded by the vile serpent's vice
 The Supreme God-head then to the Serpent spoke
 "Athwart the earth you'll crawl and eat of dust"
 Pointing to the Blessed Mother he said
 Betwixt her sons and you I will enmity evoke
 "The Son born of her, your head shall crush
 Underfoot without fail" This curse
 Found fulfillment in you, Hence for all
 Ages to come, generations will hail you "Blessed"
 (Cantos IV, 1-12).

3.2. Mary, the Child of Adam

Chavara's profound theological insight can be detected from the following lines that testify the fact that although Mother Mary is the Mother of God, she is also a human being, a daughter of Adam, just as all other human beings. It is God's grace that raised her, a human being to the divine realm, as the one who is devoid of original sin.

Though you were born as a child of Adam
 No trace of sin the cause of every woe
 (Cantos IV, 13-14).

Thanks for boons resplendent
 And praised the Almighty with grace
 The grace bestowed on her through virtue
 Its magnitude and high merit
 Though born on earth as human being
 The full human nature all
 Except the original stain of sin
 A grace to match it, there was none
 (Cantos XI, 182-192).

This is a very splendid idea that we find even in the documents of Vatican Council II. In *Lumen Gentium* 8, we read: “the daughter of Adam, Mary, consenting to the Word of God became the Mother of Jesus. Committing herself whole-heartedly and impeded by no sin to God’s saving will, she devoted herself totally as a handmaid of the Lord, to the person and work of her Son, under and with him, serving the mystery of redemption, by the grace of the Almighty God (LG 56).

Again, we see that through Mary, the poet makes the whole humankind the brethren of Mary as she intercedes for them before the triune God.

For my brethren, the dwellers of the earth
 Plead for them yet, I pray
 That they may love you as you deserve
 They my brethren, humankind
 That they may know you as their God
 And their gratitude express
 Bear patiently all things unpleasant
 Turn each woe and pain into joy
 Remember each boon you granted
 A treasure for gaining heaven to employ
 (Cantos XI, 455-464).

3.3. Mary, the New Eve

In his meditations on Mary, Chavara makes a contrast between Eve and Mary. After the fall, God said to Eve: “I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children” (Gen 3:16). Here Chavara

writes: Mary, the immaculate did not experience the pain of childbirth:

The queen of virgins by sin untainted
 Knew not the least pain of childbirth
 (Cantos V, 37-38).

The important point that the poet presents before us is that Mother Mary is the “Woman” promised by God and she has the power to destroy the powers of the Evil. She would give birth to her Son without any labour pain:

Quietly as the Sun’s ray penetrates glass
 Delivered without defiling her virginity
 (Cantos V, 49-50).

Here Chavara makes a comparison between the old Eve and the new Eve just as the Fathers of the Church like Irenaeus and Ephrem did. The same idea is seen in *Lumen Gentium* 56. By referring Thomas Aquinas, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says that “she uttered her ‘yes’ in the name of all human nature.”⁴ By her obedience, she became the new Eve, mother of the living” (CCC 511).

3.4. Mary, the Co-operator in Redemption

The poet does not always speak directly about Mary. But he puts his words on the lips of Jesus and speaks through Him as if Jesus is speaking to Mary. Chavara expresses his idea that Mary co-operated with Jesus in accomplishing the salvation of humankind, and thus, she is the co-operator of redemption. operator of redemption. Chavara puts it as if Jesus himself is acknowledging and pronouncing it:

⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* III, 30, 1.

You the joy of the blessed world
 Co-operated for the redemption of man on earth
 I, of the holy Church, the Head
 And you, its benign mistress who sealed
 Her holiness by my Blood
 (Cantos XI 396-400).

Mother sweet, my beautiful dove
 Because of love my will in all
 Even my work of redemption
 Through your bounteous love was done
 (Cantos XI 353-356).

At the work of redemption, She
 In truth did share with me
 (Cantos XII 285-286).

3.5. Mary the New Tabernacle

In *Atmanuthapam*, Chavara makes a comparison between Mother Mary carrying the child and the Tablet kept in the Tabernacle in the grand and beautiful Temple of Solomon (Cantos IV, 37-48). In this manner, Chavara presents her as the New Tabernacle. The relevant portion of this poem is the following:

In this Tabernacle he placed the Tablet
 Inscribed with the commandments divine
 So in your sacred womb immaculate
 The Adorable Deity calmly dwells
 (Cantos IV, 45-48).

3.6. Mary, Queen of the World

The traditional recognition of Mary as the Queen of Heaven obtained the papal sanction in *Ad Caeli Reginam* (Queenship of Mary in Heaven) the Encyclical of Pope Pius XII in 1954. However, it was part of the traditional faith of the Church. Chavara imbibed this faith even before the official pronouncements and articulated it with clarity in various terms. He addresses Mary as My Queen (Cantos IV, 35; VII, 434; Concluding prayer, 8), Queen of Virgins (Cantos II, 221; V, 37), Mary Queen mother (Cantos III appendix, 45), Queen of the world (Cantos IV, 32; VI, 228; XIII, 49-50), Queen of the triple World (Cantos X, 1), Heaven's Queen (Cantos X, 202), Spotless Virgin crowned as Queen (Cantos XII, 316), etc.

3.7. Mary, Mother of the Church

The role of Mary in the mystery of the Church is depicted in *Atmanuthapam*, mainly from Cantos X onwards. She takes leadership in uniting the scattered disciples of Jesus and conducts herself as a mother, solace, guide, support, etc., for their sake. However, she leads a life as an obedient member of the Church and a humble servant at the disposal of the head of the Church appointed by the Divine Saviour. The apostles, in turn, were very eager to honour her and make consultation with her in the decision they were to make. In all these depictions of Mary, we detect the attitude of Chavara towards the Mother. He presents her as the solace of sinners, Mother of the Church, sister of the humanity, consulter of the apostles, etc. Chavara perceives that it is the Heavenly Father himself who is entrusting the Church to her. Having commanded the angels to take Mary

up into heaven, the Heavenly Father entrusts to her the Church founded by His beloved Son.

And a signal voice she heard:
 "My Love, ascend to the skies!"
 The Father then approached her
 And lovingly said: My daughter,
 Your Son, my beloved Son, the
 Church founded on earth by Him
 It has so grown in number
 I entrust it to your care"
 The Holy Spirit on her bestowed
 Virtues great of wisdom and knowledge
 The loving Father then entrusted
 The Church to the Mother's care and pledge
 (Cantos X, 77-88).

It is Mary who prepares the apostles to receive the Holy Spirit as promised by Christ.

Now as decreed by the Almighty
 She made the faithful dwell in Sion
 For ten days in prayer awaited
 To welcome the "Paraclete"
 And the gifts He graciously gave
 And powers the Peter received
 (Cantos X, 123-128).

3.8. Mary, the Solace of Sinners

Chavara presents Mother Mary also as the one who give solace to the sinners as well as the one who intercedes for them:

Forth with the angels with a display of music
 Bowed on her and hailed her the Queen
 The domain of Creation of the Church forever
 The mother for the solace of the sinners
 (Cantos X, 89-92).

On such days with devotion
 She would for sinners, pray to her Son
 To save them all from damnation
 Her love would stem their destruction
 (Cantos XI, 257-259).

Jesus gives assurance to his mother that he will redeem the sinners with his precious blood. However, he asks her to pray for the sinners:

And I with my blood would pardon
 All the sins, by my faithful done
 "And once you have entered Heaven
 To absolve these from stain of sin
 And be the succor of men who sin
 Your duty would be to pray for them
 (Cantos XI, 363-368).

3.9. Mary, the Intercessor for the Church

When the number of the faithful increased in the Church, the wicked Lucifer began to torture the flock of the Son. As the first martyr, Stephan died. Saul began to persecute the faithful. In this context observing the situation very carefully, Mary prayed to her Son for the protection of his flock.

The Mother too observing this
Prayed that evil may turn to good
The loving Son heard her prayers
Assured her he would grant it
From the sky a bolt came
That made Saul give up his scheme
(Cantos X, 151-156).

From the following lines we get the idea that it is due to the intercession of the Mother that the conversion of Saul happened. And becoming aware of his faults, he turned back to the Saviour and his mother with a repentant heart. The Mother consoled him and encouraged him to go forward as a committed disciple of Christ. In these parts of the poem, the poet makes use of his imagination, and the descriptions are not in conformity to the Scripture. Nevertheless, the point that he conveys is solid and valid i.e., the intercession of Mary for the Church and her maternal care towards it.

Then when all matters he learned
Deeply grieved he then became
Hearing of Mother's deep grief
He felt could not face her again
Saul thus sat overcome with grief
The mother sent to him an angel
Who consoled and baptized him
Counselled him and prayed with him
(Cantos X, 157-164).

3.10. Mary, an Adviser in Decision Making

Although this is not a narrative that we find in the Scripture, the poet gives a role to Mother Mary in order to tackle the problems that emerged among the Apostles. When the head of the apostles, Peter decided to make an assembly at Jerusalem to clarify the doubts and solving the issue raised among them, he invites Mother Mary also with them. The poet indicates the place and role they have given to Mother Mary in the affairs and growth of the Church. The following lines vividly speak about the content of the letter and the honour that Peter, the head of the Church, has for Mother Mary.

To Mary, our Mother of God
 We write this for a good cause
 Your servant, the apostles of Christ
 The *slave of your servants*, Simon Peter.⁵
 Our Lady some doubts have arisen in us
 Some new doubts in your servants
 So the apostles have assembled
 In Jerusalem the chief of cities
 Our mistress, if you are not with us
 The new decision will not please
 Hence if you come to us now
 Many a rare gift, will be ours
 (Cantos X, 335-346).

⁵ Pope St Gregory I (590-604) was the first to use this title "Servant of the Servants of God" (*servus servorum Dei*) extensively to refer to himself as pope in official documents; the title thus initiating a practice that was to be followed by most subsequent popes.

4. Conclusion

Although vivid in imagination, Chavara presents a very strong, biblically and traditionally sound view on Mother Mary that he imbibed from his own mother at home and kept alive throughout his life. He propagated this faith among the believers through the devotion and pious practices that he introduced in the Church in Kerala through his writings and pious practices like the Rosary devotion.

ECCLESIOLOGICAL VISION OF CHAVARA

Sophy Rose CMC

1. Introduction

Kuriakose Elias Chavara lived in the 19th century – to be precise, between 1805 and 1871 – that is, almost one century before the Vatican Council II. The uniqueness of this pastor is that, although he lived and wrote before and during Vatican Council I (1869-1870) that declared the Primacy of the Pope and Infallibility of the Pope as dogmas, his life and teachings are more saturated with the teachings of Vatican Council II, which would take place in the future (1962-1965). His writings, especially, *Letters*, *Chronicles* and various poetic works contain his ecclesiological views and thoughts. His letters, especially the letter that he wrote to the Holy Father Pius IX, to the Prefect of the *Propaganda Fide*, the *Circulars* to the Parishes that he wrote in the wake of the arrival of Mar Thomas Roccas, the unauthorized prelate from Bagdad to Kerala in 1861, are the main sources where we glean his ecclesiological vision.

A perusal of his writings would lead us to have a glimpse into his ecclesiological outlook. In the writings mentioned above, we see how he played a vital role in preserving the unity of the St Thomas Church of Malabar, his attempts at fostering the Communion of Churches and his faithfulness and obedience to the Holy See.

2. Ecclesial Background

The value of the ecclesiological contribution of Chavara towards the unity of the Church can be understood only in

the ecclesial backdrop of his time. Chavara was born and brought up in an apostolic Church founded by St Thomas the Apostle. Until the 16th century, the Kerala Church had a cordial relationship with the Chaldean Church and they followed the Chaldean liturgical tradition and were spiritually guided by the bishops who came from Bagdad, as both these Churches had the same apostolic origin. However, the arrival of the Portuguese missionaries opened the way to disputes of leadership and jurisdiction.

Although the initial relationship between the local church and the missionaries was cordial, gradually, tensions and conflicts arose between them due to the imposition of the Latin rule and liturgy upon the St Thomas Christians by the missionaries. The Latin prelates took the reins of the Church in their hands and prevented the arrival of the Syrian prelates to Kerala. They began to exercise jurisdiction over St Thomas Christians. Naturally, this move caused rivalry between the native Christians and the foreign missionaries, which escalated into an open protest from the part of the Syrians against the *Padroado* authority. The protest led the subsequent division among the Syrian Christians.

These events made the ecclesial situation murky. The unrest in the Church in Kerala led to the emergence of the Jacobite Church in Kerala. Applications were sent to Rome by the members of St Thomas Church for intervention and redressal. Gradually, Rome suppressed the *Padroado's* reign over the St Thomas Christians and the *Propaganda Fide* began to take over the jurisdiction of the Church. In the 19th century, during the time of Chavara, this ancient apostolic Church was ruled by the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly appointed by the *Propaganda Fide*.

The prelates, in this period, were appointed by Rome and the Syrian Christians were ruled by the Latin bishops. The Syrian community was unhappy with this situation. They always had longed for a bishop of their own liturgical tradition and liturgical language. They kept requesting Rome for a bishop of their own, but Rome hardly took any step towards the cause. The silence of Rome and the disagreement that the Syrians had with the Latin hierarchy, led some of the leaders of the Syrian community to take initiative to have a Chaldean bishop from Bagdad as they used to have prior to the arrival of the missionaries. They requested the Chaldean Patriarch for a bishop to be sent to the Church in Malabar.

Although the Chaldean Patriarch had no authority to send prelates to the Malabar Church, on account of the repeated requests of the leaders from the Malabar Church, the Patriarch sent Mar Thomas Roccas to Kerala as a visitor. When he arrived, a grand reception was given to him and, discarding the legitimate authority of Bernardine Baccinelli, the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly, the vast majority of the Churches in Malabar went after him. Although Mar Thomas Roccas had come without the authorization of Rome, the unexpected cordial welcome that he received inspired him to exercise episcopal power in the Church. He began to administer the sacraments, especially the sacrament of Holy orders. Bishop Baccinelli was helpless as these events unfolded before him in the Church. It is in this context that he appointed Fr Kuriakose Elias Chavara who was the Prior of the Monasteries at the time, as the Vicar General of the Syrian Christians.

3. Defender of Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction

Chavara was a man of God and a man who was always obedient to the authorities of the Church. The God of truth empowered him with his Spirit and enabled him to fight against the spirit of the liar. Chavara was convinced of the meaning of what Jesus did while establishing His Church upon Simon the Rock and granting His power to Simon Peter (Mt 16:16-19). Jesus placed Simon as the first among the equals and granted him the prime authority in the Church.

Chavara firmly believed that the authority entrusted to Simon Peter and his successors was divine and nobody could prevail against that authority by any means. He also believed that to stand against the Pope and his ordinances was a stand against the will of God. It was equal to standing against Jesus Christ himself. Fully aware of the illegitimacy of bishop Roccas and his exercise of Episcopal power in the Church in Malabar, he rallied his people against the visitor. As the newly appointed Vicar General of the St Thomas Christians of Malabar, he tried his level best to convince the people of the danger and to bring the churches back to the allegiance of the lawful hierarch.

Roccas and the Christian leaders who had brought him to Kerala tried in various ways to obtain the favour of Chavara. They made an attempt to lure him to their camp offering to grant an episcopal status to him.¹ When they could not win him over by such worldly means, they threatened him and even made an attempt to arrest him. He was bold enough to face such threats and declared his

¹ CWC, Vol. I, *Chronicles*, 161.

readiness even to die for the noble cause. He stood firm in his obedience to the Holy See for the sake of the unity of the Church. However, he exhorted the faithful: "If you suffer martyrdom at their hands, remember that it will be the greatest grace of God you will receive."²

Meanwhile, in his capacity as the Vicar General, he wrote Letters to the Holy Father Pius IX enquiring of the legitimacy of bishop Roccas to exercise Episcopal power over the Syrian Catholics of Kerala. Having received the response from the Holy Father, he wrote letters to the Syrian community, endorsing very explicitly the jurisdiction and authority of bishop Baccinelli as the one lawfully appointed by the Holy See. He also called upon all the members of the Church to be faithful to the Church and to be obedient to bishop Bachinelli.

The ecclesial vision of Chavara is enshrined in the Letters that he sent to the Pope and the response that he received from the Holy Father and further, from the official circular that he wrote to all the parish churches in the context of the visit of bishop Roccas. The circular that he sent around is given below:

"He who is not with me is against me. He who does not stand with me scatters" (Lk 11:23) said the Lord. He who enters the sheepfold and exercises authority not having received it from the Pope, the successor of St Peter does not gather but scatters the sheep. He who does not stand with the pope, the Vicar of Christ, is the enemy of Christ. Such a shepherd and all those who join hands with him will perish in the eternal fire intended to the enemies of

² CWC, Vol. IV, *Letters*, IX/4.

Christ. There is no doubt about it. The shepherd who has now started from Bagdad has neither the mandate of the Pope nor his authorization. He is planning to enter the sheepfold of Christ which is in Malabar as a wolf to scatter the sheep and drive them to the eternal fire of hell. I am fully convinced of this fact.

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

Besides, I want you to know that if any one comes with the permission and the decrees of the Pope. It is necessary that in testimony thereof he should show it to one of our Vicars apostolic, that is, either to the Archbishop of Verapoly or to the bishop of Quilon and only with the knowledge and permission of one of them he can enter our churches and administer the sacraments or perform any other sacred ministry in the Church. I tell you all this, my dear brethren, being desirous of your eternal salvation and lest you fall in to the schism and incur the excommunication of the Pope and suffer the loss of your soul.³

He made clear in his letter that since, the Holy Father had appointed the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly, the

³ CWC, Vol. IV: *Letters*, IX/4.

legitimate authority of the Syrian Christians, the community of the faithful did not have the right and permission to substitute bishop Baccinelli with bishop Roccas. Finally, by the strenuous effort of Chavara and his Carmelite confreres, all the parishes along with the priests and people were convinced of the error that had made and established the unity of the Church and the communion with the legitimate authority and established unity and peace in the Church.

In moments like these, his intervention on behalf of the Church made him a perfect model of obedience to the Holy See. For his efforts towards the unity of the Church, he is considered the defender of the apostolic authority, unity of the Church and obedience to the Holy See, just as St Clement of Rome was in the Corinthian Community.⁴

4. Defender of the Primacy of the Pope

The First Vatican Council was convoked during 1869-1870 and the Primacy of the Pope and the Infallibility of the Pope were defined as Dogmas in the Council. These dogmas are defined just one year before the death of Chavara. Nevertheless, in his Letter to Pope Pius IX written on 19 June 1861, we see a very clear indication of defined dogma on the Primacy of the Pope in anticipation. For example, the very words of addressing the Holy Father in the letters that he sent to Pope Pius IX, informing him of the turbulent situation of the Church in Malabar. In the first Letter to the Holy Father he addresses him as follows: "To the Eminent and exalted throne of His Holiness Pope Pius IX, *who holds the key of St Peter* who was assured that the gates of hell shall not prevail and wields the *supreme authority over the*

⁴ J. Quasten, *Patrology*, Vol. 1, Westminster: Maryland Christian Classics, Inc., 1993, 46.

entire Church of Christ."⁵ Similarly, in the second letter he addresses the Pope: "To the great Pope Pius IX, the true *Head of the Church* installed in the Apostolic See of Rome, holding the keys of St Peter."⁶ The basis of this addressing is Mt 16:16-19, according to which, the primacy of Peter is not manmade but God intended; it is willed and established by God himself. As the successor of Peter, the Pope also has that primacy over the Church. It is a revealed truth and Chavara was very well aware of this truth. Hence, even years before defining the dogma, Chavara believed, professed and proclaimed that truth very definitively.

The conviction of Chavara regarding the Primacy of the Pope had great impact in the life of the Church of Malabar. As mentioned earlier, the confusion that was created in the wake of the arrival of Thomas Roccas was caused by the longing of the St Thomas Christians for a bishop of their own apostolic and liturgical tradition and liturgical language. Chavara, true to his tradition, knew very well that his Church would be a disgruntled Church until they received a bishop of their own apostolic tradition.

Taking into consideration the feeling of his people and respecting the legitimate authority appointed by the *Propaganda Fide*, he took initiative to bring about a solution by writing to the head of the *Propaganda Fide* as follows:

For the past many years we had no bishop of our own. But those who have received their faith in very recent times have a bishop of their own. Provoked by such envious thoughts when they get an opportunity they will go to Babel, saying 'Let us resort to Babel for getting a Bishop of our own Rite... It is good to have two bishops

⁵ CWC, Vol. IV, *Letters I/1*.

⁶ CWC, Vol. IV, *Letters I/2*.

here: one for the Latin Church and other for the Syrian Church...⁷

A closer look into this letter gives us the impression that the proposal made by Chavara was very crucial in view of the identity and growth of the Church in Malabar. It is also existentially related to the very apostolicity and the catholicity of the Church. Since there are various Churches in the Catholic Church having its own apostolic heritage, liturgy, liturgical language, liturgical practice, and administration, it was only natural for the Church in Malabar to have a bishop of its own. Chavara was very much conscious and convinced of the fact that both the Latin Church and St Thomas Church are two distinct Churches within the Catholic Church, and both are part of the undivided heritage of the Church of Christ and are under the supremacy of the Pope.

Hence, he appealed to the *Propaganda Fide* to appoint bishops for both Churches separately. According to him, it is the right and duty of the Holy See to provide bishops for each Church and it is not advisable for the Latin Church to provide bishop for the Syrian Catholic Church in Kerala as the *Padroado* did in the past. The Latin Church has no supremacy over other Churches; the supremacy is granted to the Pope, since he is the successor of Peter, the first among the twelve apostles and the head of the universal Church. The Holy Father has authority over all the Churches as the Pope, and not as the head of the Latin Church. Under the reign of the Pope, both Latin and St Thomas Christian churches were equal, and they had their own uniqueness. Hence, in his Letter, he highlighted not only the primacy of the Pope but also the equality of the Churches.

⁷ CWC, Vol. IV: *Letters*, II/5.

5. Glimpses of the Ecclesiology of Vatican II in Chavara

As we have already indicated, Chavara lived about 90 years before the Vatican Council II. Nevertheless, already in his writings, we find the ecclesial vision and insights of Vatican II. The main highlights in this regard are the following:

5.1. Apostolic Patrimony: Undivided Heritage of the Universal Church

The growth of the mystical body of Christ consists in the organic growth of all the Churches founded by the apostles and their successors. Moreover, the growth of every Apostolic Church is essential for the expansion of the universal Church, which is an organic communion of different individual Churches. Consequently, the suppression or the damage of any one of the Apostolic Churches means the damage of the Body of Christ.

Chavara was very much conscious of this reality and was very vigilant to safeguard the apostolic heritage of his mother Church. Unlike many other Churches in the Catholic communion, the Church in Malabar had the rare privilege and honour of being founded directly by an apostle, *viz.*, St Thomas in the first century.⁸ Chavara was one of the strongest proponents of the apostolicity and the identity of St Thomas Christians. In various contexts, he repeatedly

⁸ The first president of India Dr. Rajendra Prasad has observed on the antiquity and significance of Christianity as follows: "Remember, St Thomas came to India when many countries in Europe had not yet become Christian and so those Indians who trace their Christianity to him have a longer history and higher ancestry than that of many of the European countries. And it is really a matter of pride to us that it so happened." Quoted by R. Venkataraman (Former President of India), "Chavara Represents Indian Christianity at Its Best" in P. Kalluveettil & P. Kochappilly, ed., *The Lord of Heaven and Earth*. Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2004, 88.

affirmed and proclaimed this truth. For example, he writes in the *Nalagamam* (Chronicle): 'This Malabar (Kerala) which had received the faith from St Thomas, the Apostle';⁹ 'people in Malabar had true faith from ancient times...';¹⁰ 'we, the *Nazranees* claim to be Christians of ancient origin...'¹¹ are words of Chavara that reiterate the apostolic foundation of the Church in Malabar and his unwavering faith and conviction of its origin. Owing to the Latin domination, when the apostolicity of the Church was downplayed, he brought it into the notice of the head of the universal Church in the right time through his letters. Chavara wrote to the Prefect of the *Propaganda Fide* for a separate bishop for the St Thomas Christians.¹²

The issue raised by him before the officials of the *Propaganda Fide* indicates his ardent desire and alertness to protect and promote the undivided heritage of the Church. The teaching of the Vatican Council II is an approval of the authenticity of his ecclesial mind. For example, in the introductory number of *OE*, the Council has this observation:

The Catholic Church values highly the institutions of the Eastern Churches, their liturgical rites, ecclesiastical traditions and their ordering of Christian life. For, in those Churches, which are distinguished by their venerable antiquity, there is clearly evident the tradition which has come from the apostles through the Fathers and which is part of the divinely revealed, undivided heritage of the universal Church (*OE* 1).

⁹ CWC, Vol. I: *The Chronicles*, 146.

¹⁰ CWC, Vol. I: *The Chronicles*, 193.

¹¹ CWC, Vol. IV: *Letters*, IX/2.

¹² CWC, Vol. IV: *Letters*, II/5.

Almost the same idea we find also in the Decree on Ecumenism: "This entire heritage of spirituality and liturgy, of discipline and theology in the various traditions, belong to the full catholic and apostolic character of the Church" (*UR* 17). These are very sound and solid theological statements by means of which, the Council has acknowledged and declared the venerable antiquity and tradition of the Eastern Churches, which have come from the apostles of Christ through the Fathers and are part of the divinely revealed, undivided heritage and precious patrimony of the universal Church. The Council recognized the antiquity, apostolicity, ecclesiality and individuality of the Eastern Churches and their position in the eternal plan of God and in the history of revelation. The Council fathers thus put forward the apostolic faith as the basic criterion of a true Church.

5.2. Promoter of the Restoration of Autonomy

When we evaluate the content of the letter of Chavara quoted above, we come to deduce that the restoration of the autonomy and the unity of the Church of Malabar, including reconciliation with the Jacobite Church were his agenda. However, it is to be remembered that every restoration demands some sort of renewal. Chavara realized that in order to renew and restore St Thomas Church of Malabar to its pristine purity, especially, its liturgy and the way to recover the genuine theology and the spirituality of this Church and finally to establish the autonomy and unity of the Church, the only possible way was to restore the indigenous hierarchy of the Church with its apostolic heritage.

5.3. Head from the Community: An Imperative for an Apostolic Church

The St Thomas Church of Malabar, as an Apostolic Church, has the undivided heritage of the universal Church. The protection of the precious heritage and the patrimony of this Church is crucial and decisive. In order to foster this legacy is to have an ecclesiastical leader who is native to the land, well acquainted with the heritage of the Church. The conscientious leaders of this Apostolic Church, including Chavara, were conscious of this legacy. As the successors of the apostles, the bishops of each Apostolic Church are the custodians of its apostolic heritage and the visible centre of unity. Hence, they have the duty and responsibility to protect and promote this precious legacy and to transmit it to the following generation through their solid teaching, liturgical celebrations, and pastoral guidance. It strengthens the unity and collaboration in the Church.

However, in the Malabar Church of the period, there was a conspicuous lack of native episcopal leadership that would foster, promote and preserve the way of St Thomas and the liturgical language and tradition. Hence, they kept demanding repeatedly that since ours is an Apostolic Church, we should have our own bishops to rule over us and the freedom to live our ecclesiastical patrimony and to celebrate our liturgy in our own language. Chavara's solution to the problem was to have two appointed – one for the Latins and another for the Syrians. He was aiming the recognition of the individuality and autonomy of the Syro-Malabar Church with its own proper head and liturgical ritual freedom.

5.4. The Necessity to be Led by a Native Bishop

The reason for the longing for a native bishop of one's own language and rite is the desire to have a stable leadership given to the people in their apostolic heritage and faith. The sheep always listen to the shepherd. Chavara recognized that the voice of the strangers contributed to the scattering of the sheep. In one of his circulars written to the parishes in the context of the arrival of Thomas Roccas, he writes: "My beloved brethren, remember the words of our Lord that he who enters the sheepfold not through the right door is not the true shepherd, but the false one..."¹³ In the same vein, he wrote to Alexander Bernaba, the Head of the Congregation for the Propagation of Faith regarding the longing of the people for a bishop of our own Rite.¹⁴

Chavara sought to explore the reason why, like the magnetic needle that always points to the north, his people called *Nazranees* of Kerala have their hearts set on Babel for Syrian Bishops.¹⁵ It was because of the affinity that the people had for their own ancestral traditions and liturgical ways that they approached Babel for a Syrian bishop, that ultimately led them to the scandalous disunity. Chavara reasoned that they would not have turned to Babel if they had a bishop from their own land and their own rite. Chavara continued to plead:

Hence, Your Eminence, I am placing before you a suggestion which I consider good. It is good to have two Bishops here: One for the Latin Church, and the other for the Syrian Church. Then their longing to have a

¹³ CWC, Vol. IV: *Letters*, IX/4.

¹⁴ CWC, Vol. IV: *Letters*, II/5.

¹⁵ CWC, Vol. I: *Chronicles*, "Some Episodes of the Past," 146.

Bishop of their own will cease. Then gradually their relationship with Babylon will end.¹⁶

Here Chavara argues for a very important ecclesiastical right: the right of the people of God to be led by their own head. This is an existential right universally accepted and practiced. The violation of this right is considered detrimental to freedom and autonomy.

5.5. Bishop: The Visible Head of the Body of Christ

One of the decisive factors that promote the growth of the Church and the deepening of the apostolic faith of the community is the bishop. As the successor of the apostle, the bishop has three functions: teaching, sanctifying, and guiding. He teaches the community the mystery of the Christ event; he celebrates the Christ event for their sanctification through liturgy and guides the people of God to the heavenly abode. Therefore, it is vital for each particular Church to have a bishop from the same apostolic tradition, patrimony and language.

A body without a head is dead; it cannot grow. Likewise, without a bishop, who is the visible head of the ecclesial community, the Church cannot grow. This is why Chavara requested for a Syrian bishop for his Church. Vatican II acknowledges that “it is through the bishops the apostolic tradition is manifested and preserved” (LG 20). Hence, the pastoral guidance of bishop of each Church is vitally important for the integral ecclesial growth of the faithful and the protection and promotion of those individual churches and their heritage.

¹⁶ CWC, Vol. IV: *Letters*, II/5.

5.6. Bishop: Bearer and Sharer of Apostolic Patrimony

The St Thomas Christians of Malabar could grow and flourish in its full sense only under their own Hierarchs. Their history, ritual practices, social and socio-ecclesial institutions are different from those of any other Catholic community. Under the Latin jurisdiction, it was impossible to preserve and develop their apostolic, liturgical and disciplinary heritage that the Vatican II later enjoins them to do for the spiritual good of their faithful. The teachings of Vatican II proved that the position of Chavara was right, and his arguments were valid. The following Council teaching is to the point:

History, tradition and very many ecclesiastical institutions give clear evidence of the great debt owed to the Eastern Churches by the Church universal. Therefore, the holy council not merely praises and appreciates as is due this ecclesiastical and spiritual heritage but also insists on viewing it as the heritage of the whole Church of Christ. For that reason this council solemnly declares that the Churches of the East like those of the West have the right and duty to govern themselves according to their own special disciplines. For these are guaranteed by ancient tradition seem to be better suited to the custom of their faithful and to the good of their souls (OE 5).

The disagreement of the Apostolic Church of India with the foreign missionaries who belonged to a different rite was centred on this point of difference. They wanted to protect, live and promote their liturgical and spiritual heritage shepherded by their own pastors. When these rights were denied, they were frustrated and took recourse to means that resulted in the arrival and reception of an

unauthorized bishop. The main concern of Chavara's letter written to the Pope was to establish this fundamental right by the appointment of a native bishop.

5.7. Promoter of Communion of Churches

Communion is the central theme of the ecclesiology of Vatican II. It is a revealed truth that One God is the communion of three persons and the three distinct persons are equals. None of them is subordinate to or superior to the other. This Triune God is the ontological basis of ecclesial communion. The Church is the icon of the Holy Trinity. The unity in diversity, one and many, and equality of all are the key ideas behind the theology of Communion. They are the hallmarks of the Catholic Church. The Council recognized thus the wonderful diversity of the Churches that does not diminish the unity but rather emphasizes it. In other words, the Holy Catholic Church is the communion of various individual Churches and the diversity of them is not detrimental to the unity of the Church, rather it manifests the entirety and the wholeness of the Church. Nevertheless, all of them are under the supremacy of the Pope, the successor of St Peter.

Though the St Thomas Christians of the time had no theological centres to teach Systematic theology and Ecclesiology, they lived this profound Communion theology of the Vatican II. Being part of the Universal Catholic Church, they respected the *Law of Peter* as they did to the *Law of Thomas*. That is why they received the missionaries so cordially when they came to Malabar and gave the freedom to mingle with them and share with them their faith and culture. But the imposition of a foreign liturgy and administration created tension between these two Churches.

Despite the awareness of the ecclesial distinction, Chavara lived in profound cordiality with the Latin missionaries and bore witness to the communion. Although there were many disagreements between the Latin missionaries and the native St Thomas Christians, he honoured them as he saw their ecclesial calibre and missionary intention. He considered the missionaries his brethren in faith and in Christ, respected them, appreciated their zeal for souls, their missionary detachment as they had left their country, parents, conveniences, etc., for the sake of the people of a foreign land. In the *Chronicles* he writes:

From those lands have come many missionaries prompted by good intentions and absolute charity leaving their relatives and homelands with the sole motive of teaching the true religion and the way of salvation. To these spiritual fathers and prelates who spread the true faith and show us the way to heaven, we submit only because we need them and since there is no alternative left to us. But God expects of us is to love them whole-heartedly and to accept their words as God's because they gave up everything they had to save our souls and are striving and suffering for us out of true love.¹⁷

The Vatican II, though independently, endorses the mind of Chavara. *Unitatis Redintegratio* teaches as follows: "... far from being an obstacle to Church's unity, such diversity of customs and observances only adds to her comeliness and contributes greatly to carrying out her mission" (UR 16). Further, regarding the variety of

¹⁷ CWC, Vol. I: *Chronicles*, "Some Episodes of the Past: God Be Praised," 146.

traditions, the Council notes: “The entire heritage of spirituality and liturgy of discipline and theology in their various traditions, belong to the full catholic and apostolic character of the Church” (*UR 17*). Moreover, *Lumen Gentium* appreciated the ecclesial differences: “This variety of the local Churches... is particularly splendid evidence of the catholicity of the undivided Church” (*LG 26*). As we have seen, with regard to this respectful and admirable acceptance of equality, individuality and communion of Churches, Chavara is a typical model.

5.8. Equality of the Churches

Another ecclesiological theme related to the concept of the ecclesial communion is the equality of the Churches. The basis of this equality is that each individual Church has the apostolic heritage, which is part of the divinely revealed and undivided heritage of the Church of Christ. Hence, each Church is wholly the Church though not the whole Church. The basis of the equality of each individual Church consists not in the quantity – number of the faithful and institutions that it has – but its content of apostolic heritage. Vatican II categorically affirms this truth: “They are of equal dignity, so that none of them is superior to the others as regards rite and they enjoy the same rights and are having the same obligations, also in respect of preaching the Gospel to the whole world” (*OE 3*). The Eastern Apostolic Churches are therefore not substations or branch offices of the Latin Church, which alone, in this erroneous ecclesial vision, is considered ‘Universal Church’. They are not parts of the worldwide Latin Church. They are distinct Churches in the Universal Church. *Unitatis Redintegratio* endorses this equality of the Churches with a venerable expression – “sister Churches” (*UR 14*).

In his letter to the Pope, Chavara pleaded for separate bishops for the Latin Church and for the St Thomas Church of Malabar. The knowledge and recognition of this distinction is an indication that he honoured the individuality of each Church, appreciated the diversity in the Universal Church, and wanted the equality of both these Churches be recognized. Although he stood for the basic right of his mother Church, he was not reluctant to appreciate and acknowledge the richness of the Latin Church and the apostolic heritage of that Church as that of the Church of Malabar. His openness towards the Latin Church is explicit in his enthusiasm to learn the Latin language, collect Latin books on theology, adopt several pious practices and para-liturgical services, etc., for the benefit of the St Thomas Christians of Malabar. At the same time, his enthusiasm to rediscover and establish the spiritual wealth of the Church that he was a member of, is highly commendable. A typical example is the compilation of the Syriac Breviary that he made, and his earnestness to print and propagate it for the spiritual benefit of the priests of this Church. His affinity to the Syriac liturgy and language are expressed even at his deathbed.

6. Ecumenism: Promoter of the Sisterhood of Churches

A very important contribution of the Council by accepting the equality of all the individual Churches is the re-establishing of the early Church's understanding of the Churches as sister/brother Churches. This is a key notion of the ecclesiology of Vatican II. This idea we find in *OE* as well as in *UR*. In *OE 2* we read: "... Between these churches, there flourishes such an admirable brotherhood that this variety within the Church in no way diminishes her unity, but rather manifests it." The principal motive behind of

this is the apostolicity and sacramental fraternity of the Churches. In the ecumenical realm this idea has much importance. Instead of a mother-daughter/son relationship – this connotes a superior-inferior realm -, sisters/brothers relationship – this connotes equality -, fosters unity among the Churches. This is very well manifested in *UR 14* where the Council fathers frankly admit the sisterly relation between the See of Rome and the Orthodox Churches.

Going through the letters of Chavara, we see his concern for the separated members of the Church. For example, in the letter to the *Propaganda Fide*, requesting for two separate bishops, he adds the following: “This would be very opportune and useful. There are also many non-Catholics in our midst who are our own kith and kin, now known as Jacobites. The above solution will help them renounce schism and return to the unity of the Catholic fold.”¹⁸ In another letter also he indicates the same thing: “If we succeed in the plan proposed above¹⁹ the one objection put forward by the Jacobites that we Syrians have no bishops of our own Rite will be solved and there is every chance for the Jacobites of Malabar joining our fold.”²⁰

Here we see the ardent desire of Chavara for the communion of the separated brethren with the Church. According to him, the main hindrance on their way back to the Church was the absence of a bishop of their own rite. The Jacobites were the part of the Apostolic Church of St

¹⁸ CWC, Vol. IV: *Letters*, II/5.

¹⁹ If a native Syrian bishop for the Malabar Church was not a possibility, he proposed an alternative: “A European missionary bishop in whom are combined knowledge, devotion and familiarity with our Syriac language and our Malabar Rite.” See CWC, Vol. IV: *Letters*, V/17.

²⁰ CWC, Vol. IV: *Letters*, V/17.

Thomas until the *Coonan Cross Oath* in 1653 and the subsequent events. The protest against the Latin prelates caused the schism in the Church and that gradually ended up in the formation of a non-catholic community, *viz.*, the Jacobites. The struggle to preserve the identity of the St Thomas Christians (*Mar Thoma Margam*) was clearly visible in this conflict between the St Thomas Christians and the Portuguese authorities. Chavara is arguing that they are our kith and kin not only ecclesiastically, but also biologically. The Jacobite Church is our sister Church. Hence, his argument was that if the Church of Malabar has its own bishop, naturally they will come back to the Catholic communion. By implication, the letter emphasized two points: the sisterhood of the Churches and the necessity of a native bishop to foster Ecumenism. In the course of time, Vatican Council II articulated it through the conciliar documents as we have already noted. What is evident here in his arguments is the prophetic mind of Chavara and his ecclesial vision.

Chavara lived in the 19th century Church in a turbulent situation under the jurisdiction of the Latin bishops. As charismatic leader and a talented pastor, he visualized the future of his mother Church and stood for the rights of the community and for the communion of the Churches. His ecclesial vision and insights are in tune with the teachings of Vatican II that came later on. His historical Letter to the *Propaganda Fide* is a remarkable one in that respect, especially, towards defining the individuality, equality and autonomy of the Church in Malabar in the Catholic communion. Nevertheless, he was always obedient to the authority of the Church, especially to the Holy See as he stood for the unity of the Church and

communion with the Holy See and other Churches. An ecclesial luminary, he was a man ahead of his time, a seer with vision and wisdom.

Enumerating the contributions that Chavara had made to the Church and society, Pope John Paul II solemnly spoke out during his Beatification as follows:

But no apostolic cause was dearer to the heart of this great man of faith than that of the unity of the harmony within the Church. It was as if he had always before his mind the prayer of Jesus, on the night before his sacrifice on the cross: "That they may all be one; even as you, father are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us" (Jn 17:21). Today the Church solemnly recalls with love and gratitude all his efforts to resist threats of disunity and to encourage the clergy and faithful to unity with the See of Peter and the universal Church. His success in this, as in all his many undertakings, was undoubtedly due to the intense charity and prayer, which characterized his daily life, his close communion with Christ and his love for the Church as the visible Body of Christ on earth.²¹

7. Church, the Communion of Saints

In the writings of Chavara, we find not only the glimpses of the new ecclesiological vision of communion put forward by Vatican II but also the traditional understanding of the Church. In the poetic work of Chavara titled *Maranaveettill Padanulla Pana (Dirge)*, he refers to the traditional view on

²¹ Pope John Paul II, "A Heroic Son of the Church in India" (Extracts from the Homily during Beatification of Chavara, 08-02-1986 in, P. Kalluveettill & P. Kochappilly, ed., *The Lord of Heaven and Earth*, 81-82.

the “Communion of Saints” and the ‘three wings’ of the One Church, namely, the Triumphant, the Suffering and the Militant. As reiterated by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* later, Chavara views the Church as communion of the saints (CCC 946). With regard to the communion of saints, he has this to say:

Hold in the communion of saints
 A deep solemn faith I advise
 The Church triumphant, the Church militant
 And the Church in travail of souls
 Suffering in the Purgatory
 Are the triple wings of the Church
 By helping one another in virtue
 Mutual benefit we’ll attain.²²

The vision behind the communion of saints is the appellation of “saints” given to all Christians²³ as they are members of the Body of Christ. Hence, along with all those who are living in the visible Church, *viz.*, the Militant Church, all those who are in the Triumphant and the Suffering Church (purgatory) are the part of this Body of Christ.

8. Conclusion

Ecclesiology is considered to be the theoretical interpretation of the self-understanding of a particular Church and the scientific analysis of the self-realization of that Church. If theory and scientific analysis are applied to the writings of Chavara, we will find no ecclesiology there

²² CWC, Vol. III, *Dirge*, lines, 1061-1070.

²³ In the *Acts of the Apostles* and in the Pauline Letters we see this addressing.

because he has not written anything exclusively on the Church in a scientific manner. However, when we consider his thoughts on the Church, its organization, hierarchical structure and his understanding of the various components of that structure, and the process by means of which an ecclesial group strived to achieve an organizational fulfilment, his ecclesiological acumen begins to shine.

The way Chavara understood the Church would comprise all the different models of the Church that Avery Robert Cardinal Dulles in his much-celebrated work *Models of the Church* has proposed. In the records of the ecclesial engagements of Chavara at various levels, we, come to glean his thoughts on the Church as an institution, as a mystical communion, as a sacrament, as a herald, and as a servant. Above all, the confession of Chavara that the Church is “one, holy, catholic and apostolic” is the basic tent of his ecclesiological conviction.

PART FOUR

THE VIRTUES

*The sign of a monk is complete surrender of
self and practice obedience,
as if he had no eyes and ears.*

- Chavara

The 20th century was characterized by a powerful theological movement that called for a “return to the Fathers of the Church.” This movement was associated with a few well-known theologians like Henri de Lubac, Jean Danielou, and others. To a great extent, the theological expositions of these theologians were shaped by a contact with the Fathers and a vigorous engagement with the literature that they had left behind. In Pope Benedict XVI’s *Sacramentum Caritatis* and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* give an urgent invitation to revisit the Fathers in order to validate and consolidate the theological assumptions of the present time.

The participation in the divine life is made possible by the elevation of our faculties of intellect and will so that they might form principles of Christian conduct proper to that divine life in which we participate. The practical elevation of our faculties by means of the virtues that we practise and every virtue we can imagine is rooted in seven virtues – the four human or cardinal virtues and the three theological virtues.

Faith, hope, and charity were identified early in church history as “the theological virtues,” because they were said to have God as their formal object. The virtues are supremely practised when one has faith in God, hope in God, and love for God. As such, they constitute spiritual perfection, with ensuing moral implication. Hence, Augustine wrote that a man supported by faith, hope, and charity, with an unshaken hold upon them, has mastered the entire Scripture (*Enchiridion de fide, spe, et caritate* 3–4).

The *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church* notes that “the theological virtues have God himself

as their origin, motive and direct object. Infused with sanctifying grace, they bestow on one the capacity to live in a relationship with the Trinity. They are the foundation and the energizing force of the Christian's moral activity and they give life to the human virtues. They are the pledge of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in the faculties of the human being."¹

The human virtues (prudence, temperance, fortitude and justice) are called as such because they are achieved through our own will and effort and because they order our relationship to our neighbour in love. They are called also cardinal virtues because they are fundamental and are the foundation on which all other virtues stand.

In addition to these theological and cardinal virtues that are practised heroically, the history of the Church also speaks of some individuals who, through the practice of three evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience lived a life of radical consecration to God for the good of the Church. The vow of chastity freed them to give themselves in love totally to Christ and their life was marked by liveliness and a spirit of joy. The vow of poverty freed them to dispossess everything and depend on the community, in order to grow into deeper persons of self-giving. The vow of obedience freed them to do the will of God as expressed by their superiors who sought always what was best for the community as a whole.

After a long and laborious investigation into his life and activities, the Church found that Chavara had practised both the theological virtues and the cardinal virtues in a

¹ *Compendium*, 384.

heroic manner. Subsequently, he was canonised. The long process of his canonization left no stone unturned to establish that there was no mistake made in the investigation of his cause.

In addition to the practice of these theological and human virtues, as a religious he professed the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience and practised them perfectly in the religious community that he was part of. Despite the efforts that Chavara made along with his companions to found two religious congregation and despite guiding the destinies of those communities in the nascent stage of their development, overseeing the practice of the evangelical counsels by their respective members, despite the meticulous practice of these counsels that he personally professed, he never left a reflection solely on the subject. So is the case with both the theological virtues and the cardinal virtues that he practised so heroically. However, strewn throughout the literature that he left behind are indications of how he viewed these virtues and the evangelical counsels.

For the lack of printing presses and textbooks, all what he did was to integrate his thoughts on these virtues in his writings of various kind. Literacy was rare and classroom schooling was reserved for the privileged few. Chavara himself was engaged neck deep in matters that were more pastoral and practical than theoretical and so, he did not dish out treatises on the virtues and the evangelical counsels. Perhaps that was neither considered the necessity of the time nor was it the trend of the place. Indeed, he practised them and expressed the effect of the practice in his personal and community life and articulated it in his mystical notes and other literary contributions.

As a true son of the land, Chavara expressed the way that these virtues and evangelical counsels were practised in life by means of short expositions in the contemporary genre of short and epic poems, narratives, poetico-prosaic presentations, parenetic discourses and dramatic expositions.

SANCTITY AND VIRTUES IN THE LIFE OF A SAINT

Mareena CMC
Benny Thettayil CMI

1. Introduction

Holiness, in the Judeo-Christian sense of the term, points to the human participation in the divinity of God after the Levitical imperative given by God, “Be holy because I am Holy” (Lev 11:44). The imperative entails that you humbly surrender every aspect of your life to God and keep yourself from whatever is ungodly. The New Testament Jesusan invitation at the end of the discussion on the beatitudes follows the same pattern: “Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48). According to these scriptural invitations, a Christian’s basic call is to sanctity and each one responds to this call of God by means of the vocations that one chooses in the great divine providence.

Dwelling on our vocation to attain the beatitude, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* speaks of the way Christians partake in the beatitudes of the saints. It notes that the beatitudes express the vocation of the faithful associated with the glory of the resurrection of Jesus and they proclaim the blessings and rewards secured for the disciples of Christ; they partake in the lives of the Virgin Mary and all the saints (CCC 1717). This blessedness is the ultimate end of Christian striving, for the beatitudes “reveal the goal of human existence, the ultimate end of human acts: God calls us to his own beatitude, which according to Pope Francis, is the identity card that the Christians carry around:

There can be any number of theories about what constitutes holiness, with various explanations and distinctions. Such reflection may be useful, but nothing is more enlightening than turning to Jesus' words and seeing his way of teaching the truth. Jesus explained with great simplicity what it means to be holy when he gave us the Beatitudes (Mt 5:3-12; Lk 6:20-23). The Beatitudes are like a Christian's identity card. So, if anyone asks: "What must one do to be a good Christian?" the answer is clear. We have to do, each in our own way, what Jesus told us in the Sermon on the Mount. In the Beatitudes, we find a portrait of the Master, which we are called to reflect in our daily lives. The word 'happy' or 'blessed' thus becomes a synonym for 'holy'. It expresses the fact that those faithful to God and his word, by their self-giving, gain true happiness.¹

This vocation is addressed to each individual personally, but also to the Church as a whole, the new people made up of those who have accepted the promise and live from it in faith (CCC 1719). According to the document, sanctity is the hallmark of Christian life as it wonders, "what is the Church if not the assembly of saints?" (CCC 479) and what is a Christian if he/she does not partake in the Communion of Saints (CCC 946; 946).

In Christian terms, because you belong to God, holiness entails that, after the manner of Christ, you give yourself freely to others without reserve, choose to embrace all suffering in life with love, choose to unite it to the Cross of Christ, and choose to abandon everything this world offers as good, choosing instead the riches of heaven.

¹ *Gaudete et Exultate*, 63-64.

Having understood these defining qualities of holiness, many Christians desired to tread such a path with all their heart.

Holiness is mostly found in selfless living. Because of our innate tendency toward selfishness, being selfless is difficult for most people. In proportion to the growth in holiness, one overcomes selfishness and, in turn, find satisfaction in giving one's having and being away. Many Christians in the past grew mature toward selflessness in life as they embarked on the pursuit of holiness. They actively lived in a selfless way and discovered their very self in the presence of the Lord, where they discovered what it meant to be human according to the divine design.

The path of holiness that the saints followed enabled them to allow the hardships of life and all the suffering that they endured to become a source of union with God rather than an obstacle in their relationship with the Divine. In some cases, suffering and holiness worked in a complementary manner. For them, suffering became a source of the greatest fulfilment in life when it was transformed by grace.

2. Holiness of Life

Holiness in Christian scheme consists in a sustained attention paid to the heart, which is the core of the personality, the well-spring of Christian conduct, the quintessence of the soul. Holiness consists in focussing upon the incessant Christic formation and transformation of this centre. The holy life is found in the middle of everyday life as well as in the desert – far from the maddening humdrum of the marketplace. Virtuous

individuals discover it while being freely and joyfully engage the world without ever being pulled by the lure of the world. As holiness is integrative, coherent and incarnational, a holy person sees the sacred in all things.

Holiness is a mark of virtuous individuals. There is a cogent relationship between virtue and holiness. Virtue is good habits that individuals rely upon in order to make their life work according to the status to which they are called to live. Holiness is one's ability to respond appropriately to the demands of that life, which one has chosen.

With the help of various virtues, one progresses in purity and sanctity. In religious life, the ones who are called are set apart for divine purposes. In religious life, the virtuous habits deepen into fixed patterns of life. A religious, depending upon the depth of his/her habit, experiences a growing dominance of right actions effortlessly flowing from the heart that is pure and genuine. Such a person is ever in the process of becoming holy.

With the practice of the various virtues, the person in pursuit of holiness aligns him/herself in loving unity with God. In that ever-expanding alignment to the divine centre, holiness becomes a growing, maturing, lowering and fructifying conformity to the will of God and pursuit of the ways of God. In pursuit of holiness, one experiences one's truest, fullest, pristine humanity, as one becomes the person one is created to be.

3. Universal Call to Holiness

The Second Vatican Council made it plain that there is a "Universal call to holiness in the Church." The central

document of the Council, *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church has chapter five as the heart of the document calling *all Christians to holiness*. Holiness is not limited to any one state in life, but is *universal*, embracing all baptized Christians. It consists in *the perfection of love* for God and neighbours. The Council exhorts:

The Church, whose mystery is being set forth by this Sacred Synod, is believed to be indefectibly holy. Indeed Christ, the Son of God, who with the Father and the Spirit is praised as “uniquely holy,” loved the Church as His bride, delivering Himself up for her. He did this that He might sanctify her (Eph 5:25f). He united her to Himself as His own body and brought it to perfection by the gift of the Holy Spirit for God’s glory (LG 39).

Lumen Gentium further notes that this holiness of the Church is unceasingly manifested, and must be manifested, in the fruits of grace which the Spirit produces in the faithful; it is expressed in many ways in individuals, who in their walk of life, tend toward the perfection of charity, thus causing the edification of others; in a very special way this (holiness) appears in the practice of the counsels, customarily called “evangelical.” This practice of the counsels, under the impulsion of the Holy Spirit, undertaken by many Christians, either privately or in a Church-approved condition or state of life, gives and must give in the world an outstanding witness and example of this same holiness (LG 39).

Although the call to holiness is universal, the indication of the “evangelical counsels” and the “perfection of love”, especially in the light of *Perfectae Caritatis* (the decree on the renewal of religious life), is towards religious

life, implicitly declaring that religious life is a more certain way in the Church to follow in order to reach holiness. This holiness has to be generated and fostered by means of various virtues practiced in life. "Since the Church has accepted their surrender of self they should realize they are also dedicated to its service. This service of God ought to inspire and foster in them the exercise of the virtues, especially humility, obedience, fortitude and chastity (PC 5).

4. Holiness and Virtues

Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that "virtues are firm attitudes, stable dispositions, habitual perfections of intellect and will that govern our actions, order our passions, and guide our conduct according to reason and faith. They make possible ease, self-mastery, and joy in leading a morally good life. The virtuous man is he who freely practices the good. The moral virtues are acquired by human effort. They are the fruit and seed of morally good acts; they dispose all the powers of the human being for communion with divine love" (CCC 1804).

The various virtues are gifts from God that lead us to live in a close relationship with him. Virtues, like habits, need to be practiced, and can be lost if they are neglected. The three most important virtues are called theological virtues because they come from God and lead to God. The cardinal virtues are human virtues, acquired by education and good actions.

Virtues practiced heroically lead us in a life of holiness. Since, "a virtue is an habitual and firm disposition to do the good. It allows the person not only to perform

good acts, but to give the best of himself. The virtuous person tends toward the good with all his sensory and spiritual powers; he pursues the good and chooses it in concrete actions” (CCC 1803). A discussion on the holiness of another person is hard because holiness is not a concrete aspect of a person that can be measured. However, it is possible to analyse the ingredients, which we recognize as signs of holiness and those signs are virtues. In the light of the teaching of the Vatican II, and *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, we attempt to explore the life of Chavara to see how far he has practiced the Christian virtues heroically.

On the one hand, a virtuous life is the gateway to sanctity. And on the other hand, the practice of virtues could also be a sign of the sanctified life. In this section, we consider the virtues and the evangelical counsels that Chavara practised in order to attain sanctity of life and to be part of that great company of saints that constantly inspire the entire Church.

The *Catechism* notes that a “virtue is a habitual and firm disposition to do the good. It allows the person not only to perform good acts, but also to give the best of himself. The virtuous person tends toward the good with all his sensory and spiritual powers; he pursues the good and chooses it in concrete actions” (CCC 1803). Virtues are not transcendental good that one strives after, but as they are expressed in “concrete actions”, they are practical in nature. They are “firm attitudes, stable dispositions, habitual perfections of intellect and will that govern our actions, order our passions, and guide our conduct, according to reason and faith. They make possible ease, self-mastery, and joy in leading a morally good life. The virtuous man is he who freely practices the good. Moral

virtues are acquired by human effort. They are the fruit and seed of morally good acts; they dispose all the powers of the human being for communion with divine love" (CCC 1804).

5. Prominent Virtues of Chavara

We follow the life of Chavara and glean from it the way he practiced the theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity and proceed to look at the examples of the way that he lived the Cardinal Virtues of Prudence, Justice, Temperance and Fortitude and finally, we explore the evangelical counsels that he lived, and how all of them contributed to the life of holiness that Chavara lived.

From the attestations of his contemporaries, we come to realize that these virtues were heroically practised by Chavara and they were visible to them in their times. Fr Leopold Beccaro concludes the biography of Chavara with these words: "Let us who desire to die as did Fr. Prior, imitate his life full of virtues."² When Bishop Bernardin Baccinelli appointed him the vicar general for the St Thomas Christians of Malabar, he stated thus: "I am convinced that you have the fortitude, zeal, wisdom, and the virtues necessary for the right fulfilment of this office."³ While introducing Chavara to the Congregation of the *Propaganda Fide*, Bishop Baccinelli described him as a Christian, virtuous, very prudent, who in the circumstances has shown with deeds, most attached to the Catholic faith and to the Holy See.

² Leopold Beccaro, *Short Biography of Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara*. This biography was published in 1871 at the year of the death of Fr Chavara, along with the first 5 cantos of *Atmanuthapam* (Malayalam).

³ C.D. Valerian, *Malankara Sabhamathavinte Oru Veera Santhanam* (Malayalam), 1939, 230.

THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES IN THE LIFE OF CHAVARA

Mareena CMC

Benny Thettayil CMI

1. Introduction

When we consider the virtues that Chavara practiced in life, which in turn, contributed to his holiness, we begin with the theological virtues that had shaped his outlook in life. The theological virtues are the foundation of Christian moral activity; they animate it and give it its special character. They inform and give life to all the moral virtues. They are infused by God into the souls of the faithful to make them capable of acting as his children and of meriting eternal life. They are the pledge of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in the faculties of the human being. There are three theological virtues: faith, hope, and charity (1 Cor 13:13), (CCC 1813). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* enjoins the believer to profess faith and with confident testimony, to witness and spread it to the ends of the earth (CCC 1816). Further, it instructs the believers to refrain from sin and nurture hope and charity as well in order to be living members of the mystical body of Christ (CCC 1815). These virtues play an indispensable role in the growth of a Christian person in holiness.

2. Faith

Faith is the total surrender of a person before God which enables that person to consider God as his/her own. Faith develops a spirituality which transforms the ordinary happenings of daily life to divine ones. *Catechism of the*

Catholic Church teaches that “faith is the theological virtue by which we believe in God and believe all that he has said and revealed to us, and that the Holy Church proposes for our belief, because he is truth itself” (CCC, 1814). By faith, “man freely commits his entire self to God.”¹ Faith is not just a matter of freedom but an absolute requirement.

John Paul II, in his reflection on faith and reason would note: “Indeed, it is faith that allows individuals to give consummate expression to their own freedom.”² On what faith does, the Pope has this to say: “Faith sharpens the inner eye, opening the mind to discover in the flux of events the workings of providence.”³ Here the words of the Book of Proverbs are pertinent: “The human mind plans the way, but the Lord directs the steps” (Prov 16:9). This would mean that with the light of reason human beings are able to discern which path to take, but they can follow that path to its end, quickly and unhindered, only if with a rightly tuned spirit they search for it within the horizon of faith.⁴ Chavara had laid a strong foundation of his own faith from the very beginning. During the early stages of his formation, the way he handled the situation caused by the death of his parents and brother, the pressure from the relatives to return home, and the way he prevailed over them, shows his strong faith in the providence of God.⁵

The depth of Chavara’s God experience resulted in the constant awareness of his filial relationship with God.

¹ Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, 5 (AAS 58: 819).

² John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, 13 (AAS 91: 15–16).

³ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, 16 (AAS 91: 18–20).

⁴ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, 16 (AAS 91: 18–20).

⁵ C.D. Valerian, *Malankara Sabhamathavinte Oru Veera Santhanam* (Malayalam), 1939, 27.

With his growth in the virtue of faith, he entered into deep and constant colloquies with God.⁶ He lived in the presence of God and sought union with him through the fulfilment of his divine will. The people around him, considered him a man of God, a man adorned with divine grace, a man of divine vision or a man full of the Holy Spirit. He experienced the presence of God in the beauty of creation, which allowed him to see the ultimate cause, and to understand the glory and the blessed state of the other world. His faith made him see the providence of God always and in all things and events of life; especially if anything happened contrary to his will and prior planning, as in the case of affiliation of the Congregation that was founded for men to the Order of the Discalced Carmelites.⁷

From the submission to the divine will, which he often recognized in the superiors, he derived a serenity of the spirit, which always made him tranquil and peaceful. Chavara also encouraged people to rely on divine providence and find contentment and joy in both adversity and prosperity. He instructed them: "Entrust yourself to the Divine Providence when you are faced with trials and tribulations, diseases, and difficulties. He is not a strong person who is patient only when he is delighted."⁸ It was prayer that nourished such a faith. His predilection for liturgical prayers appeared when he was still a seminarian, and consequently he made a study of the ancient manuscripts and compiled for himself a book of the divine office, a practice which had almost ceased among priests of the Malabar Church and which he wanted to revive.

⁶ CWC, Vol. III: *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 3, 5, 9, 14, 40.

⁷ Vithuvattickal, "A Life Full of Virtues" in *Lord of heaven and Earth: Chavara Studies in Honour of Fr Lucas Vithuvattickal CMI*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2004, 100.

⁸ *Chavarul*, I:20, 193-94.

Chavara revised the divine office, retaining its traditional structure. With the approval of the Holy See, the book was printed and introduced into the Church.⁹ The practice of religious life in the congregation consisted of frequent prayers, long meditation, and with night vigils.

The faith of Chavara made him aware of the precious call that he had received from God. For him, the call he had received was incomparable to any other privilege one could receive in life. Therefore, he writes in a soliloquy: "Remember what the Lord has done for you. He chose you from out of thousands. There were many who were more worthy than you were. Yet, wonder of wonders, he chose you, called you to his home, endowed you with many gifts of body and spirit."¹⁰ The deep faith of Chavara prompted him to remain with God and the same is reflected throughout his writings. For example, in his letters to the sisters in the convent at Koonammavu he wrote: "Abide in the love of Jesus Christ; always sit before his face; walk along with him; converse with him unceasingly."¹¹ In another context, he exclaimed: "O Lord, do not separate from us until we are one with you."¹²

The faith of Chavara was recognised and acknowledged by none other than the Pope himself after the successful eviction of Bp Roccas. Regarding the letter of the Pope, Leopold Beccaro notes: "Holy Father Pope Pius IX, gloriously reigning, on hearing about the stability

⁹ Kuriakose, "Chavara Kuriakose Malpânte Charitram," 37.

¹⁰ Chavara, *Complete Works of Chavara (CWC)*, Vol. III, *Adhyathmika Kruthikal*, Ernakulam: KCM Press, 1986, 27.

¹¹ Chavara, *CWC*, Vol. IV, *Letters*, VII/6, Mannanam: St Joseph's Press, 2011.

¹² Chavara, *CWC*, Vol. IV, *Letters*, VII/6.

of Chavara's faith and about his zeal for saving the Christians from schism wrote to him a letter of high praise and satisfaction."¹³

Living with Jesus in itself encompasses the duty of bearing witness to him. This can be accomplished only through a vital and deep relationship with the Lord. Hence, Chavara emphasizes: "Abide in the love of Jesus Christ."¹⁴ Being with Jesus, one follows a style of life and mission to which one dedicates one's time and heart. This 'offering' is possible, authentic and fruitful only if it comes from a deep faith that helps people to mature in all the dimensions of their lives; a strong spirituality, incarnated, committed and nourished with the Eucharist, prayer and communitarian life, flowing into a profoundly mystical experience both in daily life and in the mission.

The various devotions that Chavara practiced and propagated are to be seen as expressions of his faith. His devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, Holy Family, Blessed Virgin Mary and St Joseph are seen as the expressions of his faith in God. In his effort to live a holy life, Chavara took recourse to the saints whom, on the one hand, he imitated and on the other hand, prayed for their intercession. On account of his devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, and the considerable length of time that he spent before the Blessed Sacrament, Chavara was considered an apostle of the holy Eucharist. Fr Valerian, his biographer writes about him: "This invaluable devotion began to make appearance from his childhood itself. He was vigilant to go to communion as frequently as it was allowed. Even as

¹³ Leopold Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Blessed Chavara*, by Lucas Vithuvattickal, ed., Mannanam: St Joseph's, 2003, 11.

¹⁴ Chavara, *CWC*, Vol. IV, *Letters*, VII/6.

a child, not strong enough to lift the Missal, he learned to serve at mass. This was perhaps the beginning of his Eucharistic devotion..."¹⁵ Chavara was deeply aware of the presence of the Eucharistic Lord in our midst and states in his colloquies: "In order to grant all my heart's desires, and permitting me to ask without any hesitation for whatever I would like to have, He deigns to dwell day and night continuously very close to my room."¹⁶ This awareness helped him to centre his life on the Eucharistic Lord and live according to His will.

It was early in the life of Chavara, in the family atmosphere, that Chavara had acquired a singular devotion to the Holy Family. On the day of his religious profession, he chose for himself the name Elias *of the Holy Family*. He dedicated his religious congregation to the Holy Family. The picture of the Holy Family was always placed before him on his table. The Holy Family was very dear to Chavara and he drew inspiration from the Holy Family during his life. He experienced the reign of the Holy family in his heart. He declared this fact on his death bed: "I have always visualized, remembered and venerated the Holy Family in my heart."¹⁷ He considered the Holy Family the earthly symbol of the Holy Trinity and the Holy Family was seen by him as the merging of the heaven and earth.

Not long after his birth, the pious mother of baby Kuriakose Chavara took him to the shrine of our Lady at Vechur to dedicate him to the Virgin Mary and this

¹⁵ Valerian, *Malankara Sabha Mathavinte Oru Veera Santhanam*, 1939, 263-264.

¹⁶ Chavara, CWC, Vol. III, *Adhyathmika Kruthikal*, 85.

¹⁷ Valerian, *Malankara Sabha Mathavinte Oru Veera Santhanam*, 1939, 315.

dedication was renewed every year.¹⁸ Through *Atmanuthapam*, Chavara presents his Marian vision, and the major part of the poem is dedicated to her. Furthermore, as sign of his special devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, he translated *the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary* into Syriac.

The devotion of Chavara to St Joseph, his special patron in heaven and the protector in whom he took refuge in many of his troubles, led him to the propagation of this devotion by constituting the confraternity of St Joseph for happy death. Yet another important devotion that he practiced was to St Theresa of Jesus who was very dear to him, that Fr Marcelin Bernardin dedicated to Chavara the biography of the seraphic St Theresa of Avila, which he wrote in 1866.

3. Hope

According to *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, “Hope is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ’s promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit” (CCC 1817). Chavara epitomized hope. The desire of Chavara to remain always united with our Lord was obviously not based on his own personal strength, as he was always very conscious of his weakness and of his sins. His trust was in God alone, from whom he could obtain everything. He embraced the biblical claim “The Lord is my portion and cup” (Psalm 16:5) as his guiding motto when he began his journey of ecclesiastical commitment in seminary. Even in his darkest

¹⁸ CWC, Vol. II: *Compunction of the Soul*, I: 44–60, 2–3.

hours, such as the loss of his parents and only brother, he persevered with unwavering hope, seeking solace in the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of Hope.¹⁹

The hope of Chavara never faltered. "The virtue of hope responds to the aspiration to happiness which God has placed in the heart of every man; ... it keeps man from discouragement; it sustains him during times of abandonment; it opens up his heart in expectation of eternal beatitude" (CCC 1818). Despite the setbacks and painful failures in establishing convents for women at Alangad and Puthenpally, Chavara remained hopeful and resolute, trusting in the divine providence. This unwavering hope led to the realization of his vision of the foundation of a religious congregation for women at Koonammavu. He had begun the work of the convent with a meagre amount of eighteen rupees at his disposal.²⁰

Meditating on the parable of the prodigal son Chavara exclaims: "I confide firmly in my salvation, because I reflect on what you have taught in the Gospel. This prodigal son comes to your feet. Having meditated on your favours, I confide, more than in the past, that you will make me a saint." His confidence did not vacillate, even when, after the foundation stone of the monastery was laid at Mannanam, the new Vicar Apostolic planned the transfer of the fathers involved in the foundation of the monastery to distant parishes.²¹ He did not vacillate on the

¹⁹ Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 273.

²⁰ CWC, Vol. I: *The Chronicles*, 105.

²¹ Kuriakose, "Ka. Ni. Mu. Sabhakarude Adisthanakkaranum Randamathe Sreshthanumaya Kalloorkkattupalli Idavakakkaran Porukara Pe. Ba. Thomma Malpanachante Charitram," 26. Hereafter it is referred to as "Porukara Thomma Malpanachante Charitram".

occasion of the schism of Roccas,²² although out of the 155 parish churches, 86 parishes wholly and 30 others partially had accepted bishop Roccas. He was not flustered when the group that supported Roccas had required of Chavara to set apart two of his monasteries as the residence of the new bishop, despite the fact that Roccas had the civil authorities on his side.

On various occasions, Chavara experienced the divine intervention. We see him taking recourse to the intercession of St Joseph and the guardian angel to obtain the money necessary to pay the workmen. The construction of the convent of St Theresa was begun with a sum of Rs 18; all the same, he was able to complete the construction in the course of one year spending Rs. 8000.²³ He used to say, "We work; God will give the money. This work is not ours, but the patrimony of Jesus Christ. It is enough that we work."²⁴ Also, when he was on the point of death, in hope he confirmed: "I feel joy and peace."²⁵

²² The Catholic St Thomas Christians were in the final stages of their struggle for autonomy when Roccas arrived, and by the middle of the nineteenth century, in communion with Rome, they found Patriarch Joseph VI Audo (1848–1879) as an able leader for them. They started sending complaints and petitions from Kerala to Rome and Baghdad, in which they asked for a bishop of their own rite to lead them. As a consequence, the illegal entry of the Chaldean bishop, Thomas Roccas, into Kerala took place, which led to great confusion and turmoil. In history, it is known as the Roccas Schism and Fr. Kuriakose calls it a 'religious rebellion' (*vedakalâpam*). Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 164–65.

²³ CWC, Vol. I, *Chronicles*, 136.

²⁴ CWC, Vol. IV, *Letters*, VII/5.

²⁵ *Positio*, 548; Valerian, *Malankara Sabhâ Mâthâvinte Our Veera Santhânânam*, 315; Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 349.

4. Love

Perhaps the most notable of Jesus' teachings in the New Testament is the command to the disciples to love in John 13:34-35: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." The source of all love is God as "we love because God first loved us" (1 Jn 4:19). "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers" (1 Jn 3:16). Hence, Christian love is rooted in the sacrifice of Christ for me and for you. As a virtue, "Charity is the theological virtue by which we love God above all things for his own sake, and our neighbour as ourselves for the love of God" (CCC 1822).

The *Catechism* further speaks of how Jesus made charity (love) the new commandment by which God the Father's love in the Son and that of the Son in the apostles is manifested (CCC 1823). Citing St Paul, CCC 1826 reiterates that one is nothing without charity even if he is or has everything else (1 Cor 13:1-4) and that charity is superior and the first of the theological virtues: "So faith, hope, charity abide, these three. But the greatest of these is charity" (1 Cor 13:13), because "the practice of all the virtues is animated and inspired by charity, which "binds everything together in perfect harmony" (Col 3:14). And Charity upholds and purifies our human ability to love and raises it to the supernatural perfection of divine love (CCC 1827).

4.1. Love for God

The Love that Chavara had for God and the love of God that he experienced enabled him to live a spotless life. Fr Leopold Beccaro, the spiritual director and the co-operator of Chavara, describing his death affirms: "... after a life of great innocence, such that he himself could declare before the death that he had never lost the baptismal innocence."²⁶

In the spiritual writings of Chavara, we often come across the expression of his gratitude to God for the gifts he had received. Gratitude was the characteristic mark of his spirituality. From this attitude of gratitude sprang his meditations – on the one hand, on the gifts that he received from God and on the other hand, the consciousness of sin, which manifests itself in the compunction of heart. Gratitude and repentance are the fruits of his meditation on the various mysteries of our Lord. The epitaph testifies that Chavara had entrusted his soul to the care of God "whom he ardently loved all his life."

4.2. Charity for Neighbour

The spirituality of Chavara gives his love of neighbour an ecclesial dimension. His love for neighbour is realized particularly in his contributions to the local Church, translating it into acts of a concrete nature like the founding of two religious congregations,²⁷ the renovation of the liturgy,²⁸ institution of schools attached to the parish

²⁶ Leopold Beccaro, *Short Biography of Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara*.

²⁷ Panthaplackal, "The Progressive Realization of the CMI Charism," 19; *Chronicles of the Koonammavu Convent*, Vol. 1, 8–11.

²⁸ *Positio*, 308; Kuriakose, "Chavara Kuriakose Malpante Charitram," 35; Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 241.

churches for the education of the children and youth,²⁹ introduction of Sunday sermons in order to impart moral and religious instruction in Christian life,³⁰ the starting of the printing press to propagate the Catholic doctrine,³¹ his efforts to preserve the unity in the Malabar Church, his ardent desire to bring back the separated brethren into the unity of the Church, as is clear from the letters addressed to the Jacobite Bishops inviting them to participate in the Vatican Council I (the signature is that of the Vicar Apostolic, but the text is in the handwriting of Chavara).

When Chavara opted for the monastic life, hand in hand with the personal sanctification, his aim was to enrich the society around him with more vigour and clarity. A.M. Mundadan emphasizes this fact:

He retired from the world not because he was afraid of it, or tired of it, or disliked it, or belittled it, but because he wanted to leaven the dough, to educate and to reform the sons and daughters of God, so that they became really his children. With a singleness of purpose, he tried all through his life to equip himself with knowledge, wisdom

²⁹ The circular, written by Chavara in his own hand, was signed with the official seal by Archbishop Bernardine. The circular ordered that "each parish should establish educational institutions, or else they will be debarred from communion." Chavara did not remain relaxed after getting the circular issued. He delegated members of his congregation to ensure the implementation of the order and to energize educational activities. *Chronicle of Mannanam*, Vol. 3, 90; Valerian, *Malankara Sabhâmâthavinte Oru Vçrasanthânânam*, 137.

³⁰ Kuriakose, "Chavara Kuriakose Malpânte Charitram," 34; Mundadan, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 218.

³¹ Kuriakose, "Ka. Ni. Mu, Sabhakkârude Âdisthânakkâranum Onnâmathe Priyôrumâya Chavara Pe. Ba. Kuriakose Malpânte Charitram," 32-33.

and virtue and disseminate them to his fellow religious, priests and nuns and the laity at large.³²

All this he did with such great zeal that his biographers note that the many feats that he accomplished could have been realized, only through the combined efforts of many priests. A clear example of the heroic exercise of the virtue of love was set in the parish church at Pallipuram, where he assisted a sick man, suffering from small-pox, until his death, although many dissuaded him from doing so because of the fear of contagion.

The concern of Chavara for the Christian formation of those who were entrusted to his care appears, for example, in the letter that he wrote to the parishioners of Kainakari. In the letter, he mentions such things as the rule of life for the families, relationship with others, business, justice, compensation for workmen, the proper use of things, patience, good reading, spiritual obligations, daily timetable, education of the children, etc.³³

Chavara knew how to correct those who were under his authority with charity, combining the act with magisterial prudence and pastoral love. He made not exceptions even in the case of the monasteries. He was very attentive to the matters of their health as he was selecting sites for the foundation of monasteries. Regularly, he visited the sick and consoled them. In the scope of the

³² Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2008, 345.

³³ *Chavarul*, "Epilogue," 201-202; Nalkara, "The Guidelines for the Formation of the Youth as Reflected in the *Chavarul* (Testament of a Loving Father) by St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara," 35.

Confraternity of St Joseph for Happy Death (1843),³⁴ he had incorporated in clear terms a programme of visiting and assisting the sick besides helping the poor, for whom he kept providing clothes, food, care and hospitality. He wanted charity to continue even after death by means of the suffrages for the dead.

5. Conclusion

Without the love of God and the love of neighbour, the practice of all other virtues is futile because “The practice of all the virtues is animated and inspired by charity, which ‘binds everything together in perfect harmony’” (Col 3:14), (CCC 1827). Hence, the virtue of love that was practiced by Chavara must have been the crowning of all other virtues made his life holy.

The theological virtues that Chavara practised enabled him to live in a closer relationship with God, who is known by faith, the ground of his hope and the centre of his love. In faith, Chavara carried out the various tasks that were entrusted to him by the divine providence and the ecclesiastical authorities. In hope he placed steadfast trust

³⁴ Chavara was inspired by the salutary thought on death and found ‘The Confraternity of Happy Death of St Joseph, the Patron of Happy Death’. ‘The Confraternity of Happy Death’ is a pious association that Chavara devised for the dual purposes, spiritual and material. Spiritually, to help others to die a good death; and materially, to help the poor. In 1843, Chavara began to give food and clothes to the poor who came for the feast of St Joseph on 19 March at Mannanam. To meet these expenses, the faithful and priests who would join it needed to obtain their membership by paying 100 chakrams, five chakrams each in twenty instalments. With this, food and clothes could be given to three members of a family once a year. The association continues today, and following the example of Chavara, many Catholic families in Kerala even now perform this act of charity. See CWC, Vol. IV:

waiting for his will to be revealed and in charity, which “binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col 3:14), he loved God above all things and his neighbour, even those who were hostile to him, as himself.

CARDINAL VIRTUES IN THE LIFE OF CHAVARA

Mareena CMC

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1. Introduction

The virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance were seen as core values required of Christians to live a virtuous life in the service of God. These four cardinal virtues grouped together have their origin in the philosophy of Plato and were expanded on by philosophers like Aristotle and others. These are called cardinal virtues because they play a pivotal role in life and all other virtues are grouped around them (CCC 1805). Although they originated in the Greek thought, they have remained an integral part of Christian ethics and moral teachings for over 2,000 years. Chavara, being a pastor who was constantly in contact with the people, these human virtues were employed in his relationship with the members of his community, the hierarchy, and the public.

2. Prudence

Prudence is the virtue that disposes practical reason to discern our true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means of achieving it; “the prudent man looks where he is going” (Prov 14:15). Generally, this virtue is called the charioteer of the virtues as it guides the other virtues by setting rules and measure. It guides the immediate judgment of conscience. It “is the virtue that disposes practical reason to discern our true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means of achieving

it" (CCC 1806). A prudent person determines and directs his/her conduct in accordance with this judgment. With the help of the virtue of prudence, we apply moral principles to particular cases without error and overcome doubts about the good to achieve and the evil to avoid.

Chavara was a man of great prudence. His exceptional prudence is evidenced by the trust placed in him by the Vicars Apostolic, who assigned him responsibilities of a very grave nature in addition to his role as the Vicar General for the St Thomas Christians of Malabar. Prudence is a virtue that allows one to judge rightly what, when, and how to act.

Bishop Baccinelli, the Vicar Apostolic presented him to the Sacred Congregation of the *Propaganda Fide*, with the following words: "A man truly Christian, virtuous, very prudent." The Vicar Apostolic proposed that he should be made the co-adjutor bishop for the St Thomas Christian, because "he is good, prudent and obedient."¹

The discretion and moderation of Chavara are clearly seen in his decision to accept the Carmelite rules, the severity of which he knew very well. Similarly, as he and his confreres were looking for a suitable spot for the foundation of the monasteries, he was very cautious to see that the places were healthy, easily accessible and pleasant.

Knowing well the situation of the Church in Malabar, and wishing to overcome the danger of schism, he proposed to the cardinal prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of Faith: "that there may be two bishops here, one for the Latins and the other for the Syrians, so that the

¹ Moolayil, *Positio*, 259-260.

desire to have a bishop of their own may be satisfied and communion with Babylon may be interdicted.”²

T. Kochumuttom observed that there is no reason for us to think that he excluded anybody from his world of love. He loved and treated with respect and compassion even those towards whom he could naturally have negative feelings. However, even when he exercised his love, he seasoned it with prudence.

For example, in his dealings with the intruder Bishop Thomas Roccas, the prior was very careful not to hurt his feelings. While seeking an appointment with him, Chavara expressed his preference to meet him within closed doors, because he would not be kissing his ring, which was a symbol of authority he had illegally gained. Kissing it would mean that he was party to the bishop’s wrongdoings, and that would scandalize the people. All the same, Chavara did not want to humiliate him by refusing in public to kiss the ring!³

In a brief note written in 1855, Chavara revealed clearly the difficult situation in which the St Thomas Christians of Malabar were placed, and proposed means, which he thought would be effective to eliminate the possible cause of further divisions and bring about the reunion of the Jacobites.⁴ The Vicar Apostolic often commissioned Chavara to function on their behalf so that, in his prudence, he might settle disputes that arose in the vicariate between the parishioners and the parish priest.

² Moolayil, *Positio*, 295.

³ T. Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara* (TSSC 1), Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2017, 64.

⁴ Kuriakose, “Chavara Kuriakose Malpânte Charitram,” 34.

The Saint was also often consulted by the Vicars Apostolic on financial matters of the vicariate.

3. Justice

Justice is the moral virtue that consists in the constant and firm will to give their due to God and neighbour. Justice toward God is called the virtue of religion and justice toward people disposes one to respect the rights of others and bring harmony that promotes equity with regard to persons and to the common good. The just man, often mentioned in the Sacred Scriptures, is distinguished by habitual right thinking and the uprightness of his conduct toward his neighbour (CCC 1807).

Chavara gave everyone that was his/her due, which is the essence of the cardinal virtue of justice, the practice of which enhanced his holiness. Justice, as one of the cardinal virtues usually refers to fairness and fairness is important to almost everyone living in a society or a community in relationship to another. However, justice would mean different things to different people. Social justice is the notion that everyone deserves equal economic, political, and social opportunities irrespective of race, gender, or religion, whereas distributive justice refers to the equitable allocation of assets among the members of the society. Environmental justice is the fair treatment of the environment that all living beings share. There is also a restorative or corrective justice, which seeks to make compensation to those who have suffered unfairly. Retributive justice demands punishment to be given to wrongdoers in an objective and proportionate manner. Finally, procedural justice denotes implementation of legal decisions in accordance with fair and unbiased process.

Justice is deemed one of the most important moral values in all spheres of life. Considering justice in the context of the life and activities of Chavara, we see how he practiced justice in his civil, religious, ecclesiastical and monastic life as a means of achieving great perfection. In any social or ecclesial entity, observance of the law is highly desirable, but they cannot accomplish what it aims at unless it is given in fairness, in a just manner.

When the virtue of justice is backed by fortitude, one is able to overcome all kinds of fear that can be produced in the face of psychological intimidation. His sense of justice enabled Chavara to propose an ecclesiastical solution to the persistent clamour of the St Thomas Christians for a bishop from their own tradition. Knowing well the situation of the Church in Malabar, and wishing to overcome the danger of division recurring in Malabar,⁵ although unpalatable it was for the hierarchy, he proposed to the Cardinal Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of Faith: "that there may be two bishops here, one for the Latins and the other for the Syrians, so that the desire to have a bishop of their own may be satisfied and communion with Babylon may be interdicted."⁶ In fairness, Chavara believed in the wisdom of this proposal that he made.

In all the financial transactions in connection with various projects that he undertook, and activities that he oversaw, he acted truthfully and gave no one any

⁵ See Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Chavara*, 64-56, who is referring to Denha bar Jonah and Roccas. "Denha bar Jonah had come here without authorization and pretending to be duly consecrated bishop, he began to alienate the faithful from the Varappuzha administration."

⁶ Moolayil, *Positio*, 295.

opportunity to raise a finger against him. He maintained a meticulous statement of the income and expenses. He noted down very diligently the various votive offerings along with the obligations connected with masses and other donations. He taught to respect the ownership rights of others and one's obligation to pay the workmen their wages. However, his justice was not blind. He was always kind towards his debtors who were poor. In handling of the money, he was so fair and just, and his conscience so delicate that in case of doubt, he preferred not to use the money if he was not sure of the source. For example, he received a donation of Rs 100 but he was not very sure of the origin of the amount nor the intention of the donor. Hence, despite financial constraints, he did not use it for the construction of the convent but distributed it in alms to the poor.⁷

4. Temperance

Temperance is the moral virtue that moderates the attraction of pleasures and provides balance in the use of created goods. It ensures the will's mastery over instincts and keeps desires within the limits of what is honourable. A temperate person directs the sensitive appetites toward what is good and maintains a healthy discretion: "Do not follow your inclination and strength, walking according to the desires of your heart" (Sir 5:2). (CCC 1809). In Paul, the practice of the virtue of moderation or sobriety is a way to live a godly life. We ought "to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world" (Tit 2:12).

The Carmelite rule that was given to the community at Mannanam required them to be disciplined and it drilled

⁷ CWC, Vol. I, *Chronicles*, 136.

them in temperance, which is a virtue that moderates our desires for inordinate joys. This virtue keeps the desire within the limits set by one's reason and faith. From the biblical perspective, the first parents in the garden of Eden had no addiction to anything nor did they experience any unhealthy cravings.

According to the biblical vision of man, the human senses were in complete harmony and were controlled by reason. They were not compulsively obsessed with eating or getting drunk. However, this ideal state of our being deviated and the power of our self-control was lost, and we drifted naturally to unhealthy excess in the pursuit of unwarranted joys, when sin entered the stage. As a result of the sin, the fall, all the physical senses, which were good by nature were subject to reason, got out of control and were no longer controlled by reason. The virtue of temperance restrains our uncontrollably free senses and brings them back into control, harnessing them with the reigns of faith and reason and allowing us to keep from excesses.

The spiritual life of Chavara, in line with the prevalent notions of penance, included several austere penitential practices that were intended to discipline the will. For example, according to the prescription in the early Constitution of the community, very rigorous fasting was required during the Quadragesima and advent. Furthermore, a form of mitigated fasting was required on several other occasions as outlined in the rules. Daily meals in the monastery were very frugal, and Chavara maintained strict austerity in his eating habits. Additionally, he practiced the discipline of flagellation three times a week as per the demands of the Constitution.

The moniker that was given to the first house of the community was *tapasu-bhavanam* (house of penance) where an ascetical life could be pursued. Later on, in this house of austerity, Chavara's meditations on the passion of Christ, he felt in himself, the corresponding pain of Christ. For example: "Now I meditate on the imposition of the crown of thorns on the head of our Lord because now I suffer greatly from headache."⁸

All these activities led Chavara to restrain his will in such a way that before the virtue of temperance that he had learnt to practice, even the offer of episcopacy for which the entire Malabar Church was craving, could not lure him. Certainly, he wanted it for his Church, not for him. At heart, he made his needs and ambitions moderate after the original ideal that his revered mentors had instilled in him as the *raison d'être* of religious life – to be away from the corrupt and the corrupting world! Not only that no one was able to lure him into such a high office – ill-gotten or not – but as Archbishop Baccinelli wrote to Rome based on his experience that only if such an office is given to him under the precept of obedience, the Prior would accept it.⁹

5. Fortitude

Fortitude is the moral virtue that ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good. It strengthens the resolve to resist temptations and to overcome obstacles in moral life. The virtue of fortitude enables one to conquer fear, even fear of death, and to face

⁸ *Chronicles of Koonammavu Convent*, Vol. II, 10. Original manuscript is preserved in the Archives of CMC Vimala Province, Ernakulam.

⁹ Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Chavara*, 28.

trials and persecutions. It disposes one even to renounce and sacrifice one's life in defence of a just cause (CCC 1808).

Fortitude is that moral courage, the psychological and emotional strength of a person that assists him/her to make a moral choice, face difficulty, adversity, danger, or temptation with courage as he/she stands for truth and justice. When a person has the conviction that the one who has called him/her is faithful and is steadfast in his promises, he is galvanized by power from above. Chavara was a man who exercised the virtue of fortitude in his life.

The pastor of the flock of the Lord is not the one who runs away at the sight of the wolf, but moral courage would enable the shepherd to protect the sheep even at the cost of his life. While serving as the vicar of Pallipuram, he was informed that a critically ill parishioner was asking for the anointing of the sick, and it was night. The prior immediately got ready to go to him. But the people tried to stop him saying that it was a case of contagious smallpox. But the prior would not care. "It is my duty! God will take care of me,"¹⁰ he said. Courageously he went to the patient and joyfully administered the anointing of the sick. The fortitude of Chavara enabled him to follow his Master and lay down his life for his friends.¹¹

The virtue of fortitude that was practiced by Chavara was visible to those who related to him closely on various occasions that called for radical action. Appointing Chavara the Vicar General of the St Thomas Christians in Malabar, Archbishop Baccinelli wrote to Chavara. In the letter, among other virtues, the archbishop notes his courage:

¹⁰ Kuriakose Porukara, *Sthapaka Pitakanmar*, 26.1

¹¹ See Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Chavara*, 62.

In the present circumstances, ... hereby I nominate you vicar general so that you may administer, as regards the spiritual matters, the priests and laity of the Syro-Malabar Church under our jurisdiction. For, I am convinced that you have the *fortitude*, ability and the virtues necessary to carry out this office. Hence, besides the authority and privileges, which the common law acknowledges, I grant you all those privileges, which I am entitled to impart in accordance with my patent letters.¹²

In the wake of the visit of Bp Roccas and the subsequent skirmishes, there were plots hatched against the monasteries, to take them away forcefully.¹³ When Roccas failed to placate Chavara with enticements, Roccas wrote letters to the parishes that had followed him, condemning Chavara to “eternal perdition”. According to Kochumuttom, instigated by this letter, many more turned against the Prior.¹⁴ Chavara perceived the wider negative consequences of this episode and noted: “From them as well as the Jacobites and Protestants, we had to suffer much humiliation and oppression.”¹⁵

The source of the moral courage found in Chavara was the righteous life that he lived all along. A life based on righteousness often enabled him to act for morally sound reasons despite the risk of negative consequences that was involved in the process. His bravery was caused by faith, a sense of morality, compassion and responsibility. Often these courageous actions helped others to overcome

¹² *Positio*, 216f.

¹³ See Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Chavara*, 64.

¹⁴ See Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Chavara*, 65.

¹⁵ Chavara, *CWC Vol. I*, (1990) 86.

challenges they faced as individual religious, or as a religious community.

6. Conclusion

The human virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance were stable dispositions of the intellect and the will that governed the acts of Chavara, ordered his passions, and guided his conduct in accordance with reason and faith. Prudence disposed his practical reason to discern, in every circumstance of life, what is true and to choose the right means for achieving it, especially at tricky moments of life. His sense of justice enabled his to be firm and constant in giving vertically what was God's due in his prayer and spiritual exercises and giving horizontally what was due to his neighbour. Fortitude ensured in his life the right resolve without fear even when he was intimidated in difficult times. Finally, temperance kept moderating the attraction of his senses and enabled him to bring about a balance in the use of goods. These moral virtues, which he cultivated through education, deliberate acts, and perseverance in struggle were further purified and elevated by the Divine grace that Chavara was open to. Hence, he was confident of persevering in the baptismal grace until his last breath.

EVANGELICAL COUNSELS IN THE LIFE OF CHAVARA

Mareena CMC

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1. Introduction

Christ proposes the evangelical counsels, in their great variety, to every disciple. The perfection of charity, to which all the faithful are called, entails for those who freely follow the call to consecrated life the obligation of practicing chastity in celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom, poverty, and obedience. It is the profession of these counsels, within a permanent state of life recognized by the Church, that characterizes the life consecrated to God (CCC 915).

Looking at the disciples in the context of the voice of the Father heard at the transfiguration of Christ, John Paul II exhorts religious worldwide:

The words from on high give new depth to the invitation by which Jesus himself, at the beginning of his public life, called them to follow him, to leave their ordinary lives behind and to enter into a close relationship to him. It is precisely this special grace of intimacy which, in the consecrated life, makes possible and even demands the total gift of self in the profession of the evangelical counsels. The counsels, more than a simple renunciation, are *a specific acceptance of the mystery of Christ, lived within the Church (Vita Consecrata 16)*.

The evangelical counsels that aim at a closer following of Christ, would entail the total gift-of-self (obedience), the grace of intimacy with Christ (chastity), and parting with the ordinary life (poverty).

Through these vows, a person responds with the whole of his life to God's invitation to love him completely

and without reserve. The life of vows is a free response, and is a fuller expression of the baptismal call. For those who are called to the consecrated life, it is a means to greater holiness as these vows provide for a purification of heart and spiritual freedom. Living these vows enables them to focus their entire being on God and His people.

2. Practice of Evangelical Counsels

As religious life was not something that was practiced by the St Thomas Christians at the time of Chavara. However, they were influenced by the European missionaries most of whom belonged to religious orders. Chavara had limited awareness of consecrated life. However, he had begun observing and living the evangelical counsels as he renounced his family, possession and oneself, first in choosing a life of pastoral commitment and, eventually, in the radical discipleship of Jesus in religious life. For all practical purposes, even when he was a candidate for diocesan priesthood, he had adopted the motto, "The Lord is my portion" (Ps 16:5), and was already leading a consecrated life practising the evangelical counsels of obedience, chastity and poverty without a public profession. As priests, they were celibates, hardworking and were satisfied with the minimum facilities and comforts of life, and obedient to the ecclesiastical superiors.

2.1. Obedience

Through the evangelical counsel of obedience, a consecrated person aligns his life to that of Christ listening and responding to God's will as Jesus did. This act of configuring oneself to Jesus Christ affects all aspects of one's

being in such a way that it conforms his attitude to that of Christ Jesus (Phil 2:5).

While he was in formation, young Chavara observed all the rules of the seminary faithfully. He also obeyed his senior companions while cooperating with them in the foundation of the religious congregation for men. On the occasion of his transfer to Pallipuram, there was nobody to oversee the work of the monastery. Obedience to the hierarchy would mean that the approved dream project of the foundation of the monastery at Mannanam would go to the dogs. However, Chavara conducted himself most heroically preferring obedience to the orders of the superiors rather than the pet project of his dream. Fr Louis Manjummel testifies that Chavara was the first in the observance of rules, always obedient like a novice.

The life of Chavara reveals his readiness to obey God through his superiors at all times. Generally, the letters he wrote to the authorities ended with the words: "on me who is ready to obey and serve," "ready to obey" or "willing to obey," etc.¹ In this regard, his spiritual daughters of the convent at Koonammavu observe:

His Father was obeying all like a little child. The good example which he showed us till his death is something that everyone marvels at. Is it not right and lawful then that all of us learn from his good example and live accordingly? As he was the prior and the head of all the monasteries (only Fr Delegate was superior to him, whose command he had to obey, Fr Leopold was out of the country) all were bound to obey his command. Still

¹ See Chavara, *CWC*, Vol. IV, *Letters*, III/7, III/8 & III/9.

he obeyed all like a child. This he did in order to give up his will completely and thus set a good example for all.²

Chavara followed his Master in matters of obedience and hence, in him one finds the face of Christ who was obedient unto death. He achieved such heroic heights of sanctity because he had fully abandoned his own will. He became a model for obedience to all the consecrated people.³ While narrating the last moments of Chavara's life, the Chronicler of the convent at Koonammavu, quoting the words of Fr Leopold, narrates the following incident which divulges his spirit of obedience:

Yesterday night, I administered the last sacraments as well as the remission of sins. Before I administered the Holy Communion, the patient (Fr Chavara) spontaneously burst out into a speech about the passion of Jesus Christ and the glories of the Mother of God. One will be astonished at hearing his words... I asked thus, 'father, are you happy now, and enjoy the peace of mind?' Then by folding both his hands he replied, 'father, now there is great peace and happiness.' Then he intimated to me one thing: 'father, I did not participate in the Holy Mass last Sunday.' I thus replied, 'it was not because of your unwillingness. Was it not because of the holy obedience that prohibited you? Why should you be disturbed about it?' At this, he was satisfied and said: 'Yes, it is true. It was indeed because of the holy obedience. This is enough for me.'⁴

² *Chronicles of Koonammavu Convent (CKC)*, vol. II, 13.

³ Kalluveetil, *et al.*, *Women TOCD: Facts versus Fabrications*, 276.

⁴ CKC, Vol. II, 21-22.

The life of Chavara was indeed a life of *cholviily* (obedience) which remains as a true witness and challenge to the people who embrace religious life today.⁵ The exhortations of Chavara on obedience bear witness to the vow he lived in all the moments of his consecrated life. He says: "The sole mark of a religious is blind obedience, abandoning one's own will completely. One who has obedience is a religious. It is not an easy task. Nevertheless, recognizing that our obedience is not yet perfect, we have to try to make it so."⁶ 'God's will in everything' was his motto.

It made obedience easy for him in difficult situations as he mentioned in one of the letters to Fr Kuriakose Porukkara: "Everything is God's will. As the Book of Proverbs says, 'the will of the Lord is my fortune'. Bear this in mind always". The same sentiments are reflected in his spiritual reflections also. In *The Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, he notes: "May the holy, supreme and true will of God be praised now and forever."⁷ Similarly, the prayer that was dear to his heart expressed his desire to be obedient: "Do with me whatever you wish. I am fully resigned to your holy will. Lord, grant me the grace never to waver from this resolution until my death."⁸ Doing the will of God always, everywhere and in everything was the principle of Chavara. In this manner, he turned out to be a true model of obedience, which is the essence of consecrated life.

These examples shed light on the mystical personality of Chavara and his concept of vowed life. The

⁵ Kalluveettil, *et.al.*, *Women TOCD: Facts versus Fabrications*, 275-277.

⁶ CWC, Vol. IV, *Letters*, VI/4; see also CWC, Vol. IV, *Letters*, V/2.

⁷ CWC, Vol. III, *Adhyathmika Kruthikal*, 68.

⁸ CWC, Vol. III, *Adhyathmika Kruthikal*, 62.

evangelical counsels are the core of a life that was lived in intimate union with Christ. It is a life based on faith and trust in God's providence in one's life, a life of total surrender and total abandonment. The consecrated life of Chavara is a guiding star for all the consecrated people to live a productive and meaningful life of holiness.

Following the Lord in a closer manner, Chavara would invite us to meditate on the hands of Christ, that are open and full of nothing, showing us the *poverty* of Christ who was detached from worldly goods and possessions. Further he wants us to meditate on the feet of Christ, that are nailed to the cross; they walked the path of God in perfect *obedience* to the will of the Father. Finally, he points to the heart of Jesus pierced by the soldiers with a lance bringing forth blood and water, giving the gift of Himself, pure in heart, to God and to all in practice of perfect *chastity* - all leading him to live a life of holiness.

2.2. Chastity

Chastity means the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual being. Sexuality, in which man's belonging to the bodily and biological world is expressed, becomes personal and truly human when it is integrated into the relationship of one person to another, in the complete and lifelong mutual gift of a man and a woman (CCC 2337).

The love of Chavara for this virtue of purity in soul, mind and body was reflected in his diligence to educate the faithful in modesty. His desire for founding the Congregation for women was prompted by his keenness

to provide facilities for women to live their vocation to consecrated life with integrity. In his exhortation to the Sisters, he used to remind them of their dignity, being the queens and brides of Christ.

The vision of Chavara on the vow of virginity is reflected in the exhortations given to the first community of the Sisters. In his written reflections on the status of the consecrated ones, Chavara eulogizes the spousal dignity of the Sisters. His reflections begin with a citation from St Augustine:

Oh consecrated, Oh blessed Sister! You have a Bridegroom who is the most sublime above the glories of heaven and earth. He has chosen you from among the virgins, in order to make you his own and to elevate you as His bride. Don't you know that you are granted the pledge of love? It is then proper that you should have the greatest love for him.⁹

In one of his letters, the saintly father articulates his feelings when he reads about the lofty status of the consecrated virgins. He candidly confesses that he felt holy jealousy about the Sisters whom he designates the great queens and spouses of Christ. His words seem to disclose his own mystical experience of the graces of consecrated life. His reference to the Sisters: 'Oh the great queens, the brides of my God'¹⁰ is noteworthy in this context. Further, Chavara borrows the words of Christ the Bridegroom who has fixed His gaze on His beloved brides who are attracted to the worldly joys and things. However, they need not be

⁹ Chavara, *Chavarayachante Kathukal*, Kakkanadu: Chavara Central Secretariat, 2011, VII/12.

¹⁰ Chavara, *Chavarayachante Kathukal*, VII/12.

worried and be sad since the heavenly Bridegroom is ever compassionate and is ready to claim them. He is constantly beside them and has given Himself to them.¹¹ Chavara trained the early members of the community of sisters to live in the ever abiding and loving presence of the divine Bridegroom and to keep constant communion and communication.

The consecrated life of chastity led Chavara into an ongoing exploration of the mysteries of life, which in turn, enabled him to grow in holiness and into the maturity of Christ in all respects as it kept expanding the horizon of relationship and ever kept pushing its limits further.

2.3. Poverty

The vow of poverty professed by a religious person is a radical call to freedom. As he is unrestricted by the concerns of wealth and material possessions, he is free to focus on higher realities, relationships and service.

According to Chavara, Poverty is the complete trust and dependency in the divine providence. Having left his family, after his formation and having been ordained a priest, Chavara dedicated himself to religious life in 1833, depending totally on the alms of the faithful and donations from churches and priests for financial support. Fr Leopold Beccaro, Fr Louis Manjummel and Fr Marceline testify to his practice of evangelical poverty in glowing words. He always exhorted his confreres not to lose even one drop of the reward of the practice of the vow of poverty.

A sublime example of simplicity in attitude and the dependence on God is found in one of his letters to the

¹¹ Letter VII/6.

Sisters at Koonammavu: "Let us get the work done; the Almighty will give us the money. This is not our property; rather this is the patrimony of Jesus Christ."¹² He believed that God, the source of inexhaustible riches, is ever ready to pay the labourers on our behalf. The first community of Sisters at Koonammavu were trained by Chavara in the life of simplicity that they evolved a spirituality of trust in their religious life.

Chavara was endowed with a biblical and mystical vision of the concept of the vow of poverty. He exhorted the Sisters in the first convent at Koonammavu that life with basic facilities such as the bamboo mat for walls, was a life of true poverty.¹³ He clung to God for the completion of the project by saying, "I trusted in the Lord with the hope that He would complete everything."¹⁴ Chavara taught the Sisters the essence of poverty and they were convinced that they were, "more fortunate in comforts proper to heaven than all of the people in the world."¹⁵ They recall the care and diligence with which the Lord looked after their day-to-day affairs¹⁶ revealing the deep conviction of the saint who taught them that the Lord would provide for his people.¹⁷

The vow of poverty seen practiced by Chavara illustrates his total reliance on the divine sources for fulfilment. For him, a life of evangelical poverty was one

¹² CWC, Vol. IV, *Letters*, VII/5.

¹³ CWC, Vol. I, *Chronicles*, 126.

¹⁴ CWC, Vol. I, *Chronicles*, 127.

¹⁵ CWC, Vol. IV, *Letters*, VII/7.

¹⁶ CWC, Vol. IV, *Letters*, VII/11.

¹⁷ Paul Kalluveetil, Sophy Rose, Maria Anto & Mareena, *Women TOCD Facts versus Fabrications*, Aluva: CMC Publications, 2013, 258.

of the steppingstones to a life of holiness that brought the joy of fullness of life in Christ as he had considered God his only portion.

3. The Virtue of Humility

One of the best marks of holiness is the virtue of humility practiced before God and human beings. If one aspires to be holy, one needs to have a humble disposition as that of a child. Holiness without humility is impossible because humility feeds holiness. According to the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector and their prayer, the most poignant mark of a counterfeit holiness in a person is the lack of humility. As holiness and humility go hand in hand, a Christian cannot have holiness without humility, which is always the underlying determining factor contributing to those who are walking in holiness and who simply desires to but is left struggling to do so.

The virtue of humility in Chavara that was practiced along with the religious vows was manifested above all when he refused the proposal of the episcopacy, which the leaders of the Chaldean group of Roccas offered him in order to entice him to side with them. Although he had appealed to Rome for a native bishop for the St Thomas Christians of Malabar, he would keep himself away from it.

It is significant to note that Chavara addresses himself 'humble' (*kurayappettavan*): "Fr Kuriakose Elias Chavara was a *humble one* who was trained under Fr Thomas Palackal, our Malpan";¹⁸ further, in humility, he considered himself a fool (*bhoshan*): "for me, a fool, both were happy

¹⁸ CWC, Vol. I, *Nalagamagal*, 1.

and felt as alike;"¹⁹ He would go to the extent of considering himself *a senseless person (vakathirivillathavan)*: "when (the bishop) heard my senseless answer that he knows the administration of the sacraments...;²⁰ etc., are examples of how in his humility Chavara referred to himself.

Furthermore, Archbishop Baccinelli while writing to Rome regarding the benefits of appointing Chavara the Coadjutor bishop, makes a note of the humility of Chavara: "... having made a simple vow of humility Chavara would not accept the position (of the bishop) unless commanded under obedience, as it was the case when he was appointed as vicar general."²¹

In his writings, Chavara does not hesitate to exaggerate his own faults and shortcomings and further confess them referring to his unworthiness. In his humility, he attributed to God the good that he accomplished. In the same way, he attributed to Fathers Palakkal and Porukara the whole credit of founding the religious congregation for men, and to Fr Leopold Beccaro, the entire credit of founding the religious congregation for women.

Generally, it is not possible to be holy without a humble heart. A seeker of holiness, Chavara was ever on his guard, lest unconsciously pride might creep in where its presence is least expected. Having achieved what no other member of his Church in his time and space had achieved and having come an ecclesiastical office higher than anyone from his background had, he intentionally walked the path of humility, so that he might not naturally

¹⁹ CWC, Vol. I, *Nalagamnagal*, 31.

²⁰ CWC, Vol. I, *Nalagamnagal*, 30.

²¹ Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Chavara*, 28.

drift into self-righteousness. Cultivating an attractive, humble life, he inspired the members of his community leaders of the Church. Chavara knew that authentic holiness comes always wrapped in humility.

4. Suffering and Holy Death

Towards the end of his life, Chavara endured physical suffering as his health deteriorated and he lost his eyesight. Without complaints, he offered up all his sufferings for his own sanctification and for the sanctification of the souls. In the chronicles of the convent at Koonammavu, we see the following narration, which reveals the sufferings of Chavara during his last days:

Almost three months he suffered all his illness with great patience and joy. Though he was given much treatment, his illness grew worse. The great thing that filled all with wonder was this; it was very human that one will naturally feel tension and sorrow at the loss of eyesight. Such a reaction was not seen in our father. He always appeared with a smile on his face. Looking at him, nobody would feel that he was suffering all these illnesses. His attitude was such that people who saw him felt that he was experiencing some great joy.²²

One day, when Gerard Mooppachan visited Priorachan, the latter said: "Now I feel that God is calling me. Therefore, I pray you to give me the last sacraments." But Gerard Mooppachan said, "Not at all. The Almighty has willed to make you live longer." Only the Holy Communion was given to him. During these days, Fr Leopold came from Europe. There was no improvement

²² *The Chronicles of Koonammavu Convent*, Vol. II, 14-15.

in the medical condition of Chavara. Moreover, he had no eyesight..."²³ The Chronicler continues:

Last night, i.e., on Sunday, 1 January, he (Chavara) requested for the last sacraments. Gerard Mooppachan asked him, "In what Rite do you want to receive the last sacraments and the remission of sins?" Even though Priorachan's desire was to receive the sacraments from Fr Leopold of St Joseph, he was ready to comply with the will of others: "If it were in my own language, I can join in responding to the prayers. Still, I am ready to obey the command of the superiors..." Later, Gerard Mooppachan intimated to us: "When I was administering him the Holy Communion, I felt an urge to fix my eyes on his face and I did accordingly. Then I saw in his face, an extraordinary glow and joy, which were never seen before."²⁴

The attestation of Gerard Mooppachan regarding the transformation of the face of Chavara when he received the Holy Communion, speaks volumes. Even at his deathbed, it was as though Chavara had already become a member of the celestial world. The sisters who were present at the time were greatly inspired by this rare experience.

According to the chronicles and other similar narrations, the death of Chavara was very peaceful and holy. When all the members of the community had gathered around him and were in tears, Chavara, sitting on the bed, and in full consciousness told them in a clear voice:

"Why are you weeping? Man, no matter who he is, has to die one day. Now it is my time. By the grace of God, I

²³ CKC, Vol. II, 16.

²⁴ CKC, vol. II, 20.

was keeping in mind this moment... My pious parents in many ways impressed on me great regard for the Holy Family: Jesus, Mary and Joseph." Pointing out to the picture on his table, he said: "In this way, I was always keeping in my heart and mind, and was honouring, the Holy Family. Hence, their help was always available to me. By the grace of God, I dare say, that with their help never had I an occasion to be deprived of the grace received in Baptism..."²⁵

Chavara died on Tuesday, 3 January 1871 around 7.15 a.m. After the funeral, Fr Leopold, as he was back at his desk, wrote about the holy life and the passing in his private journal:

Today, Tuesday, 3 January 1871, at 7.30 a.m., Fr Kuriakose Elias of the Holy Family, the first Prior, after a good life, more pure innocence, which he himself before his death could testify that he never has lost his baptismal innocence; in the exercise of the more beautiful virtues, specially in the simplicity of heart, living and tender faith, obedience and devotion to the Holy Sacrament, to Holy Mary and St Joseph, after enduring immense toils for the sake of the Christian community in Malabar... After having suffered enviable resignation, even with cheerfulness, an illness of two months, completely detached from all earthly things and thinking, having foreseen a few months back the end of his life, after receiving with rare piety the Sacrament with a peace of paradise, mourned by all, specially by me, that I loved him as I (love) myself, at the age of 65 breathed out his soul in peace and was buried in this

²⁵ Moolayil, *Positio*, 548f.

church of Koonammavu. Oh holy and beautiful soul, pray for me to Jesus.²⁶

These words testify the holiness of life in Chavara. Having recognized the sanctity of Chavara, Fr Leopold, his spiritual director and confessor, concluding the day's entry in his journal, prophetically, prays for the intercession of Chavara.

5. Attestations of Holiness by the Contemporaries

Many of his contemporaries recognized Chavara a holy man. Some of them have acknowledged it and several of them have testified to their experience Chavara as a holy man. Some of those testimonies are given below:

Fr Jacob Palakkunel relates an incident:

It was the day before the titular feast in a parish. Fr Prior too was present. But even until late in the night the preacher did not turn up. So, they decided to request Fr Prior to preach the homily and looked for him. But he was missing. Someone who knew him personally said: "Look for him either in front of the Blessed Sacrament in the church or in the cemetery." Indeed, we found him praying in the cemetery.²⁷

The year before his death, Chavara, the Prior was under treatment in the monastery at Koonammavu. Disputes and quarrels were still going on in the parish of Anackal relating to the Portuguese Patronage. All efforts

²⁶ *Diary of Fr. Leopold*, Vol. III (CMC Archives, Aluva), 25.

²⁷ These were narrated in the book of C.D. Valerian, *Malankara Sabha Mathacinte Oru Veera Santhanam*, 230-243.

to bring about a reconciliation between the rival groups met with failure. Ultimately, the leading men of the parish approached the Prior and said: "It is enough that you come for the peace to be restored." Despite his ailment, he went with them, talked to the feuding factions and peace was restored!²⁸

The contemporaries who heard Chavara, and who came in contact with him have attested the sanctity of Chavara. Mani Kurian, a very elderly member of the family of Madathikunnel at Muttuchira remembers: "I have seen Fr Prior. Still more, I was fortunate to hear his sweet sermons. It is difficult to describe how delightful his appearance was. Indeed, a man filled with the Holy Spirit! With his soft, but clear voice, everybody could hear his music-like sermon. Ah! I can never forget it. I feel as if I heard it only yesterday."²⁹

Fr Varkey Muttathupadath, one of the disciples of Chavara, convinced of the holiness in which his guru lived, ignoring the objections that Chavara made, collected a few strands of his hair and respectfully preserved them as a relic. Bishop Mathew Athanasius, the founder of the reformed Mar Thoma Church, was a close friend of Chavara. His words regarding Chavara and his certainty about Chavara's destiny, has these proverbial statements to make: "In this country who other than Fr Prior is likely to go to heaven? By holding on to his leather belt, I too shall endeavour to reach there!"³⁰ Fr Leopold, in his short biography of Chavara, writes:

²⁸ Valerian, *Malankara Sabha Mathavinte Oru Veera Santhanam*, 230-243.

²⁹ Valerian, *Malankara Sabha Mathavinte Oru Veera Santhanam*, 230-243.

³⁰ Valerian, *Malankara Sabha Mathavinte Oru Veera Santhanam*, 230-243.

Fr Prior fulfilled his priestly and religious duties more by good conduct and virtuous practices than words and deeds. All are impressed by his deep humility, unparalleled charity and spirit of submission to authority. Therefore, they not only respect and love him, but also unquestioningly trust his words. Among his virtues, the most notable ones are his devotion to and love for the mother Church and the Holy Father.³¹

6. Conclusion

The holiness of Chavara is like a shining star in the darkened sky. The brightness of holiness that he emanates is visible to everyone. Such a person provides hope, comfort, and inspiration to everyone who knows him and loves him. Although his earthly life lasted only for 66 years, yet its fruits will remain forever. The light of faith will inspire for generations to come. The outstanding virtues that he practised will keep motivating thousands in the future.

In life, in his writings and in his various ecclesiastical and social engagements, Chavara gave an example of how to live a holy life. In all these, he lived a life in conformity to the moral precepts of the scripture. Living by faith at all times, and in all the engagements, Chavara made the people of his time understand that the kingdom of God that we are working towards, was a higher and deeper reality where all are called in holiness to live the joy of fellowship with God, and the ecclesiastical, religious and personal nitpickings that we often raise can only eclipse it.

Chavara engaged fully in various spheres of ecclesial life and navigated various kinds of terrains both

³¹ Leopold Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Lucas Vithuvatical, ed., Mannanam: St Joseph's Press, 2003, 15.

spiritual and profane, all the while maintaining the state of baptismal grace that he began his life's journey with. Having crossed over to the other side of the ocean of life, he tells us that only following a path of holiness that one can come to experience the joy that comes from God. We get to share in this joy only through obedience and fellowship with God. In his meditations, he tells us of the endurance of Jesus in his suffering in view of this joy. Holiness produces joy, and conversely, joy can also produce holy living, as this joy is an assurance in Christ that strengthens the believer towards living a holy life entices further to pursue the life of holiness. The reward of holiness is pure joy.

PART FIVE

THE TITLE

Forgiving completely the wrong doings
of others is a mark of
great strength and prudence.

- Chavara

Anyone who glances around that section of the library devoted to the early Christianity, cannot fail to observe on its shelves imposing collections on patristic texts like *Bibliothèque Augustinienne*, *Corpus Christianorum*, *Migne's Patrologia*, and *Sources Chrétiennes* in addition to the other monographs and manuals on the Fathers of the Church. All these works represent only a tiny portion of the patristic works published in the field of Christian Antiquity.

The immense amount of the extant literary material from the Fathers bear witness both to their own spirituality and to their contribution to spiritual theology. On account of their sanctity of life, the spirituality they lived and proposed had a profound effect on the whole of the early Christian literature. It is for this reason that the liturgy of the hours in the Roman Church has excerpts from the writings of Fathers of the Church incorporated into it for daily reflection and prayer.

Patristic theology is fascinating especially for the early scriptural hermeneutics and basic ecclesiology. The Fathers were authentic interpreters of scripture, who read the Bible in and with the church in a contextual manner. They were witnesses to the church's understanding of herself and of her offices at the formative period when the structure of the Church in relation to her self-understanding was taking place. Moreover, they were contemporaries and participants in the theological conversations and controversies of their days. It was in this period that, in discussion with and debate between various schools of believers that the development of doctrine took place, which contributed to modern theology.

Like several of the Fathers of the Church who were not academics who pondered obscure points on God, but who responded to the contextual needs of a theological nature, Chavara followed a theological method that was in vogue in his day. Like most of the Fathers of the Church, Chavara was primarily a pastor, and most of his works represent the pastoral response of the Church to urgent local needs in dire ecclesial circumstances.

As it is the case with the writings of the early theologians, we find a unique theological method that was followed by Chavara. With no printing presses and media to disseminate his thoughts, he often used the ordinary medium of the Church that was the liturgical assembly and in later years, he used his letters as a channel. Much of his teachings were given when his people came to Eucharistic celebration. He aimed his teaching at adults, encouraging the parents to pass the faith on to their children. There he conveyed the important details of faith in memorable ways –through hymns, prayers, poems, stories and brief parenetic sayings.

When his life and contributions are considered from the contemporary point of view, the significance of Chavara is undeniable. In his life and contributions to the Church and the society, he is no less than either the Fathers of the Church or the Doctors of the Church.

CHAVARA: FATHER OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

Thomas Kollampampil CMI

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 lifetime, 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 misleading 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

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

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.

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, was pulled between the *padroado* and the *propaganda* factions of the Western missionaries in India. For the sacramental and social unity of the Church, Chavara had to develop on the East Syrian liturgy and for social unity, many social reforms and educational endeavours were began in the social life of his times. For spiritual progress and life of Christian perfection consecrated religious communities were established (CMI and CMC congregations). 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

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

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 (GS 1). 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.”

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).³ 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

³ 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).

in the Paradise, which was their given world 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 inlaid 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.⁴ 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

⁴ Christopher Rengers, *The 33 Doctors of the Church*, Rockford, Illinois: Tan Books and Publishers, 2000, xxii-xxiv.

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.⁵

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 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.⁶ According to

⁵ Christopher Rengers, *The 33 Doctors of the Church*, xxiv.

⁶ 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).

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 body of revelation and salvation to the world in the form of a single continuum.⁷

⁷ Cf. Pope Francis, *Motu Proprio, Aperuit Illis*, Instituting the Sunday of the Word of God, 30 September, 2019, no. 11: "We frequently risk

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

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).

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.

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'."⁸ 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

⁸ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 1.1.2-2.1; cf. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.41.2

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” (1 Cor 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’.⁹ 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.¹⁰ 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

⁹ J.H. Crehan, “Fathers of the Church”, in *A Catholic Dictionary of Theology* Vol. II, Melbourne: Nelson, 1967, 289.

¹⁰ J. Chapman, “Fathers of the Church”, in *The Catholic Encyclopaedia* Vol. VI, New York: Gilmary Society, 1913, 1.

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 coterminous with the period of the first seven great Ecumenical Councils 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.¹¹

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*).¹²

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

¹¹ Crehan, “Fathers of the Church”, 288.

¹² J. Quasten, *Patrology*, Vol. 1, Westminster: Christian Classics, 1984, 10.

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.

3.3. Outstanding Features of the Fathers/Doctors of the Church¹³

The Scripture and the Tradition are the foundations of Christian theology. The Tradition is rooted in the activities

¹³ 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.

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. 1 Cor 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 (DV 10).¹⁴

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.¹⁵ 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

¹⁴ *Instruction on the Study of the Fathers*, 9.

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

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.¹⁶

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.¹⁷ 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.¹⁸

¹⁶ *Instruction on the Study of the Fathers*, 10.

¹⁷ *Instruction on the Study of the Fathers*, 9.

¹⁸ *Instruction on the Study of the Fathers*, 10-11.

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.¹⁹ 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.

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.²⁰ 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.

¹⁹ *Instruction on the Study of the Fathers*, 9.

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

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, "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, 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 Chavara were generously spent for edifying the Church and the society as a powerful Christian witness in India.

DOCTORS OF THE CHURCH AND SAINT CHAVARA

Thomas Kollamparampil CMI

1. Introduction

The progress of the history of salvation is guided by the Holy Spirit according to the varying needs and levels of the reception of the divine economy by human communities in every age. In view of the continued realization of the promised salvation in every context, the divine economy provides inspired people for the building up of the Church through their teaching, guidance and exemplary active life patterns. These providential gifts of individuals are acknowledged and accepted officially as 'Doctors of the Church' from time to time.

Initially the great 'Doctors of the Church' in the West and East were acclaimed by the public than by any Church pronouncement. Thus, originally eight Doctors of the Church were accepted, four each from the West and the East; the four from the West are St Ambrose, St Augustine, St Gregory the great and St Jerome;¹ the four from the East are St Athanasius, St Basil, St Gregory of Nazianzus and St Chrysostom.² Later, in addition to these eight doctors, others were added by Popes, starting with the addition of St Thomas Aquinas by Pope St Pius V in 1568. In the 20/21 centuries four female doctors were also added to the list. They are St Catherine of Siena (by Pope Paul VI on 4 October, 1970), St Teresa of Avila (by Pope Paul VI on 27

¹ Officially these four were declared by Pope Boniface VIII on 20 September, 1295.

² Officially these four were declared by Pope Pius V in 1568.

September, 1970), St Thérèse of Lisieux (by Pope John Paul II on October 19, 1997) and St Hildegard of Bingen (by Pope Benedict XVI on 7 October, 2012). The latest additions were that of St John of Avila (by Pope Benedict XVI on 7 October, 2012) and St Gregory of Narek (by Pope Francis on 21 February, 2015). Thus, at present there are 36 Doctors of the Church declared by the Catholic Church.³

2. Current List of the Doctors of the Church (up to 2019)

No.	The Doctors	Life	Year of Declaration
1	St Athanasius	296 - 373	1568 by Pius V
2	St Ephraem the Syrian	306 - 373	October 5, 1920 by Benedict XV
3	St Hilary of Poitiers	315 - 367	May 13, 1851 by Pius IX
4	St Cyril of Jerusalem	315 - 386	July 28, 1882 by Leo XIII
5	St Gregory of Nazianzus	325 - 389	1568 by Pius V
6	St Basil the Great	329 - 379	1568 by Pius V
7	St Ambrose	339 - 397	September 20, 1295 by Boniface VIII
8	St John Chrysostom	347 - 407	1568 by Pius V
9	St Jerome	347 - 419	September 20, 1295 by Boniface VIII
10	St Augustine	354 - 430	September 20, 1295 by Boniface VIII
11	St Cyril of Alexandria	376 - 444	July 28, 1882 by Leo XIII
12	St Peter Chrysologous	400 - 450	February 10, 1729 by Benedict XIII
13	St Leo the Great	400 - 461	October 15, 1754 by Benedict XIV
14	St Gregory the Great	540 - 604	September 20, 1295 by Boniface VIII
15	St Isidore of Seville	560 - 636	April 25, 1722 by Innocent XIII
16	St John of Damascus	645 - 749	August 19, 1890 by Leo XIII
17	St Bede the Venerable	672 - 735	November 13, 1899 by Leo XIII
18	St Peter Damian	1007 - 1072	September 27, 1828 by Leo XII
19	St Anselm	1033 - 1109	February 3, 1720 by Clement XI
20	St Bernard of Clairvaux	1090 - 1153	August 20, 1830 by Pius VIII

³ The up-to-date full list of the 'Doctors of the Church' is given below.

21	St Anthony of Padua	1195 - 1231	January 16, 1946 by Pius XII
22	St Albert the Great	1206 - 1280	December 16, 1931 by Pius XI
23	St Bonaventure	1221 - 1274	March 14, 1588 by Sixtus V
24	St Thomas Aquinas	1226 - 1274	April 11, 1567 by Pius V
25	St Catherine of Siena	1347 - 1380	October 4, 1970 by Paul VI
26	St Teresa of Avila	1515 - 1582	September 27, 1970 by Paul VI
27	St Peter Canisius	1521 - 1597	May 21, 1925 by Pius XI
28	St John of the Cross	1542 - 1591	August 24, 1926 by Pius XI
29	St Robert Bellarmine	1542 - 1621	September 17, 1931 by Pius XI
30	St Lawrence of Brindisi	1559 - 1619	March 19, 1959 by John XXIII
31	St Francis de Sales	1567 - 1622	November 16, 1871 by Pius IX
32	St Alphonsus Ligouri	1696 - 1787	July 7, 1871 by Pius IX
33	St Therese of Lisieux	1873 - 1897	October 19, 1997 by John Paul II
34	St John of Avila	1500 - 1569	October 7, 2012 by Benedict XVI
35	St Hildegard of Bingen	1098 - 1179	October 7, 2012 by Benedict XVI
36	St Gregory of Narek	951 - 1003	February 21, 2015 by Pope Francis

3. On-going Teaching, Sanctifying and Governing Ministry of the Church

Humanity has been endowed with the faculties of prophecy, priesthood and kingship in creation in view of the needed teaching, sanctifying and governing in the society. These faculties are to be developed and exercised in order to attain the desired goal of human life, individually and communally. In the communal level of the exercise of teaching, sanctifying and governing, the Holy Spirit calls out and anoints suitable persons for the building up of the redeemed humanity, “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called

you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9; Ex 19:5-6).

Jesus assured the assistance of the Holy Spirit to his Church. This assistance is provided also through the teachers and guides of the community of the faithful in the Church from time to time and for all peoples of all ages. Among all peoples there are individuals of wisdom and knowledge, guided by the Holy Spirit for molding the witnessful life of the Church. St Paul speaks of various gifts and offices in the Church in 1 Corinthians 12. In 1 Thessalonians 5:19-23, St Paul advises all to test everything and hold on to what is good so as to sanctify the whole human person, body, soul and the spirit.

Tertullian speaks about the teachers of the faith for the good of the community as those who cure and maintain the community properly.⁴ Isidore of Seville, a Doctor of the Church, writes: “Just as skilled Physicians treat the body’s varied illness with different medicines, there being diverse cures for the varieties of wounds, so too a doctor of the Church uses the fitting remedy of teaching for each and all, and will proclaim whatever is needed for each person, according to age, sex and profession.”⁵ Doctors of the Church have the duties of teaching and illuminating the minds of the faithful. For this purpose some receive special interior illuminating action of the Holy Spirit.⁶

From the early Church onwards, the bishops lived a life of witnessing, exercised their teaching commitment as

⁴ cf. Tertullian, *Against the Heretics*, 8

⁵ cf. Isidore of Seville, *Book of Sentences*, Book, III.

⁶ cf. St Thomas Aquinas, *Suma Ia-IIae*, III. 4; cf. *Commentary on 1 Corinthians 12*, Lesson 2.

well as good administration of the community with the help of gifted people as guided by the Holy Spirit. In the Church, the gifts are distributed by the Holy Spirit, the services are guided by the Lord Jesus and all varieties of activities are activated by God, in and through the single economy (1Cor 12:4-6). So the teaching authority of the Church cannot be restricted to the institutional authority alone. There were people with specific charisma in the Church. The best medieval example is St Francis of Assisi who was called to reform the Church in the 13th c. There were many such gifted and charismatically blessed individuals of the community. There were male and female members, both from the clerical and the lay states, who guided the community and built up the Church in their own periods from time to time (Teresa of Avila, Catherine of Sienna, Robert Bellarmine, Thérèse of Lisieux, and others). Sometimes such teachers might have stood against some orientations of the official bishops also by their prophetic utterances and stance, in view of the radical renewal in the Church.

4. The Transmission of Christian Faith and Tradition by the Doctors of the Church

The period of the Fathers of the Church gave the basic foundation to the modes of Christian life. Even after that period the faith had to be transmitted and Christian tradition had to be molded appropriately according to the needs of the times and contexts of the world situations. It is because the history of salvation is ongoing and needs apostolic continuity and correct teachings. In such situations of the world, eminent people were called up and were anointed by the Holy Spirit with specific charisms and functions among the peoples of various Christian traditions from time to time. Those inspiring and

illuminating leaders with their orthodox teachings and orthopraxis built up the Christian community, the Church, and they became inspirational models for the posterity as well. They have even reformed the Church traditions, as done by Theresa of Avila, Alphonse Ligouri, and others.

In the organic growth of the Church, the Doctors of the Church made vital contributions. They shaped Christianity in their own historical, cultural, social, ecumenical, dogmatic settings. The Church was raised in the inclusive patterns of human life, in embracing the whole humanity for the Kingdom of God. As Christianity spread far and wide from Jerusalem (cf. Lk 24:47; Acts 1:8), there emerged the need for preaching the Word of God in various social and cultural contexts for molding the needed modes of Christian witnessing life. Some prominent models for such witnessing life are given below:

St Augustine (354-430) by his refutation of Manichaeism, Donatism and Pelagianism, laid foundation for solid Christian soteriology (against Manichaeism), sacramentology and ecclesiology (against Donatism) and anthropology (against Pelagianism). He is also a pioneer of Western monasticism on account of his way of ascetical life. He composed the monastic rules for the priests who lived with him. He also composed similar rules for the women ascetics. The book, *City of God*, by Augustine was the solution he found for the prolonged tension between the 'secularizing world and the sanctifying Christian way of life', he himself confronted in the Roman Empire. He found 'two loves', in two cities, the earthly love of self even unto the contempt of God and the heavenly love of God unto contempt of self⁷ that are in need of integration.

⁷ St Augustine, *The City of God*, 14.28.

Finally, he established that true history is the unseen but real building of the 'City of God' by assuming and getting nourished by the salvific mystery of Christ, the centre of history. *Confessions* report the personal spiritual combat and growth of Augustine.

Pope Gregory the great (540-604), by his teaching, preaching and action, laid the foundation of *Christianitas*, the medieval foundation for the Christianity in Europe.⁸ Gregory had a deep inner balancing between compunction and contemplation. The inner urge for tuning to God in contemplation and the outer fulfillment of the love of neighbour in actions that guided Gregory for his witnessful life.⁹

Catherine of Sienna (1347-1380) mediated between the warring city states and the papal authority. Her illuminated mystical experience and realistic perception on social and political life, gave her the power and wisdom to counsel the Pope. Her vision of signs and symbols, such as, tree, book, river, etc., and the wider use of allegory and symbols in describing the mystery of redemption are famous. She is an icon of women enlightenment in the Church, especially in the context of Avignon papacy.

Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) was an empowered Carmelite woman of the 16th century. By her active and contemplative life, Teresa enriched the world of spiritual realization by way of the ecstatic mystical way of Christian life. In the active sector she was a reformer of religious life, founder of convents with reformed orientation, and a

⁸ Cf. Bernard McGinn, *The Doctors of the Church*, New York: Crossroad, 1999, 85.

⁹ Cf. McGinn, *The Doctors of the Church*, 86.

prolific writer of mystical treatises and letters. She is an example of how God illuminates and guides people of specific generations through reform and contemplation.

Thérèse of Lisieux (1873-1897) brings in a specific aspect of the building of the Church and Kingdom. She opened the 'Little Way' of perfection by way of total surrender to the love of God. Her mission in her own terms was to love God and make others love God. Her way was love of God and prayer for all. Her vocation of love and apostolate of prayer for all made her a role model to common people who live their faith in ordinary situations of life. She opened a new way of being Christian amidst rationalism, hedonism and material affluence.

5. Doctors of the Church as 'Scribes Trained for the Kingdom of God'

The Word of God is multifaceted with power and energy for all times. Hence, the Church is blessed with charismatically gifted people to interpret and unveil the power and energy of the Word of God in all ages and circumstances for Christian action. Only by such Christian action, propelled by the power and energy of the Word, the transformation of the world into a 'new heaven and a new earth' (Rev 21:1) would take place. A Doctor of the Church can be described, as taught by Jesus in Mathew 13:52, "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." The Doctors of the Church are 'wise scribes' who could bring renewal of Christian life by updating the teachings and practices from the older sources of biblical teachings and updating the Christian vision for the building up of the Church as required in their times.

With their charisms, the Doctors of the Church reflect over the needs of the Church, society and the human culture, so as to bring about the needed social transformation as salvific transformation for the world. They redefined the doctrines and traditions of the Church in the new contexts of the evolving world situations for the guidance of the believers. The on-going guidance of the Spirit through the Doctors of the Church are visible in the history.¹⁰ The questions raised to Jesus and the old questions against Christian faith are reappearing in the modern world, in new age groups and other circumstances.¹¹ Such issues need purification, rectifications and proper solutions. Thus, they become 'Pastors of the New Heaven and the New Earth' by their translation of the Word of God into human and social actions by obeying the command of Jesus by 'teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you' (Mt 28:20).

6. Doctors of the Church as the Visible Face of Christ to the World

Making Christ visible, at all times, in all cultures, in all developments and at all times of crises, is the ministry of the Doctors of the Church. Here one must remember the prophecy of Simeon in the temple when Jesus was presented. He is set for the rise and fall of many (Lk 2:34). The ministry of Jesus was to preach the good news to the poor, release of captives, liberty to all who are oppressed and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord (Lk 4:18-19). In this respect the new interpretations given by Jesus to the Law in the 'Sermon on the Mount' stand as an ever-

¹⁰ Christopher Rengers, *The 33 Doctors of the Church*, xxvi.

¹¹ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 19 March, 2018, Chp. II; Nos. 37 & 40.

dynamic paradigm. While keeping the spirit of the law, the body of human action has to be given shape. It is in the mode of 'old wine in new wineskins' (Mt 9:17), old wine of Christian doctrines has to be preserved and further given out with proper renewed interpretation in the new situations of the world.

The length, breadth and depth of the Word of God are so unfathomable and are not for one interpreter alone to comprehend totally. Word of God gives needed specific resources to each generation. Hence, there is the need of teachers and guides proper to each generation. Here, we are reminded of the teaching of Saint 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 might find the needed richness in what he or she contemplates.¹²

The universal divine salvific will and plan for the world has to be made visible by teaching, preaching and Christian action in the world situations.

¹² St Ephrem the Syrian, *Commentary on the Diatessaron*, 1, 18; cf. Pope Francis, *Motu Proprio, Aperuit Illis*, 30 September, 2019, § 2.

7. Doctors of the Church as Catalysts of Spiritual and Ascetical Life

The 'indwelling of the Spirit' in all generations has to be made effective as a 'new Pentecost'. Only by the guidance and work of the Spirit the embodiment of the will of God would take place. Mary prepared herself and the Holy Spirit came upon her and the embodiment of the Word took place (Lk 1:35). On the day of Pentecost when the apostles were assembled with Mary, the Holy Spirit came upon them in tongues of fire. They were empowered by the indwelling of the Spirit for preaching the good news everywhere. Likewise, the Doctors of the Church prepare the people and the society for the coming of the Holy Spirit as on the day of Pentecost.

In developing and widening the consciousness of the people, the presence of Christ who is the way, the truth and the life, has to be made discernible (Jn 14:16). This has to be taught, experienced and lived in the society. Doctors do this and enhance the doing of this by their witnessing life and mission. From time to time, God has selected champions, leaders, teachers and models for the People of God. This factor has to be discerned, acknowledged, and accepted by all, especially in the case of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara. This acceptance itself is a model of growth. The Doctors of the Church were tuning the tradition by their noble vision, way of life, and thus opened new modes of life for the building up of the Church. So Doctors of the Church, as true guides, may be compared with the 'star of Bethlehem' (Mt 2:9) that guided the Magi to Bethlehem, to Christ Jesus, the embodied Saviour.¹³

¹³ Christopher Rengers, *The 33 Doctors of the Church*, xxx.

8. Norms for the Declaration of a Doctor of the Church

In the initial stage, the doctors of the Church in the West and East were acclaimed popularly and subsequently they were recognized by the universal Church. But later, some general norms were set to identify and recognize the Doctors of the Church. In the search for the earliest guidelines for identifying the Doctors of the Church, one finds the work of Prospero Lambertini, *The Beatification of Servants of God and the Canonization of the Blessed* (in 4 volumes).¹⁴ In the second book, he proposes three conditions required for a Doctor of the Church: *eminens doctrina* (eminent teaching), *insignis vitae sanctitas* (outstanding sanctity), and *Ecclesiae declaratio* (declaration by the Church).¹⁵ It was for the first time that these norms were proposed. According to Lambertini (Pope Benedict XIV, pope from 1740-1758) the last norm is the declaration by the Pope or by a general council. But till date, no general council has declared any one a Doctor of the Church (Book 2, Chps. 11-12). But General Councils have taken the teachings of many Doctors of the Church as norms for their teachings.

Naming of female Doctors of the Church made the norm clear that no ecclesiastical office was needed for someone to become a Doctor of the Church. In 1997 Pope St John Paul II declared St Thérèse of Lisieux a Doctor of the Church. Then he declared that the love-centered teaching of St Thérèse was an answer to the rationalism, materialism

¹⁴ Cf. Bernard McGinn, *The Doctors of the Church*, 14.

¹⁵ Lambertini had a long period of work experience in Vatican, in the Congregation for the Saints, dealing with canonization process and related issues. Thus his proposals have contextual significance and higher discernments.

and hedonism of the modern period. According to John Paul II, the 'Church Teaching' in its wider context incorporates "contemplative study to which theologians are called", the "magisterium of pastors", and the "profound understanding of spiritual things given to saints". There are enlightened and inspiring individuals in the Church who have created effective history of the course of the Church in their own times. By their life and mission, they have taken seminal steps that were aimed at the current and later fruitfulness in the community of Christians and in the course of the history of the Church.

The case of St Francis of Assisi is a concrete example of salvific tuning of the history of the Church. Doctors of the Church have many ways of teachings other than being mere doctrinal teachers. Hence, the recent perspectives on the Doctors of the Church are leaning to the power and modes of their work (in many respects) for the building up of the Church. This new perspective opens attention to the needed plurality in the aspects of teaching, sanctifying and governing modes of the Church as presented by eminent theologians, saints and pastors of the Church. Pope Paul VI once made it clear that it is not the Pope who creates the Doctors, but the Pope recognizes the ways of the Holy Spirit who works through such people in a distinguished way for the good of the Church.¹⁶ In this respect, the working of the Holy Spirit through Chavara among the Thomas Christians of India, and more specifically, in the formation of the present Syro-Malabar Church, has its own uniqueness, identity and specific contributions.

¹⁶ Cf. Bernard McGinn, *The Doctors of the Church*, 21.

9. Conclusion

The nature and function of the history of salvation makes it evident that Christianity in India, and within that spectrum, the Thomas Christians of India, had the guidance and empowering presence of the Holy Spirit in their history. Such guidance and empowering were embodied and realized through the enlightened teachers and leaders of the land. One such instance and evidence is the appointment of Chavara as the Vicar General of the Syrian Thomas Christians at the time of the tragic ordeal and challenge from Roccas schism in 1861. The power and energy of the Holy Spirit in the Church worked through Chavara for the good of the Church, precisely in keeping the unity of the Church.

There were many such vicissitudes in the history of Thomas Christians of India. During all those times, the divine providence had supplied leaders, teachers, preachers and illuminated brave sons of the Church for the faithful. Among them Chavara stands as a prominent one in many respects. His spiritual realization is acknowledged by the Universal Church through the canonization. Now his powerful inspiration and the relevance of his teachings as well as his personal witnessing power and energy are to be acknowledged locally ('Father of the Church' in the Church *sui iuris*) and in the universal Church, as 'Doctor of the Church'.

The ministry of Chavara became fruitful through the pastoral (kingly) services; the religious/sacramental level ministry became fruitful through the priestly services; the spiritual level ministry became fruitful through the prophetic vision attained from the life in *darsana veedu*

(house of vision) and *thapasu bhavanam* (house of austerity). Thus, St. Chavara had exercised his prophetic, priestly and pastoral (kingly) faculties/ duties to the maximum possible, depending upon the divine providence with full cooperation to the divine call. In quite Indian terms, in the Indian context, Chavara became a highly sublime *Yogi* (one who has realized integration), by bearing witness to the Indian way of Christian life, through *Jñâna-mârga* (path of knowledge), *Karma-mârga* (path of action), and *Bhakti-mârga* (path of devotion).

GENERAL CONCLUSION

Saints come in all colours and sizes. There are saints who loved the ornate and the Gothic, and those who loved the austere and the simple. There are queen saints and slave saints. There are seafaring saints, city dwelling saints, forest cabin saints, and shantytown saints and pillar saints. There are saints who loved elaborate habits, and saints who loved plain work clothes and of late, one appeared in his jeans! They came presenting the unlimited ways of attaining sanctity. At Assisi in Italy, Francis standing naked in the main piazza like a crazy man, vowed to live in poverty. At Toledo in Spain, John of the Cross was incarcerated by his Carmelite confreres for his attempts to reform their order. They come from all corners of the world.

Some of them, however, are titled the Fathers of the Church and a few others are called the Doctors of the Church. In some cases, these two categories overlap, but they are not the same. Those saints who are designated as Fathers of the Church are significant teachers from the early centuries of the history of the Church. Their writings on Christian doctrine and morals are considered to have great weight and are worthy of great respect. These men were also remarkably holy.

The Fathers of the Church are called so, partly because according to the Pauline teaching, the term "father" is sometimes used to refer to someone who teaches the faith by word and by example (1 Cor 4:15-16). Hence, the first teachers of the faith who came after the apostles were collectively called "the Fathers" (2 Pet 3:4). The ones who are designated as the Church Fathers played a very

critical role in interpreting the scripture, expounding the orthodoxy and orientating the community in the right direction in morality and faith. Thus, they guided the infant Church nourishing it by means of their teaching and personal holiness. Ignatius of Antioch, Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose, Augustine and John Chrysostom are a few of the great Fathers of the Church who are universally recognized.

The Doctors of the Church are called so because of their didactic contributions to the Church along with the sanctity of life and the orthodoxy they held in their teachings. These are men and women who are noted for the greatness of their spiritual or theological learning as well as the holiness of their life. The title comes from the Latin word "doctor", which literally means "teacher." All the Doctors of the Church are recognized as saints as well. A few of the great teachers of the Faith from the early centuries are both Doctors and Fathers of the Church. They come from all periods of Church history, including the modern times.

Scholars who are from the field of Church History and Hagiography are still in debate about whether a few more names could be included in the list of the Fathers of the Church. The discussion is necessitated for three reasons: First of all, there is a disagreement on the time-frame within which a Church Father should have lived and how late in the history of the Church the designation should be allowed and which century should be established as the cut-off date. Secondly, there is a debate about their teaching. The teaching of the Fathers of the Church has significance based both on the quality and the quantity of teaching. Finally, there is a debate on whether the influential ancient teachers, such as Origen and Tertullian, who taught much that is

praiseworthy and are still relevant but also taught some ideas that the Church has rejected.

It is in this context that we look at the possibility of the eligibility of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara who lived between 1805 and 1871 to be recognised as either a Father of the Church or a Doctor of the Church. He was an Indian Catholic priest, religious, theologian, poet and social reformer who belonged to the ancient Apostolic Church of St Thomas, which has come to be known as the Syro-Malabar Church. In order to assess the eligibility of Chavara, we revisit the tripartite scholarly argument mentioned above, i.e., the time, the contribution and orthodoxy. First of all, having made a thorough scrutiny of the sanctity and orthodoxy, since the universal Church has declared Chavara a saint, his orthodoxy in faith and teaching has been established beyond question.

Secondly, there is the time-frame within which a Church Father should have lived in the history of the Church in order to be considered eligible for such a title. Conventionally, the cut-off year in the Western Church was year 636 and in the Greek Church, it was 749. Such a date has not been determined for the Syriac Fathers.¹ Now, the time-frame determined by the Western and Grecian periods are the formative periods of those Churches. Taking into account both the lack of a cut-off date in the case of the Syriac Fathers, and the rather lengthy formative time that the St Thomas Christian Church took to become a full-fledged Church with a hierarchy of its own, the cut-off year of the ecclesial formative period has to be relatively late. A

¹ J.H. Crehan, "Fathers of the Church", in *A Catholic Dictionary of Theology*, Vol. II, New York: Gilmary Society, 1913, 1.

member of that Church who has fulfilled all other parameters should be considered eligible.

Thirdly, there is a debate about their teaching. The teaching of the Fathers of the Church – some of them voluminous in quantity and profound in quality and depth. However, the parameters that were used to measure them are Western and Greek. There is no comparison between the literary and philosophical Western world and the almost illiterate state of the Church in Kerala even in the 19th century in which Chavara lived and worked. The general standard of education in the society notwithstanding, taken in his own right, from the contemporary perspective, in his teachings and writings, Chavara has contributed to the Church in an unprecedented manner. Hence, in matters of dates and contribution, an Eastern Father who belonged to the ancient Church of St Thomas should be assessed with parameters developed in conjunction with the growth of the particular Church. In the light of these rationales, St Chavara, indeed is worthy to be recognized as the Father of the Church.

Now exploring the possibility of St Chavara being recognized as a Doctor of the Church, we see that whatever is applicable to the Fathers of the Church is also applicable to the Doctor of the Church except that they are not confined by a timeframe. This is why Pope Francis declared Grigor Narekatsi (Gregory Narek c.950 -1011), a Doctor of the Church in 2015. He was an Armenian mystical and lyrical poet, monk, and a theologian, venerated as a saint in the Armenian Apostolic and Catholic Church. The son of a bishop, Gregory was ordained, and was stationed at Narekavank on the southern shores of Lake Van in modern Turkey. He became the most significant theological and

literary figure of the Armenian religious tradition and was best known for his *Book of Lamentations*, a significant piece of mystical literature which serves as a confessional prayer book in many Armenian religious households. His works have inspired and influenced Armenian literature. Probably the universal Church wanted to recognize the ancient Armenian Apostolic Church by declaring one of her saintly sons as the Doctor of the Church. Moreover, the adequacy of the literature can be seen in the case of Thérèse of Lisieux (1873-1897), a young French Carmelite, who was declared the Doctor of the Church in 1997 based on what she wrote in her spiritual autobiography describing her “little way” of spiritual perfection. In the deconstructionist fashion, there is no comparison between Therese of Lisieux and Augustine or Thomas Aquinas when we consider their theological contribution. All the same, they are all Doctors of the Church!

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