

**MYSTICAL AND MISSIONARY SPIRITUALITY  
OF BLESSED KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA**

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**JOSE EROORICKAL**



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Jose Eroorickal CMI  
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## ABBREVIATIONS

### **Biblical:**

Am	Amos
Acts	Acts of the Apostles
Chr	Chronicles
Col	Colossians
Cor	Corinthians
Deut	Deuteronomy
Ecc	The Book of Ecclesiastes
Ex	Exodus
Ezek	Ezekiel
Gen	Genesis
Heb	Hebrews
Is	Isaiah
Jb	Job
Jer	Jeremiah
Jn	John
Judg	Judges
Lk	Luke
Mk	Mark
Mt	Matthew
NT	New Testament
Num	Numbers
OT	Old Testament
Pet	Peter
Ps	Psalms
Rom	Romans

**Church Documents:**

AA	<i>Apostolicam Actuositatem</i>
AAS	<i>Acta Apostolicae Sedis</i>
DCE	<i>Deus Caritas est</i>
EN	<i>Evangelii Nuntiandi</i>
EP	<i>Evangelii Praecones</i>
FD	<i>Fidei Donum</i>
ID	<i>Indulgentiarum Doctrina</i>
LG	<i>Lumen Gentium</i>
MD	<i>Mulieris Dignitatem</i>
MI	<i>Maximum Illud</i>
MND	<i>Mane Nobiscum Domine</i>
NA	<i>Nostra Aetate</i>
PC	<i>Perfectae Caritatis</i>
PDV	<i>Pastores Dabo Vobis</i>
PO	<i>Presbyterorum Ordinis</i>
PP	<i>Princeps Pastorum</i>
RD	<i>Redemptionis Donum</i>
RE	<i>Rerum Ecclesiae</i>
RH	<i>Redemptor Hominis</i>
RM	<i>Redemptoris Missio</i>
VC	<i>Vita Consecrata</i>

**Other Common Abbreviations:**

ASJM	Archives of St. Joseph's Monastery
CBCI	Catholic Bishop's Conference of India
CE	Christian Era
CIIS	Centre for the Indian and Inter-religious Studies
CKC	Chronicle of Koonammavu Convent
CMC	Congregation of Mount Carmel
CMI	Carmelites of Mary Immaculate
CMS	Church Mission Society
CS	Compunction of the Soul
CSK	<i>Chavarayachante Sampoorna Krithikal</i>



CSWR	Centre for the Study of World Religions
CTC	Congregation of the Teresian Carmelites
CWC	Complete Works of Bl. Chavara
GPA	General Plenary Assembly
IC	Interior Castle
ICS	Institute of Carmelite Studies
NGO	Non-Government Organization
OCD	Order of the Carmelites Discalced
OIC	Order of Imitation of Christ
SCOC	Sacred Congregation for the Oriental Churches
SPCK	The Society Promoting Christian Knowledge
TOCD	Third Order of the Carmelites Discalced
Ts	Testament (of Chavara)
VOSARD	Voluntary Organization for Social Action and Rural Development

## GLOSSARY

<i>Ashram</i>	=	A place where prayer, meditation, simple life etc., is practiced individually or in community.
<i>Avatara</i>	=	Incarnation, Divine descent.
<i>Bhagavad-Gita</i>	=	A section of <i>Mahabharatha</i> , one of the Hindu Epics. A long spiritual discussion between Lord Krishna and Arjuna.
<i>Bhagavan</i>	=	God, the auspicious One.
<i>Bhakti</i>	=	Devotion, loving self-surrender.
<i>Bhaktiyoga</i>	=	Path of devotion.
<i>Brahmacharya</i>	=	Studenthood, celibacy, self-restraint.
<i>Chavarul</i>	=	Testament of Chavara.
<i>Coonan Cross</i>	=	Curved or slanting Cross.
<i>Dalit</i>	=	Oppressed person, down trodden, the broken.
<i>Darsan</i>	=	Vision, seeing.
<i>Darsanaveedu</i>	=	House of vision: Religious house.
<i>Dharma</i>	=	Moral and religious duty; law, religion; righteousness; virtue. One of the four goals of human life in Hinduism
<i>Dhyanyogi</i>	=	Contemplative.

<i>Grahasta</i>	=	The house holder; married man; the second in the order of the four <i>ashrams</i> .
<i>Jnanayoga</i>	=	Path of knowledge, one of the paths for God-realization.
<i>Kalari</i>	=	Village school
<i>Kanji</i>	=	Rice porridge
<i>Karma</i>	=	Action.
<i>Karmayoga</i>	=	Path of action, one of the classical divisions of the paths for God-realization.
<i>Mahabharatha</i>	=	The largest epic of India. The legendary author is Vyasa.
<i>Malpan</i>	=	Professor or teacher. It is also a honorific title conferred on learned priests.
<i>Manusmriti</i>	=	They are the Laws of Manu who is a semi legendary Hindu lawgiver. It is one of the standard books in the Hindu canon, and a basic text for all gurus to base their teachings.
<i>Marga</i>	=	Way, Path.
<i>Maya</i>	=	Illusion.
<i>Moksha</i>	=	Liberation or release from the cycle of death and rebirth.
<i>Muni</i>	=	One who practices internal and external silence.
<i>Nishkamakarma</i>	=	Actions done with detachment, not desirous of or attached. to the fruit of the actions.

<i>Rishi</i>	=	Seer or sage. One who has attained the Divine experience.
<i>Sannyasa</i>	=	Life of renunciation, the fourth stage of life.
<i>Sannyasi(n)</i>	=	One who practices <i>sannyasa</i> .
<i>Shrama</i>	=	to exert.
<i>Swami</i> to a holy man.	=	The lord; a title or honour given to a holy man.
<i>Taittiriya Upanishad</i>	=	One of the Upanishads
<i>Tapas</i>	=	Spiritual energy, austerity, heat.
<i>Tapasubhavanam</i>	=	House of austerities.
<i>Tapodhana</i> of meditation, an	=	one who possesses the treasure ascetic.
<i>Thrishna</i>	=	Desire, Passion.
<i>Upanishads</i>	=	most important body of sacred Scriptures of Hinduism written between the eighth and third centuries BC. These are collections of stories, discussions, and instructions addressing issues of the relationship between the human and the ultimate realms.
<i>Vanaprastham</i>	=	retreat to the forest.
<i>Vanavasam</i>	=	dwelling in forest.
<i>Vedas</i>	=	The oldest collection of Hindu sacred texts. They were written between 1500 and 500 BC.
<i>Yoga</i>	=	Union, spiritual discipline. This discipline usually involves practices of meditation, mental concentration, exercises of the body including both of control and asceticism.

## INTRODUCTION

This research is a study on the spirituality of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara (1805-1871) who was a prominent mystic and a missionary in the Church, particularly the Church in Kerala (at present the Syro-Malabar Church), in India. He is well known among the people of Kerala and they remember him as the co-founder of two religious Congregations (the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate [CMI] for men, and the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel [CMC] for women), a spiritual and social reformer, the first Vicar general of the Syro-Malabar Church, and a versatile writer. Our study focuses on his spirituality in which the dimensions of ‘contemplation and action’ were well integrated and lived. This research investigates how Chavara led an exemplary life of a mystic and missionary by integrating the principles of both contemplation and action. Hence, this study is titled ‘The Mystical and the Missionary Spirituality of Blessed Chavara.’

### **Relevance and Scope of the Study**

We come to know Chavara’s spirituality not only from his biographies, but also from his own enriching writings <sup>1</sup> and his apostolic activities. The literary and spiritual qualities of Chavara’s writings are relevant teachings and a great contribution to the field of spirituality. Two of his writings (Vol. II and Vol. III) profoundly reveal his mystical personality and union with God. The active role and leadership of Chavara in pioneering several apostolates reveal his missionary zeal for the growth of the Church in Kerala. While

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<sup>1</sup> The main writings of Blessed Chavara are compiled and edited into four different volumes as *Chavarayachante sampoorana krithikal* in 1981. Cf. Z.M. Moozhoor, ed., *Chavarayachante sampoorana krithikal*, vols. I, II, & III (Mannanam: 1981)

John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila of the Carmelite Order are prominent representatives of Western mysticism with their classical writings, Chavara, who also belongs to the Carmelite family, is a prominent representative of Eastern mysticism. Hence, it is relevant to know the spirituality of Chavara.

The scope of this investigation is to study the spirituality of Chavara in depth with the help of his writings and how the elements of contemplation and action evolved into mystical and missionary spirituality in Chavara's life. Though there are researches and inspiring writings on the life of Chavara, this study is quite different. Several authors have written books and articles on Chavara and most of them have focused on his apostolate, but very few have conducted deep studies into his writings. Except for two doctoral dissertations on Chavara, the researches by Joseph Kanjiramattathil, CMI,<sup>2</sup> and by Elisabeth Molly,<sup>3</sup> no one has so far attempted to do any research, as we have done in this study. Hence, the relevance of this study is the focus on the spiritual wisdom of the writings of Chavara.

### Sources and Methodology

The original writings of Chavara, on which this study mostly depends, are available today in Malayalam. However, their English translations are also available.<sup>4</sup> Besides many writings related to the life of Chavara, the Church documents, Conciliar documents and books related to mysticism and mission, consulted for this study, will enrich the worth of this thesis. The methods used in this study is historical, analytical deductive and reflective. We analyze and interpret

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L. Vithuvattickal, ed., *Chavarayachante sampoorana krithikal*, vol. IV (Mannanam: 1982).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. J. Kanjiramattathil, "The Pastoral Vision of Kuriakose Elias Chavara." (master's thesis, University of Lateran, Rome: 1984).

<sup>3</sup> E. Molly, "Religious Philosophy of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara- a Study," (master's thesis, University of Mahatma Gandhi, Kottayam: 2007).

<sup>4</sup> They are known as *Chavarayachante sampoornakruthikal* in four volumes and each of them is subtitled as *Nalagamangal*, *Sahityakrutikal*, *Adhyathmikakrutikal* and *Kathukal* respectively. And they were translated to English under the title *The Complete Works of Blessed Chavara [CWC]* in 1989. Cf. P. J. Thomas, trans., *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara: The Chronicles*, vol. I (Mannanam: 1989); M. Leo, trans., *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara: Compunction of the Soul, Dirge, Anastasia's Martyrdom* (Mannanam: 1989); J. Chitilappilly, trans., *Complete Works of Blessed. Chavara: Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, vol.

Chavara's writings to ascertain a coherent view of his mystical and missionary spirituality.

### **Structure of the Study**

The research is comprised of four chapters besides the general introduction and the general conclusion. The first chapter is a brief study of the life and personality of Chavara. In his biographical sketch, we come across many circumstances that groomed him to be a worthy son of the Church. The profile, given in this chapter, presents his infancy and childhood, his active role as a great leader in the Church, the final stages of his life and the popular private devotions to him after his death. The visible signs of his sanctity and the testimony of many individuals described at the end of this chapter show his holiness and his power of intercession.

In the second chapter we study Chavara's teachings on mysticism. The first section of the chapter is an overview of the concept of mysticism from a scriptural, traditional and patristic perspective. The second section narrates the primary and secondary factors, which are foundational, that formed Chavara into a unique person. The third section is an analysis of his poetical and prose writings from which the main teachings of Chavara's mysticism are drawn. Though he was engaged in several external welfare apostolates he found time for contemplation and to share his profound God-experiences in writings in the form of beautiful poems. They were not only outstanding literary writings but also resemble the features of a spiritual canticle. The writings in prose describe Chavara's personal encounter with God. In these writings one finds a collection of his personal meditations in which he narrates his profound *Abba* experiences.

The third chapter focuses on Chavara's missionary spirituality and his valuable contributions to the St. Thomas Christian community [present Syro-Malabar Church], in Kerala. Here we analyze the concept of missionary spirituality, the historical background of the Syro-Malabar Church and its missionary consciousness and conclude with a note on the contribution of Chavara in this field. Here we also consider *The Chronicles* and *The Letters* which are important sources to understand Chavara's active role in the Syro-Malabar Church. By his apostolic works Chavara was enkindling the missionary zeal in the Syro-Malabar Church. The rich traditions we find today in the

Syro-Malabar Church are to a great extent the result of his vision. This Church, which Chavara nurtured and defended, has spread worldwide today, and her missionary activities are admirable and praiseworthy. Today this church is blessed with a good number of religious and missionaries rendering their services to the Church all over the world.

The fourth chapter is a theological appraisal of Chavara's mystical and missionary spirituality. In this assessment one finds a rhythm of Chavara's God-experiences expressed in the poetic writings which he calls spiritual canticles (*atmageetanagl*), writings in prose as spiritual colloquies (*atmasallapangal*) and finally his God-experience culminates in a spiritual union (*atmavismruti*). These experiences expressed in his writings make Chavara a unique and prominent mystic of the East.

While Chavara was a man with deep spiritual insights and mystical experiences, he was also open to the realities around him. The sensibility to these realities made him play an active role in the Church which in turn, provides spirituality for missionaries. For the people of his time, both Christians and non-Christians, he was a holy person. He followed a life of pure *nishkamakarma* (selfless action)<sup>5</sup> dedicated to God, *ecclesia* and the people, which led him to engage in various activities and work for the renewal of the Church. Chavara had a great rapport with the people in witnessing Christ. He had a clear vision for the future mission of Indian society. The people accepted him and his views, and perceived the goodness in him. In fact, Chavara was not 'enforcing the Gospel' but revealing the Gospel values that attracted people to them (gospel values). Both as a mystic and a missionary Chavara contributed much to Christian spirituality. His spirituality is most relevant for the religious and the missionaries of today. In this context, a proper Christian living and witnessing of Christ as modelled by Chavara is a guide par excellence for the present day religious and missionaries in India.

III (Mannanam: 1989); M. Leo, trans., *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara: The Letters*, vol. IV (Mannanam: 1989).

<sup>5</sup> The word *nishkamakarma*, derives originally from Sanskrit, meaning, 'actions are to be done with detachment,' i.e., 'not desirous of or attached to its fruits.' It denotes a detachment from the fruits of one's action, or a selfless action for the general welfare. The concept is well understood with the background of the dialogue between Lord Krishna and warrior Arjuna, described in *Bhagavad-Gita*, a spiritual classic of India.



## Chapter One

# LIFE AND PERSONALITY OF BLESSED CHAVARA: A PROFILE

### Introduction

Throughout the history of the Church the Holy Spirit has inspired and called various persons in various cultures at various times to be prophets to the world. They inspired others to follow their footsteps and live the Gospel as they lived it. Each founder or foundress of a religious community received a particular charism from God to be of special service to the Church at a particular time in history. Charisms are gifts of the Holy Spirit for the benefit of the Church. Each charism received, lived out and transmitted, is given to the Church and humanity at a specific moment in history. This intuition has neither boundaries nor precise direction and is limited by neither time nor space. Yet, this new and pressing experience of the Holy Spirit energizes every bearer of gifts to transform his/her life. God gives a person this special charism to meet the needs of the Church. Such individuals are special envoys of God sent to fulfill a certain mission or for a special purpose to revitalize humanity at particularly crucial times. The personality of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara<sup>1</sup> shows the world how to respond to God's love and to his call.

In the biblical account the call of Abraham and Moses shows that they were people primarily chosen to perform a particular

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<sup>1</sup> In some writings Chavara's name is also given as Cyriac Elias Chavara, but both indicate the same person. The name used in the *Positio* is Cyriac. Cf. *Positio: Cyriaci Elias Chavara*, (Rome: 1977), 27; Kuriakose was the name given to him at the time of baptism, whereas Elias was a later addition which he assumed when he made his religious vows. Chavara is the family name or the surname.

mission for Yahweh (cf. Gen 12; Ex 3). Saints Benedict, Dominic, Francis of Assisi, Ignatius of Loyola, Vincent de Paul, Don Bosco, Teresa of Avila, Clare, and Catherine of Siena were some of the prominent individuals in the Church. Like these saintly individuals, Chavara was chosen by God as an envoy, commissioned to renew the Church in India, particularly the Syro-Malabar Church in Kerala.<sup>2</sup>

Indian spiritual tradition, especially the Hinduism, speaks of a doctrine of *avatara* (incarnation), a doctrine which says that whenever human society disintegrates and degenerates from righteousness, God incarnates or assumes visible forms with a definite purpose.<sup>3</sup> In similar way Chavara was like an *avatara* for the restoration of the Church in Kerala, which is presently known as the Syro-Malabar Church.<sup>4</sup> His main objective was to promote the interest of his community and to give effective leadership in remaining in communion with the See of Rome.

### **I. A Glimpse into Chavara's Life**

We shall study the life of Chavara in four different stages and each of them points to certain inspiring features in his life. In the first stage we look at his birth, infancy and childhood, his school education, vocation and life in the seminary. Secondly, we discuss his active life from the time of his priestly ordination until the year when his health began to fail. The third stage we shall call the evening of his life to denote the time of preparation to depart from this world. It consists of an overview of the sufferings in his life and here we see how he made a proximate preparation for his eternal life. Finally and fourthly, a special section is devoted to the analysis of events after his death. Here we shall consider the faith of the multitude of people who experienced Blessed Chavara's intercession, which points to his sanctity proved by the signs and evidences of the favors they received.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. C.D. Valerian, *Vannya divya sree Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan* (Mannanam: 1939), 6.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. R.C. Zaehner, *Bhagavad-Gîta* (London: 1979), 58.

<sup>4</sup> The name presently given to the St. Thomas Christian Community remained faithful to Rome during the time of Chavara. The name Syro-Malabar came into existence only after his death when the Church attained autonomy.

## A. Birth and Childhood

Kuriakose was born on 10<sup>th</sup> February 1805 in the village of Kainakary in Kerala, India. His parents, Kuriako and Mariam Chavara, were pious and devout Catholics and hailed from traditional Catholic families<sup>5</sup> of the Syrian Christian community. Kuriakose had four sisters and a brother, and was the youngest of the family. Both parents took great care to bring him up as a good Christian. He was baptized on 16<sup>th</sup> February 1805 with the *Nazrani* tradition.<sup>6</sup> In particular, his mother was careful to ensure that he would be filled with the virtues of humility, charity and fear of God. Later, Chavara considered the day of baptism as a great day and a great gift of God.<sup>7</sup> He was ever faithful in maintaining the baptismal grace. On his death bed he makes the following claim: “I am proud until today that the grace received at baptism is not lost.”<sup>8</sup> This particular faithfulness in protecting his baptismal grace is accepted as a heroic witness.<sup>9</sup>

His mother was a great devotee of the Blessed Virgin Mary. We see an expression of her great devotion when she dedicated young Kuriakose in a special way to the care of the Blessed Mother at the Marian Shrine at Vechoor.<sup>10</sup> “Accept him as your humble slave, to your maternal love, I entrust him, my lowly womb’s humble,

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<sup>5</sup> Here, the ‘traditional Catholic family’ signifies as a family which received Christian faith from St. Thomas, the Apostle. It is believed and the historical records show that family of Chavara is one of the branches of the famous ‘Pakalomattam family’, which Apostle St. Thomas baptised in AD 52. Later on when the family lineage stemmed into different branches it took different names such as Meenappally and Kalassery. ‘Chavara’ was a branch that stemmed from the ‘Meenappally’ family. Cf. C.D Valerian, *vannya divya sree Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan*, 8; Z. M. Moozhoor, *Blessed Chavara: The Star of the East* (Kottayam: 1993), 3.

<sup>6</sup> Formerly the Christians in Kerala were commonly known as *Nazranis* and it was in this name they were known also during Chavara’s lifetime.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. CWC, vol. II: *Compunction of the Soul*, 2, line 36.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. C. D. Valerian, *Vannya divya sree Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan*, 315.

<sup>9</sup> *Positio*, 361.

<sup>10</sup> There is a very ancient Church at Kudavechoor (estd. 1463) dedicated to Our Lady, popularly called *Vechoor Muthiamma*. It is a famous pilgrim centre. The feast falls on 8th September and thousands of pilgrims flock there from all parts of Kerala. A picture of Our Lady, which is believed to be a replica of the one painted by St. Luke, is kept here. Cf. *Compunction of the Soul*, 6.

tender fruit.”<sup>11</sup> She offered her son to the care of Mother Mary. This way of love and devotion of his parents to the Blessed Mother inspired and attracted him to the devotion to her from a very early age. As he claims, his mother’s loving care had a greater influence on him than his father’s. At the time, the father of the family was the bread winner, whereas the mother remained at home bringing up the children. When we go through his writings, we find how he frequently refers to his mother’s commitment to his spiritual formation and education. He writes:

Mixed in her sweet milk, she regaled me  
 With thoughts of heaven, and words of grace pure!  
 And when reason grew strong, my little mind  
 Patiently informed, to lisp holy names

Huddled close to her feet, I learnt aright  
 Gently, of matters sublime, of my Faith  
 As at midnight she rose and knelt at prayer  
 Warding off sleep and pretty dullness to the air  
 Long hours, on her knee in prayer she stayed <sup>12</sup>

Chavara’s mother sowed seeds of the spirit of prayer in the mind of little Kuriakose, forming him in to a man of prayer. She gave him the primary lessons in prayer while breast-feeding him. He imbibed them earnestly; sitting beside her; he learned many things about God. She woke him up at midnight, so he might say little prayers to the ‘Mother of God’ and to ‘Jesus, the King.’ <sup>13</sup>

In Christian families of Kerala, the parents take care that their children grow in good discipline and they have great expectations of their future. The mother of Chavara not only cared about his physical growth, but also his spiritual growth. It was important that he grew as a child of God, who granted him a healthy and sound body. She not only taught him to pray, but was also a living witness of the faith which his young mind imbibed. Gradually she taught him the mysteries of Christian faith such as the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of our Lord.

<sup>11</sup> CWC, vol. II: *Compunction of the Soul*, 6, line 8.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 2, lines 48-56.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Compunction of the Soul*, 2-3 lines 59-60.

This does not mean that his father had no role in his upbringing. At that time, the traditions, culture and the social system in Kerala were quite different from today. Chavara does not mention specifically the role of his father, but he recalls him in his writings on the role played by his parents, which he describes as follows:

My pious parents, in different ways, impressed on my mind the Holy Family: Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. I have been always keeping the Holy Family in my mind in this way and have been retaining in my memory and honouring them.<sup>14</sup>

The parents had great love for their young son and he grew up to desire a life that was pleasing to God and man.

**B. School Education**

The young Chavara was initiated to *Kalari*<sup>15</sup> - village school - at the age of five and he continued there until he was ten years old. The *Kalari* was frequented by children of different family backgrounds and religions. On entering school, the child experienced a different atmosphere from that which he had enjoyed with his family members, and it was a very strange experience to find himself in a strange place and with unfamiliar faces. Even though parents care for their children and have a good rapport with them so that they may see and learn only good things, but even in the family a certain atmosphere can have a negative effect on young minds. In a particular situation, Chavara felt very guilty about his shortcomings during his student life at *Kalari*. He recalls this in his writings:

All my colleagues save a few of them  
Held not the Christian faith .....  
.....  
Mingling free with those my dizzy friends  
Stilled became my gratitude to God;

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<sup>14</sup> L. Moolayail, *Short Biography of the Last Years (from September 1869 to January 1871) of the Venerable Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara: The First Prior of the Congregation of the Carmelites of Malabar* (Mutholy: 1923); J. Kanjiramattathil, *The Pastoral Vision of Kuriakose Elias Chavara* (Bangalore: 1986), 9-10.

<sup>15</sup> *Kalari* is a village school where children were given primary education in olden days. It was the only means available for providing education at that time. Cf. H. C, Perumalil, K.M. Tharakan and Others, ed., *Christian Encyclopaedia* (Alleppy: 1975), 495.

Steeped in flaws; amid such Godless chums  
 Who could reap but dust the dingiest clod?  
 Temptations abounded where're I cast my looks  
 The scenes around me beckoned me to sin  
 Indecent pranks, immodest words and deeds.<sup>16</sup>

But his mother's discipline had made him very prudent and intelligent. His pious way of life even surprised his neighbors and made them love him very much. Hence, like the Child Jesus, little Kuriakose also "increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man" (cf. Lk 2:53).

In the five years of *Kalari* education, the children were taught the languages of Malayalam, Tamil and Sanskrit. Chavara was very brilliant and was successful in his studies. His special skill in learning languages was very helpful in his later life. Its tremendous impact inspired Chavara and he encouraged others to learn several languages. When he was at school he was initiated to assist at mass in the parish church. The child showed a keen interest in learning the prayers which were mostly in Syriac. Such pious activities instilled in him a sense of belonging to the Church, and led him to obey and respect the Church authorities.

### **C. Vocation and Seminary Life**

Chavara's infancy shows God's special grace in his life, acting through a good devoted Christian family and parents. This grace of God continued to work in him and helped him to choose a proper vocation in his life, which he later recalls in his writings. Everybody admired him on account of his unusual piety and good qualities. When Fr. Thomas Palackal first met Kuriakose, he was impressed by his character. As a preparation to enter the seminary Kuriakose spent two years in the parish church at Chennamkary.<sup>17</sup> His life in the seminary at Pallippuram, the ideal life of Fr. Thomas Palackal and the tragic moments that occurred during the period of his studies would play an important role in his life.

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<sup>16</sup> *Compunction of the Soul*, 3- 4, lines 93-108.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Compunction of the Soul*, 5.

## 1. Kuriakose at Pallippuram Seminary

At thirteen Kuriakose entered the seminary at Pallippuram. It was the seminary started by Fr. Abraham Thachil, brother of Mathew Tharakan Thachil. When Chavara entered the seminary, Fr. Palackal was the Rector there. Chavara described his life at the seminary as an occasion for spiritual, intellectual and disciplinary formation. In the first year he learned Syriac, the liturgical language of the Malabar Christians.<sup>18</sup> He described the several difficulties in learning the Sacred Sciences as there were insufficient books in Malayalam. Most of the books were available only in Tamil. So the rector made earnest efforts to make the books in Malayalam available to his students.<sup>19</sup> As Chavara was a brilliant student, quick in learning languages, the rector encouraged him to learn more languages. Thus, he learned Latin and Portuguese besides Syriac.

He found life at the seminary very fascinating. From the description given in *The Chronicles*, it is clear that Chavara was very kind and gentle to others in their needs. In this regard he speaks particularly about a Philip who was weak in his studies and also needed improvement in his prayer life. Among other things, Chavara describes the discipline in the seminary, the nature of the timetable and the traditional use of cassocks at that time.

## 2. Influence of Fr. Thomas Palackal

Fr. Thomas Palackal played a decisive role in Chavara's decision regarding his vocation and his priestly formation. According to Chavara, Fr. Palackal was a man of knowledge and led an exemplary life; He was hardworking, efficient and intellectual. Chavara highly praised Fr. Palackal's efforts to impart maximum knowledge to the future priests. He learned Tamil and translated the materials from other languages into Malayalam. Besides, the simple and saintly life of Fr. Palackal represented a great Gospel ideal for the seminarians. His life was very austere. Chavara himself writes about him in the following words: "He had no breakfast and for lunch he had only some rice and for supper a little *kanji* (rice porridge)." These traits of the rector were a great inspiration for

<sup>18</sup> Cf. C.D. Valerian, *Vannya divya sree Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan*, 31.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *The Chronicles*, 63-64.

Chavara to take his religious studies and spiritual life seriously. As a result, he led an exemplary life and therefore he was very much loved by Fr. Palackal and others.

### **3. Turning Point in Chavara's Life**

In 1827 Brother Chavara received the diaconate from Bishop Peter de Alkandra, who was then Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly.<sup>20</sup> But some tragic incidents immediately after his ordination to the diaconate were moments of challenge in the pursuit of his vocation. While he was a student in the seminary, he lost his parents and the only brother due to an epidemic in his home village. As all four of his sisters were married, his sister-in-law was left alone at home with her infant daughter. At the death of his brother, the relatives forced him to interrupt his priestly training in order to manage the affairs of the Chavara family.<sup>21</sup> Even Fr. Palackal, his rector, raised no objections to his break in studies. The rector yielded to the situation and sent him home.

At home, the young seminarian met his eldest sister, to whom sometime later he entrusted the management of the affairs of the family in his stead, until his niece came of age and had settled within the Chavara family. In this way, Chavara settled the issue prudently and returned to the seminary with renewed dedication to his priestly studies. The providence of God helped him through all his difficulties.

## **II. Active Life of Chavara: Time of Leadership**

### **A. Early Years of Priestly Ministry**

Chavara's active life began with his priestly ordination. On November 29, 1829, at the age of 24, he was ordained to the priesthood by Bishop Maurelius Stabilini, Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly, at St. Andrew's church, Arthungal, and he celebrated his First Holy Mass at Chennankari Church.<sup>22</sup> After the ordination he

<sup>20</sup> Cf. C.D.Valerian, *Vannya divya sree Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan*, 26; Z. M. Moozhoor, *Bl. Chavara: The Star of the East*, 11.

<sup>21</sup> As Chavara was the only male member to continue the lineage of Chavara Family after his brother died, his relatives that compelled him to discontinue his studies and return to the family.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. K.C. Chacko, *Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara* (Mannanam: 1968); Z. M. Moozhoor, *Bl. Chavara: The Star of the East*, 16.



served in his home parish and nearby parishes for some time. Then, he was asked to assist *Malpan*<sup>23</sup> Fr. Palackal at the Pallipuram seminary.

Chavara had high regard for the priesthood. He considered the preaching of the word of God to be a priest's primary duty, especially in the particular situation of his society. Sensing the need of the faithful who were yearning for spiritual food, he preached in a few churches. On the invitation of the faithful and of the parish priest, he preached also a spiritual retreat to the faithful of the parish at Pulincunnu. The spiritual benefit people received from the retreat was so great that they could recall his sermons and draw spiritual benefit from them even several years later.<sup>24</sup> He had a long cherished desire to serve God and his people. Ultimately, he most liked to be at the service of the people, something he had zealously desired from a very young age.<sup>25</sup> However, when he was asked to assist Fr. Palackal at Pallipuram seminary, he accepted it as the will of God. But he continued to move among the people while giving priority to the responsibility he had been entrusted with.

While assisting the Malpan in the seminary, he was also moving from one place to another as a retreat preacher. During this time he realized that certain things were to be done urgently in the Church in Kerala. He was firmly convinced that only holy priests could do anything worthwhile for the spiritual transformation of society of the time. On one occasion, he expressed his grief over the fact that the St. Thomas Christian community had not produced a saint even though Christianity had reached India in the first century. He considered the formation of priests and the renovation of society as the most urgent needs of his time.

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<sup>23</sup> *Malpan* is a Syriac word which means 'Professor' or 'Teacher'. It is an honorary title conferred on learned priests by the bishop, known for their learning and sanctity of life. Formerly, there existed many parochial seminaries under 'Malpans'. In the course of time most of them disappeared. For more explanation see, J. Kallarangattu, "St. Thomas Christians of India: Ecclesial Heritages and Perspectives," *Christian Orient: Journal of Eastern Churches for Creative Theological Thinking* 21 (March 2000): 32.

<sup>24</sup> L. Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara* (Mannanam: 2003), 6.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. C.D.Valerian, *Vannya divya sree Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan*, 42.

## B. Leadership in Spiritual Renewal

As a spiritual leader Chavara pioneered several Christian devotions and practices in the Syro-Malabar Church. His profound vision of several innovative works began to flourish within a short time in the Kerala Church. The important spiritual initiatives were formation of ideal Christian families, retreat preaching, and fostering major Christian devotions. First, He considered the family to be the most important unit to play a vital role in the Church. After ordination he took great interest in visiting the sick and converting sinners. He wished and prayed for the holistic development of the people and his deeds made them feel that he was very amiable and approachable. *A Testament of a loving Father* written by him is regarded as the Magna Carta for Christian families.

Secondly, he gave much importance to preaching the Word of God. Sermons were not preached frequently in those days, which negatively affected the spiritual growth of the Christian community. Conscious of this drawback, Chavara preached from parish to parish. His preaching was very effective and popular among the people, as we have already seen.

Thirdly, the efficient spiritual leadership of Chavara earned great recognition from the ecclesiastical authorities. Chavara played an important role in safeguarding the Church in Kerala from the threats of division and disunity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Church in Kerala. The vital role he played during the time of the Roccas Schism is a remarkable historical event.<sup>26</sup> Besides his responsibility as the

<sup>26</sup> Roccas Schism was regarded as a great schism in the Kerala Church in 1861. There was an intense desire among Malabar Christians for a bishop of their own Rite which had been denied to them in 1599 at the synod of Diamper. Thomas Roccas was sent to Kerala by the Patriarch of Persia only as a delegate to study the situation in Malabar Church. He was given a grand welcome by the Malabar Christians. A few weeks later, he began to assume the powers of a proper bishop which was known to neither the Holy See of Rome nor the Patriarch of Persia. His presence and activities among Malabar Christians created confusion with regard to both the Latin hierarchy of Verapoly as well as the faithful. Chavara, who was revered as faithful to the Vicariate of Verapoly, was entrusted with more responsibilities to deal the issue. He played an important role in fighting this great schism which was a grave threat to the unity of Kerala Church. For more details see CMI, *The Carmelites Congregation of Malabar* [1831-1931] (Ernakulam: 1932), 48-54; K.C. Chacko, *Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 57-64; CWC, vol. I: *The Chronicles*, 161-69.

Prior of his religious community, he was appointed Vicar General of the Malabar Church in 1861. This gave him the opportunity to initiate several reforms as well as to fight against schism in the Church of Malabar.

The main activities of his reforms are found in the field of the formation of priests, of liturgy, education, mass communication and the building of ideal Christian families. With a view to improving the spiritual life of priests, Chavara introduced annual retreats for them.<sup>27</sup> To facilitate the celebration of the Divine Liturgy with devotion and in a uniform manner, Chavara prepared the rubrics of the Liturgy in detail and made their observance obligatory. He prepared the liturgical calendar of the Syro-Malabar Church re-introducing the traditional nine liturgical periods,<sup>28</sup> which had almost been forgotten during the Latin jurisdiction.

### **C. Leadership in Social Renewal**

His special skill of leadership in the spiritual field was utilized by Chavara in the social fields too. He pioneered many welfare activities, which were real challenges in those times. His projects of socio-cultural and religious upliftment at various levels, aimed at the integral development of society, concentrated on the fields of education, on uplifting of the poor and backward classes, on media communication and on fighting against the prevailing social evils.

As we have a special chapter dedicated to Chavara's social welfare activities, we shall give here only a short description of them. In the social field he concentrated on the education of all. The starting of a Sanskrit school at Mannanam in 1846 was meant for all people in society without any distinction of caste or religion. There were several objectives for this. First, the venture was to convey the message of respect for human dignity and values that had been neglected due to the caste and other social systems of ancient India. Secondly, Sanskrit was considered to be the language

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. *Positio*, 275; T. Bernard, *Brief History of the Third Order of the Carmelites Discalced* [TOCD] *Congregation* (Ernakulam: 1989), 286.

<sup>28</sup> There are nine liturgical periods according to the Syro-Malabar Liturgical tradition. Each one generally, consists of seven weeks. They are the Period of Annunciation, Nativity, Epiphany, Lent, Resurrection, Apostles, *Kaitha*, Elijah-the Cross- Moses, and Dedication of the Church.

*par excellence* for spiritual knowledge as it was the Vedic language. Thirdly, English was a newcomer and there was resistance to it on the part of the Catholics as it was considered to be the language brought by the British Protestants.<sup>29</sup>

The apostolate of the press was a followup of his educational vision that led to the spiritual and intellectual growth of the individual. He founded a printing press primarily meant to spread Catholic literature. At that time there were only two printing presses in Kerala, one owned by the Government of Travancore and the other by the CMS missionaries. These were not willing to print articles on Catholic matters. So Chavara took it upon himself to provide such a means.<sup>30</sup> He also initiated other welfare activities for the development of society.

#### **D. Co-Founder of Religious Communities**

Chavara is known as the co-founder of two indigenous religious congregations. The Church in Kerala during Chavara's time was familiar with different religious orders in the West, and it ardently desired for a religious community of its own. Some historic writings show that there were religious even among the St. Thomas Christians in the early centuries. While describing the tomb of St. Thomas at Mylapore, the Arabic Scholar and historian Amar, mentions a religious house founded in the name of St. Thomas.<sup>31</sup> It was known as "the Convent of St. Thomas."<sup>32</sup> In 1501, a priest from the St. Thomas Christians, known as Joseph the Indian, while visiting places such as Lisbon, Rome and Venice talked about religious men and women in Kerala who were leading a life of detachment.<sup>33</sup> All these prove that the existence of religious groups and religious life was not new to the Church in India, but for some

<sup>29</sup> Cf. M. Kaniampampil, "Blessed Chavara and his Unique Contributions to the Church in India," *Herald of the East* 6 (December 2004): 4.

<sup>30</sup> For more details regarding the foundation of the Press at Mannanam, See C.D. Valerian, *Vannya divya sree Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan*, 88.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. A. E. Medlycott, *India and the Apostle St. Thomas* (London: 1905), 96.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. T. Bernard, *Marthomachristianikal*, vol. I, 41-2; Cf. D. Ferroli, *Jesuits in Malabar*, vol. I (Bangalore: 1937), 368-69.

<sup>33</sup> A. Vallavanthara, *India in 1500 AD: The Narratives of Joseph the Indian*, (Mannanam: 1984), 176; A. M. Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India*, vol. I (Bangalore: 1984), 187.

reason or other, they all ceased to exist without leaving behind many historical details about their life, activities and other characteristics. With the appearance of Chavara, in the Malabar Church the pioneering of an indigenous religious life gained renewed vigour.

A consideration of his role as the co-founder of religious communities, is worth reflecting on the importance of the gift of charisms from the Catholic point of view. The Greek word *charisma* refers to a spiritual capacity resulting from God's grace (*charis*).<sup>34</sup> "Charism" is traditionally defined as a grace, i.e., a gift of the Holy Spirit, given not only for the sake of the recipient but also and primarily for the building up or edification of the Church.<sup>35</sup> W. Harrington, "Charism," J.A. Komonchak, M. Collins, and D.A. Lane, eds, *The New Dictionary of Theology* (Wilmington: 1992), 180-83.

Various religious Orders are the bearers of these gifts. Here we find an agreement with St. Paul's teaching that every manifestation of the Spirit is for the common good (ICor 12:7).

With regard to the charism of each founders, the Second Vatican Council makes the following observations, "the spirit and aims of each founder [which] should be faithfully accepted and retained" (PC no.2). In the case of Chavara, his charism assumed solidarity with the poor, resulting in the gradual emergence of the need for a specific type of presence which he was to bequeath to his foundations. His keen evangelical insight became a force and a power that was to lead his congregations to live in a prophetic and evangelical way.

### **1. Carmelites of Mary Immaculate [CMI] Congregation**

According to the history of the foundation of the CMI Congregation, the foundation of the congregation was the result of the united thought of three priests of the Syro-Malabar Church, namely, Thomas Palackal, Thomas Porukara and Kuriakose Chavara and assisted by Brother Jacob Kaniayanthara. As we

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<sup>34</sup> E. J. Malatesta, "Charism," M. Downey, ed., *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality* (Bangalore: 1995), 140-43.

<sup>35</sup> W. Harrington, "Charism," J.A. Komonchak, M. Collins, and D.A. Lane, eds, *The New Dictionary of Theology* (Wilmington: 1992), 180-83.

already have a profile of Chavara, let us also know the other two priests and Brother Jacob Kanianthara before discussing the role of Chavara as the cofounder of the CMI Congregation.

Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara were two zealous priests of the Syro Malabar Christian community and co-founders of the CMI Congregation together with Chavara. After his ordination Palackal served the Church as a *Malpan* (Seminary professor). A man of prayer with a spirit of self-sacrifice, he was the Rector of the Seminary of the Malabar Christians at Pallipuram. Among his duties, he was also secretary and advisor to the Bishop of Verapoly.

Thomas Porukara was another co-founder of the CMI Congregation. After his priestly ordination he was engaged mostly in parish ministry. He was a great devotee of St. Joseph and encouraged people to grow in that devotion. This devotion of his was instrumental in choosing St. Joseph as the Patron Saint of the Church and Monastery at Mannanam. His abiding interest in silence and prayer prompted him to work for the foundation of the indigenous religious Congregation. Both priests enjoyed their respective ministries, but they had a great desire to spend the rest of their lives in prayer and meditation.<sup>36</sup>

Jacob Kanianthara was a person associated with Porukara and Palackal with the desire to serve the Church but remained in the Brotherhood. He labored much with the other founders for the erection of the Monastery at Mannanam. He made the profession of his vows as a brother-co-operator in 1865 and died in 1893.<sup>37</sup>

The initial proposal of starting a religious community for men was put forward by Thomas Porukara in the year 1822.<sup>38</sup> Once he communicated his desire for religious life to his friend Jacob Kanianthara: "When I shall be ordained, both of us shall go into solitude to lead a *vanavasam* (hermit life). Salvation will be difficult, if we live in this world."<sup>39</sup> This desire was communicated thereafter to Thomas Palackal and Chavara. Along with the goal of a total

<sup>36</sup> Cf. A. Kanjirathinkal, *A Church in Struggle* (Bangalore: 1984), 69.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. "History of the CMI Congregation," [www.cmicongregation.org](http://www.cmicongregation.org) ( May 15, 2006).

<sup>38</sup> C.D. Valerian, *Vannya divya sree Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan*, 47.

<sup>39</sup> J. Kanianthara, *Chronicle of Mannanam Monastery* (Mannanam), 1; C.D. Valerian, *Vannya divya sree Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan*, 47- 48.

renovation of the Church, Chavara also ardently desired to have a religious community in the Syro-Malabar Church. Chavara, who was a disciple of both Palackal and Porukara, joined in their enthusiasm for starting a religious community. The Chronicle of the monastery at Mannanam speaks of the starting a Congregation in Chavara's words:

In this Malabar not even the priests have a religious house (*Tapasubhavanam*). Consequently several good things are not being realized here. Hence it is our earnest desire and our request, that a religious institute (*Darsanaveedu*) be started here, at least for priests.<sup>40</sup>

While narrating the history of the foundation of the Congregation, Chavara uses the terms '*Tapasubhavanam*' and *Darsanaveedu*, which have great significance in the Oriental Christian and Indian traditions. In the Indian view *tapa* (austerity) is a synonym for religious life and the house for it is *Tapasubhavanam*. In the following sections, we consider the great role of Chavara as a co-founder, his vision and his leadership of the newly founded religious community after the death of the two other co-founders. So we shall consider both his initial role and his major role as a co-founder.

### **a. Initial Role as Co-founder**

We have already seen some evidence of the idea of founding a religious community which was first initiated by Father Porukara. Chavara was only a deacon when Fathers Palackal and Porukara first expressed this desire, so it might not have been proper for him to immediately spell out his likes or dislikes as a seminarian. But he was happy about such a new venture. However, the young deacon felt free to share his views when the other two discussed the topic with him on several occasions. It may be surprising for us that they discussed this with a seminarian under their guidance; nevertheless, they placed great hope in the person of Chavara seeing his way of life. They viewed in him a brave personality for the future Indian Church. Chavara himself was, therefore, inspired by his inner spirit when he offered the first Mass with the intention for its realization.<sup>41</sup> The role

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<sup>40</sup> *The Chronicles*, 1.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. *The Chronicles*, 26; C.D. Valerian, *Vannya divya sree Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan*, 41.

of Chavara, the youngest among them in this venture, is quite remarkable.

After the priestly ordination of Chavara, the idea of starting a religious community again became the topic of their discussions. Together with Fr. Chavara their idea of a religious community matured. Consequently, on November 1, 1829 two fathers, Palackal and Porukara, approached the Vicar Apostolic Bishop Maurilius Stabilini, of the Vicariate Apostolic of Verapoly in Kerala, for permission to retire to a quiet place. The Bishop appreciated their good desire but did not approve the proposal as they desired. As there were few educated priests like Palackal and Porukara, he advised them to found a religious house in such a way that they might do good to the people instead of retiring to lead a life of a hermit.<sup>42</sup> Considering the extreme needs of their time, both Palackal and Porukara followed the direction given by the Bishop and Fr. Chavara joined them in establishing the first indigenous religious community. In the letter of 1st November 1829 Bishop Stabilini approved the proposal and gave permission to establish a monastery.<sup>43</sup> A religious community was then founded with the motto of *sanctification of self and sanctification of others*. The foundation would set a good example for the people around and facilitate conversion to the faith, the reunion of the separated brethren and progress of the Malabar Church. This motto summarized the vision of Chavara's plan of a holistic development, namely, development of the religious, social and cultural necessities of the time. Thus, on May 11, 1831, their long cherished dream of a religious house was realized at Mannanam.<sup>44</sup> The new religious community was named the Servants of Mary Immaculate.<sup>45</sup> After a few years, more members began to join the religious community.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. J. Kianithara, *History of the Foundation of Mannanam Monastery* (Mannanam: 1846), 6; J. Kanjiramattathil, *The Pastoral Vision of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 29-30.

<sup>43</sup> M. Stabilini, "Pastoral Letter." 1 November, 1829, Archives of St. Joseph's Monastery, Mannanam:

<sup>44</sup> Mannanam was the place where the first monastery was built on a hillock. By choosing a high place for the *Darsanaveedu*, they symbolically visualised the inner meaning of the CMI charism.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. *The Chronicles*, 67-68. Later from 1858 on account of their shared life with the Carmelite Missionaries, the community began to be known as the 'Servants of Mary Immaculate of Mount Carmel.



However they did not have any written rule or regulations. In 1840, the members resolved to start a community life, sharing their assets in common and meeting all their expenses from the community resources.

### **b. Major Role of the Co-founder**

It is difficult to identify who is more unique among these three co-founders of the Congregation So I would consider Chavara as a great co-founder. My reasons for such a consideration are the two decisive moments in the life of the young Congregation.

First, Chavara's role and commitment to the newly founded religious community after the death of the other two co-founders was vital. As the new religious community was progressing well, Palackal died on January 16, 1841, and Porukara on January 8, 1846, before the canonical erection of the Congregation. At this juncture, the full responsibility of leading the infant Congregation fell upon Chavara's shoulders. His profession as the first member in the community has also great significance because the community was canonically approved only in 1855. On December 8, 1855, on the first anniversary of the official proclamation of the Immaculate Conception of our Blessed Mother, Chavara made his religious profession before Fr. Marcelline Berardi, OCD, the delegate of the Vicar Apostolic, and became the Prior of the community. Afterwards, ten other companions made their profession of the religious vows before Chavara.

The second decisive moment was the laying of the foundation stone for the first house at Mannanam. There arose a difference of opinion as to who should be the patron saint of the foundation. The Bishop suggested St. John the Baptist, because he wanted the community to be filled with his prophetic charism of the forerunner of Jesus Christ. The other two cofounders had different opinions. Fr. Palackal suggested the name of St. Dominic as he was a great devotee of this saint and was following the Dominican way. Fr. Porukara, motivated by his personal devotion to St. Joseph suggested him to be the patron saint, to whom the people at large also had a great devotion. Hence, all agreed to this proposal and named St. Joseph as the patron saint of the first house. However, the two

Fathers, Palackal and Paorukara agreed to adopt for the new community the Dominican ideal, including the white habit.<sup>46</sup>

Chavara is held in higher honor, perhaps, than the other two due to his major role in leading the religious community after the death of Frs. Palackal and Porukara. He governed the Congregation for 16 years as Prior, under the name *Valiyapriorachan* (Great Prior). The association with the Carmelite Order and a special devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary inspired Chavara to transform the new community to the Servants of Mary Immaculate of Mount Carmel. Once again in February 1861 the religious community changed its name to the Third Order of Carmelites Discalced (TOCD).<sup>47</sup> However, Chavara saw all those developments as the providence and plan of God. So he writes:

Congregation, Rev. Frs. Palackal and Porukara, were praying for and organizing this community on the model of the Order of St. Dominic. So it was that we were wearing the white habit, which was quite uncommon here. But our Blessed Mother viewing our frailty took particular care of us and loved us in this Congregation.<sup>48</sup>

When we view these developments today, and consider the words of Chavara, we see that this was a special grace he received from God through the Blessed Mother as a result of his special devotion to her. The common religious habit of the new community consisted of a white cassock with a leather belt. Chavara in his testament refers to it as an expression of their attachment to the Dominican Order. However, there was also a brown scapular worn inside the habit. Archbishop Bernadine, the Vicar Apostolic, gave to the members long white scapulars joined to and worn above the cassock, and in 1859 the same Vicar Apostolic gave the members the hood, also white in colour,<sup>49</sup> joining to the cassock.

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<sup>46</sup> CWC, vol. IV: *The Letters*, 70.

<sup>47</sup> V. Parapuram, *Chronicle of Mannanam Monastery*, (Archives of St. Joseph's Monastery, Mannanam), 653-54.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> T. Bernard, *Brief History of the TOCD Congregation*, (Mutholy: 1908), 79, 246.

However, this community was not made part of the main Order of Carmelites, but remained separate as a Third Order. In February 1861 the existing monasteries received the official communication from Archbishop Bernardine, affiliating the budding Congregation as the Third Order of the Carmelite Discalced (TOCD). Though it received its charism and heritage from the main Order and was part of the Carmelite family, it maintained its own identity. The community moved forward and flourished under Chavara's brave and profound vision. Seeing its many activities and rapid growth, many priests and people requested him to open monasteries in their midst. Thus more monasteries were started by Chavara himself.

We find that, from the time of the beatification of Chavara in 1986, many articles and other works about him were published. Most of the authors of these works have mentioned Chavara as the founder of the CMI Congregation. Gradually, he was more famed as the founder of the CMI Congregation than Frs. Palackal and Porukara, which diminished their importance as founders, but their initiative and vision for this Congregation cannot be neglected. Fr. Marcellin OCD, who received Chavara's religious profession of vows, says:

When the religious house at Mannanam was canonically erected it was Fr. Kuriakose Elias who was found worthy to be appointed Prior of the monastery. Even if he was the only flower that blossomed at Mannanam, yet the labours of Frs. Palackal and Porukara must be considered to have been amply fruitful.<sup>50</sup>

The Congregation respects and honours the trio as co-founders. Although today Chavara is given more respect and honor with the title of 'the founder' by several authors, there is no doubt that the CMI Congregation equally respects and honors the other two co-founders along with Chavara. We shall deal with the activities and charism of the Congregation (CMI) in greater depth in the fourth chapter.

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<sup>50</sup> T. Kochumuttom, "Blessed Chavara: Man of Prophetic Charism and a Contemplative in Action," *Herald of the East* 6 (December 2004), 65.

## 2. Congregation of the Mother of Carmel [CMC]

After founding a religious community for men, the next venture of Chavara was to start a religious community for women which was realized in the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel (CMC). While starting the religious community for men in 1831, Chavara had already in mind the plan for a women's religious community,<sup>51</sup> but circumstances were then not conducive. Chavara himself presents in the first pages of the *Koonammavu Chronicle*<sup>52</sup> the report of an attempt to start a convent at Puthenpally and how it failed.<sup>53</sup> The Congregation of the Mother of Carmel is also known as the first indigenous Congregation for women in India, founded by Chavara and Fr. Leopold OCD<sup>54</sup> at Koonammavu on 13 Feb. 1866. Like the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate, it imbibes the heritage of St. Thomas Christians in the cultural background of India. It was really a challenge to found another congregation while the congregation for men was in the initial stages, but relying on the providence of God, Chavara and Leopold moved forward. God prepared them to shape this new bud by giving them the courage to meet the challenges it posed.

### a. Chavara's Vision of a Congregation for Women

There were two reasons behind the founding of a religious Congregation for women. First, it was born out of an ecclesial need as the St. Thomas Christians lacked religious Congregations for women. The idea of religious life was not very popular among the Christian community in Kerala during Chavara's time. Secondly, a Congregation for women would have a social role for uplifting the status of women in the society where, in that era, they enjoyed a

<sup>51</sup> Chavara indicates an early attempt to begin a religious Congregation for the women which, however, did not realize. Cf. CSK., vol. I, 127.

<sup>52</sup> Jossy, ed., *CMC in the Shadow of the Most High* (Aluva: 1997), 11.

<sup>53</sup> Jossy, ed., *CMC in the Shadow of the Most High* (Aluva: 1997), 11.

<sup>54</sup> Fr. Leopold Maria of St. Joseph of the Beccaro family was born at Grogano, Italy in 1837. He professed in the Order of the Discalced Carmelites came to Malabar in 1854. He was appointed the Novice master of the Tertiary Carmelites of Malabar (denotes CMI Congregation) and later became its Provincial delegate. He was an eye witness of the life and activities of Chavara from 1860. From 1864-71 he was the confessor and the spiritual director of Chavara. He went back to Rome in 1875 and spent the rest of his life in Liguria until his death in 1914.

status lower than that of men. The age old Hindu religious attitude and teachings of *Manusmruti* (Law of Manu) like *na sthree swathanthryamarhati* (woman deserves no freedom), *pathivratha* (dedicated wife), and *antharjanam* (indwellers of the house), had great impact on the women folk of Indian society. It can be said that the general attitude of Hindu religion was not positive towards religious life for women.<sup>55</sup>

This Hindu tradition naturally affected the life of Christian women too. It was not easy to for social changes even among Christians as such attitudes were also shared by them. In this life style, it is said that Christian women never attended the retreats conducted in parishes. Therefore, to start a religious Congregation for women was found to be an appropriate and urgent step to work for the spiritual growth and social emancipation of the Christian women folk. The objective, thus, also was to form girls as good women and ideal mothers for the future of the community. So the realization of a religious community for women in India was a challenging task before Chavara.

## **b. Foundation and Goals**

With regard to the first attempt at the foundation of the religious community for women, Fr. Varkey Parapuram, a contemporary of Chavara, recorded the following in his diary in 1859: Chavara sought a plot of land at Alangadu together with Mgr. Bernardine Baccinelli, the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly. The reason why it was abandoned can also be seen in Parapuram's diary.<sup>56</sup> Some time later, Puthenpally church was chosen for the convent. For that Chavara obtained permission from the bishop and planned to start the religious community for women at Koonammavu immediately after the monastery was established. Unfortunately, for a number of reasons, this was never realized.<sup>57</sup> Then some time later, however, with the help of Fr. Leopold, Chavara did establish the convent at Koonammavu. A widow called Eliswa, aged 34, and her only

<sup>55</sup> P.V. Kane, *The History of Dharmasastras*, vol. II, part 2 (Pune: 1946), 945.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Jossy, ed., *CMC in the Shadow of the Most High*, 18.

<sup>57</sup> Chavara gives details of the foundation laid for convent in 1860 and the construction underway. But the Roccas Schism became a reason for the bishop to change his plan. It was decided to convert this convent into a seminary. Cf. *The Chronicles*, 193-94.

daughter Anna, aged 14, approached Fr. Leopold and shared their ardent desire to lead a consecrated life. Then Fr. Leopold confided the matter to Chavara who wrote as follows on the subject:

One evening (in September) 1865 our delegate Very Rev. Fr. Leopold took me for a walk with him. He told me, here is a widow with a 14 year old daughter whose father has left to her half of his properties. The girl doesn't want to be married. So why not get these two out of their joint family house, and settle them in the works nuns do, i.e., teaching girls the practice of virtues and training them in some handicrafts? I also feel it to be a very good idea. I replied.<sup>58</sup>

The first convent was inaugurated on February 13, 1866, and the community was named as the Third Order of the Carmelites Discalced with the following members: Elisabeth (Eliswa) Vaippisery, her daughter Anna Vakayil, Theresia Vaippisery, the sister of Elisabeth and Clara (Eliswa) Puthenangady.<sup>59</sup> After a few months, many more members joined the community. From then on, Chavara acknowledged the surprising manner in which God acted through people of good will. "It appears that God has been pleased to fulfill something for which I have long been praying, namely, a convent for women."<sup>60</sup> The shortage of money posed a threat to their new beginning, but with full of confidence in the Almighty God both the founders proceeded with courage and went ahead with their plan. The first convent began to function in a temporary bamboo-mat shed. Within one year they found a suitable piece of land and constructed a new one. In the CMC chronicle of Koonammavu, Chavara himself delineates the community's goals after discussing these with Fr. Leopold. "They could take care of their spiritual life, teach girls prayers and train them in certain handicrafts."<sup>61</sup> In short, he aimed at the holiness of the consecrated

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<sup>58</sup> *The Chronicles*, 104.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. M. Prescilla, *Leopold Missionary* (Kakkanadu: 1994), 27-28; Cf. *The Chronicles*, 233-39. Here Chavara records way of beginning of the first religious community at Koonammavu in which we know how actively he involved in its accomplishment. According to his *Chronicles*, it began with three members and Clara Puthanangady joined next day.

<sup>60</sup> *The Chronicles*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* 195.

religious women, their Christian formation, the practice of virtues, and their training in intellectual and self-reliance activities.<sup>62</sup>

### **c. Unique Role of Chavara**

In the midst of many debates as to whether Chavara or Fr. Leopold was the founder of the Congregation of Mother of Carmel, once again the question of prominence is raised. From the testimonies and vision of the religious community mentioned above, we consider both of them as co-founders because it was realized through the cooperation and mutual understanding of the two minds in collaboration with the work of the Holy Spirit. They gave each other credit for founding the convent and emphasized one another's role. Fr. Leopold himself testifies with his own words that "it was his (Chavara) great desire to start a religious house for women with the main intention of making it a safe place for the girls of Malabar to live their religion as good Christians and to learn spiritual things."<sup>63</sup> The two founders were united in thoughts, words, deeds and every aspect related to its realization. It is difficult for us today to judge who was greater given the love Chavara had for Fr. Leopold or the respect in which Fr. Leopold held Chavara. In this regard we conclude that both of them shared the grace and leadership as co-founders.

As we know from the historical survey of the Kerala Church, the St. Thomas Christians became free from the ecclesiastical administration of the Latin hierarchy in 1887. It was then that the Church was named the Syro-Malabar Church. This event also had a great impact on the life of this religious community later. The Congregation which began with two candidates was divided into two separate communities. The members of the Latin rites formed the Congregation of the Teresian Carmelites [CTC]. It was subsequently aggregated to the Carmelite Order on November 30th, 1969. The Congregation was raised to Pontifical Right on 28 June 1971 by a Decree of the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. At present the Generalate of CTC is at Edappally, in Kerala. The specific mission of the Congregation is the Christian

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<sup>62</sup> Cf. Edward "Vazhthappetta Chavarayachanum CMcium," *Chavarayachan-Deepika Special* (Kottayam: 2004), 85.

<sup>63</sup> L. Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 12.

education of youth. They are engaged also in other charitable works.<sup>64</sup>

Though CTC and CMC have a common origin they have drawn their respective identity from the corporate initiative of the co-founders. CTC respects and honors Mother Eliswa as their foundress and Fr. Leopold and Chavara as their spiritual guides. Those members of the new congregation who belonged to the Syro-Malabar Church continued to be known as the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel [CMC]. and they view Chavara as founder of the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel. The specific charism of CMC is the Christian education of youth as well as other charitable works. The founding fathers set forth a clear religious vision for the first religious Congregation for women in Kerala:

It was a religious life style having a constant communication with the divine guest dwelling in the heart, contemplative prayer and availability to the people of God. They had planned that the formation of highly cultured and educated house-wives should be achieved through CMC. They set forth as the characteristic mark, the special qualities of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the model of womanhood.<sup>65</sup>

The spirit of the CMC Congregation may be described as *Bhakti Karma Yoga* (Life of devotion, action and contemplation) as portrayed in the motto “*Dhyanena Madabhakta Karmena Madarpita*” (Devoted through contemplation and dedicated through action). The goal of the community of CMC is that its members be completely possessed by God in total availability to their fellow men and women.

Today the Congregation carries out educational activities aimed at the intellectual, social, economic, moral and spiritual advancement of the people, particularly of women and children. The care of the sick and the destitute, the handicapped and the marginalized, social welfare services and other similar activities are undertaken by the community according to the needs of the Church and of the people

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<sup>64</sup> Cf. “Congregation of the Teresian Carmelites [CTC],” [http://www.ocd.pcn.net/ist\\_con4.htm](http://www.ocd.pcn.net/ist_con4.htm), (accessed May 23, 2006).

<sup>65</sup> Jossy, ed., *CMC in the Shadow of the Most High*, 37.



of the locality. The Congregation, which is of Pontifical Right, today is spread all over the world. The members of the community render their services in Europe, America, and Africa as well as to other countries in Asia. By founding the first indigenous Congregation for women, Chavara laid the foundations of his vision of an ideal Indian Church, where today we find various women's religious communities with a variety of charisms.

There are divided opinions over the founder and the question of CMC as the first indigenous religious Congregation for women as the original community was divided into two communities. P. Urumpackal in his study pointed out Leopold as founder and Chavara as co-founder.<sup>66</sup> C.J. Mary who analyzed various opinions of scholars gives more importance to Fr. Leopold as the founder and accepted the fact that the foundation could not be realized without the help of Chavara.<sup>67</sup> Opposed to these views, we find the opinions of some others who give equal importance to both as founders. T. Bernard who wrote the first history of TOCD held the view that it was with the joint effort of Leopold and Chavara that the convent for women was founded.<sup>68</sup> C.D.Valerian, biographer of Chavara gives more importance to Chavara than Leopold as the founder.<sup>69</sup> J. Kanjiramattathil presented Chavara as the main figure of the foundation. According to him, Chavara attributed to Leopold the dignity of founder due to his humility.<sup>70</sup> Whatever be the differences over founders, one cannot deny the clear role of Chavara as the founder of the first indigenous Congregation for women as far as the historical evidences given above are concerned. Today, while CMC honors Chavara and Leopold as their founders in the official history of their Congregation,<sup>71</sup> Mother Elisabeth (Eliswa) is considered by CTC as its founder

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<sup>66</sup> Cf. P. Urumpackal, *Vocation in India: The Religious Women*, vol. 1, (Vadavathoor: 1986), 197, 285.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. C. J. Mary, "The Carmelite Congregation for Women in Kerala 1866-1890" (master's thesis, University of Calicut, Kerala: 1985), 73.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. T. Bernard, *Kaldaya suriani rithil chernna Malayalthile carmelita munnam sabhayude Charitram* (Mutholy : 1908), 24.

<sup>69</sup> C. D. Valerian, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara* (Cochin: no year), 22.

<sup>70</sup> J. Kanjiramattathil, *The Pastor Vision of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 163-68

<sup>71</sup> Jossy, ed., *CMC in the shadow of the Most High* (Aluva: 1997), 21-22.

### E. Greatness of Chavara as a Poet and Writer

Chavara's greatness as a writer is quite impressive as shown through his various writings. As a versatile linguist Chavara had mastery over many languages. Apart from the Indian languages of Malayalam, Tamil and Sanskrit, he had working knowledge of a good number of foreign languages: Latin, Portuguese, Italian, and Syriac. Though he was occupied with several responsibilities and assignments in the Church in Kerala, he could find time and leisure to write inspiring prose and poems. There are a variety of writings available which are written by Chavara, a few of which were only proved to have been his work through scientific analysis. All these writings are major and important sources for analyzing his mystical and missionary mind.

Although there were many writings by Chavara, only the following are identified as authentic ones. And practically none of his writings except liturgical writings, were printed during his lifetime. Chavara's *Chavarul* (Testament), one of his writings popular among the Christian families of Kerala, was the first one to appear in print immediately after his death. Years later, his major writings, both poetical and prose works were collected and codified in four volumes. Hence, all his writings are now in the series titled *Chavarayachante sampoorana krutikal* (The Complete Works of Fr. Chavara).<sup>72</sup> These writings, in Malayalam, were published for the first time in 1981. The editor of the codified works called them *Nalagamangal* (The Chronicles), *Sahityakrutikal* (Literary Works, a collection of poems), *Adhyatmikakrutikal* (The Spiritual Writings) and *Katukal* (The Letters). Later these respective volumes of writings were translated into English in 1989.

Chavara's liturgical writings, which we have mentioned above, also have great importance. They were six books: Little Office of Blessed Virgin Mary, Service for Holy Saturday translated from Latin, Lectionary of Syro-Malabar Church, Ritual of Mass and Ritual of 40 Hours Adoration. Moreover, these liturgical writings reveal Chavara's pastoral concern for the people rather than as his role as a learned liturgist.

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<sup>72</sup> Cf. CSK, vols. I,II, &III IV

### **III. Evening of His life**

In this section we describe the final state of Chavara's life. As a religious priest he was very active in the service of the Lord, but illness obliged him to renounce his active role as Prior, Vicar General of the Syrian Christians and other important responsibilities he held. The following points enumerate the Christian value of his sufferings and his manner of preparing himself for death.

#### **A. Path of Suffering**

In general, we find his life marked by a series of physical and mental sufferings. While he was a seminarian he suffered from rheumatic fever that persisted doggedly for the rest of his life. At one point it developed into a type of paralysis. In the evening of his life, Chavara endured great physical suffering, but he was never afraid of death. He appointed a new prior to the Monastery at Mannanam and moved to Koonammavu where he lived until his death, continuing his service in different ways. The CMC sisters with great appreciation and gratitude hailed Chavara for all he did in spite of his old age and ill health:

Our very Rev. Fr. Prior has suffered a lot in his old age on our account. So all of us have an obligation to remember him and pray for him at all times. Moreover, he has also given us a monstration as a memento.<sup>73</sup>

Again we find how they expressed their gratitude and honor by recalling several instances. Here I quote a testimony of such an incident:

.....And there was no other good water to drink. Again, during this April 1870 our Fr Prior decided to make a well (for us) at all costs. So he made arrangements for the materials required, like stones, lime, etc., and engaged many workers so as to finish it within a short time. It was dug at the same spot they had fixed upon the previous year, and the work was soon completed. Though the Father was not keeping well those days, he often came and supervised the work and looked into all matters concerning it.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> As quoted by T. Kochumuttom and Jossy, *Dream Fulfilled: Bl. Chavara and the Foundation of CMC* (Delhi: 2005), 60.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

Even when he was ill, he continued regular prayers as far as he was able to do so.. He accepted the help of others in hearing the word of God and performing the divine office.<sup>75</sup> He was suffering from elephantiasis in his legs, but this was not serious.<sup>76</sup> More than his bodily pains, it was mental suffering that affected him most. The early loss of his parents, the death of his brother, and the epidemic in his home region caused great mental suffering during his studies. During the schism, some of his own people abandoned him and joined schismatics and fought against him.

## **B. Preparation for Death**

In the life of Chavara we see a person fully prepared for a good death. Flashes of thoughts and imagination in his writings are clear evidence of this. His thoughts and prayers regularly turned to St. Joseph and Mother Mary. The intercessory prayer we find in his writings shows his complete trust in and devotion to them. “Although I have not always been your worthy son, I beseech your intercession for the grace living up to the dignity of your son. I may see the face of my savior face to face. Numerous as my sins are, I am consoled to think that I enjoy the loving and sweet intercession of my patron saints.”<sup>77</sup>

Chavara had a premonition of his death long before he died. On his death bed when all those assembled around were in tears, he said to them: “Why should you grieve after all? All men must die sometime or other, who or whatever they be! My hour is come. By the grace of God I constantly had the vision of this hour before me and I was preparing for it.”<sup>78</sup> He was ever careful to live his life in accordance with the spirit of his baptismal grace. This enabled him to declare that he never lost his baptismal grace and the devotion to the Holy Family enabled Chavara to be happy until death.

The final moment of his life gives a valuable message to the present generation. First of all we find a happy and peaceful parting from this world. The final exhortation symbolizes a meaningful handover of his inner spirit to his followers. He acknowledged how

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<sup>75</sup> Cf. C.D. Valerian, *Vannya divya sree Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan*, 296.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. *Positio*, 449, 501; *The Chronicles*, 130.

<sup>77</sup> CWC, vol. III: *Colloquies with Heavenly Father*, 13.

he was protected by the Holy Family and he entrusted the Congregation to them.

Let the Holy Family reign over your hearts, do not be worried or upset that I am dying. Willingly submit yourselves to the way of providence. God is all powerful and infinitely merciful. He would give you a new prior, who could do much more good for you and our Congregation. Stand fast in the observance of the rules of our elders, our Congregation and the Church. Love our Lord Jesus in the Most Blessed Sacrament with all your heart. Draw from that fountain the waters of eternal life. You members of the order and particularly elders and priors among you love one another-be truly charitable. Thus God [will] be glorified through the Congregation which will also grow progressively.<sup>79</sup>

At the end of his exhortation he raised his hands and, clearly pronouncing the formula of benediction in Syriac, blessed all those who stood nearby: *Burkhasē d'maren isomissiha uhoobe d'alaha ava ushauvtappusa d'ruhadkudsa tehve am kollen hassa vavu kolvan vale aalam almeen amen*" (The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ the love of God, the Father and fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all).<sup>80</sup> Certainly, blessing those nearby, he entrusted the whole Congregation to God. As soon as he realized that he was about to leave the world, he expressed his desire to receive the Sacrament of the Anointing of the sick.<sup>81</sup>

### C. Demise

On January 3, 1871 at 7.30 in the morning he was called to his eternal reward. He was laid to rest at Koonammavu. The people around him at his death experienced how his desire of "God becoming one with man *Emmanuel*, I long to see"<sup>82</sup> was being realized at the time of his parting and embracing eternal life. "Today the flag

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<sup>78</sup> K.C. Chacko, *Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara* (Mannanam: 1968), 111; Cf. C. D. Valerian, *Vannya divya sree Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan*, 315; *Positio*, 548.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. K.C. Chacko, *Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 111-12.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. As quoted by K. Vadakketh, *Chavara athyatmeekatha* (Manganam: 2005), 253

<sup>81</sup> C.D. Valerian, *Vannya divya sree Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan*, 316.

<sup>82</sup> *Compunction of the Soul*, 17.

of Kerala has fallen down” was the remarkable words spoken about him by the priest who made the funeral oration. Later his mortal remains were transferred to and venerated in the monastery chapel at Mannanam, where it is venerated by many now. The Sacred Congregation for the cause of saints began the process in 1958. He was beatified in 1986 during the visit of Pope John Paul II to India.

#### **IV The Eternal Life**

This section describes the importance of Chavara after his departure from this world. The Christian faith teaches us that life after death guarantees an eternal life, where God permits the righteous to enjoy heavenly joy. It is a truth revealed to us by Jesus himself when he describes the final judgment of God (cf. Mt 25: 46). The living presence of Chavara is being experienced by his devotees on the earth. The visible signs and witnesses testify to Chavara’s eternal life. In this perspective it is right to discuss the following three aspects: his path to sainthood, his role as an intercessor and the visible signs and witnesses.

##### **A. Path to Sainthood**

The Church in the past and present continues to spread its fragrance of holiness through the exemplary lives of saints with their different charisms and missions. They were sent to revitalize humanity at crucial times of the Church and of society and each one has contributed to the universal Church in various ways. They are sources of inspiration and models for Christian perfection. Today the Church is proud of having a good number of saints to represent each continent. The Indian Church is proud of Chavara for his unique life and personality. His contemporaries and the religious of his community regarded Chavara as a saint. His spiritual director Fr. Leopold knew the core of Chavara’s heart and considered him a saint. That was the main reason behind his immediate publication of Chavara’s biography based on his own experiences and those of his friends. Fr. Louis who served Chavara at his death bed has remarked in the following words. “As we heard his final words, we believed and were convinced that he had led a virtuous and holy life. All those who were gathered there unanimously believed

that he had left for us a saintly life to imitate.”<sup>83</sup> Fr. Varkey Muttathupadathu, another contemporary of Chavara, also considered him as a saint.<sup>84</sup> People considered him as “... a man of God; he was a saint in the true sense of the word. His love of God gushed out of his pure and innocent heart in the form of the love of his neighbor.”<sup>85</sup>

Though he was widely respected as a holy man during his life, the process of Canonization began only in 1958. Chavara himself shared once his grief over the barren Indian Church without an officially canonized saint.<sup>86</sup> And it was also his good fortune to be the one elevated to the altar of veneration for the first time in India together with St. Alphonsa of the Immaculate Conception<sup>87</sup> by the declaration of Pope John Paul II in 1986. This historical event gave new hope and impetus to the life of the Indian Church. She is proud today and waits at the door of the chamber of the canonized, having other blessed people like Mariam Thresia, Augustine Thevarparampil (*Kunjachan*), Evuprasia and Mother Teresa of Calcutta.

## **B. Role as Intercessor**

The practice of seeking intercession through the saints goes back to the earliest days of the Church and is a teaching of the Catholic Church. The justification for calling upon a saint in prayer is that the saints are close to God, because of their holiness. As we know, intercessory prayer is a petition made to God on behalf of others. If a believer prays for her children or friends, his enemies or leaders, then the believer is interceding on behalf of another.

This is reconfirmed in the Church’s teaching through the communion of saints of Vatican Council II. As we know, it is the spiritual solidarity which binds together the faithful on earth, the

<sup>83</sup> Cf. C.D Valerian, *Vannya divya sree Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan*, 319.

<sup>84</sup> Once after Chavara had been to the barber, Fr. Varkey collected some of his hair and carefully preserved it in a monstrance. He received many blessings from this relic. When he died he gave it to his nephew saying, “This is the best gift I can give you.”

<sup>85</sup> J Chirayil, “Chavara, the social worker,” *Chavara charamasabdhi 1871-1971* (Kottayam: 1972), 170.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. *The Chronicles*, 146.

<sup>87</sup> St. Alphonsa of the Immaculate Conception is a Franciscan Clarist nun, is declared saint on 12<sup>th</sup> October 2008 by Pope Benedict XVI.

souls in purgatory, and the saints in heaven in the organic unity of the same mystical body under Christ its head, and in a constant interchange of supernatural offices (cf. ID no. 4). The participants in that solidarity are called saints by reason of their destination and of their partaking of the fruits of the Redemption (1 Cor 1:2).

### **C. Visible Signs and Witnesses**

Hundreds of people visit and pray daily at the tomb of Chavara at Mannanam. Their strong faith in the intercession of Chavara inspires them to go to him. We find a short report on the average number of daily visits.<sup>88</sup> Some of the important miracles and wonders that take place mark the visible signs to prove his role of intercession before God. Though there are a number of favors reported and registered in his name, the instances we will discuss are only those miracles which were accepted officially by the ecclesial authorities in elevating him to the state of blessed. In spite of the fact that it took more than eighty years to begin Chavara's canonization process, the authorization by the Sacred Congregation of Rites in 1955, gave a hope that the Indian Church is not so far from realizing its dream and having its first fruit of holiness. The following are merely some of the important testimonies of experiences and favors received through the intercession of Chavara.

#### **1. Some important Testimonies**

There are a good number of both Christians and non-Christians who, from their shared experiences, have profound faith in the intercession of Chavara.<sup>89</sup> It is right to begin with the thoughts on Chavara of Fr. Leopold, his spiritual father, who first identified the saintly life of Chavara. As one among those who were at the moment of his last breath he witnesses as follows in his autograph:

Today, January 3, 1871, Tuesday at 7.15 in the morning, Father Kuriakose Elias of the Holy Family, the First Prior, died after a life of great innocence. He could declare before his death that he had never lost the baptismal innocence. He was exercising

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<sup>88</sup> Cf. J. Madathikandam, "Chavara Pilgrim Center- Mannanam," *C' Mission*, (Ernakulam: December 2005): 93-95.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. *Herald of the East* 3 (April- July, 1993), 21-22; no.2 (October 1993), 57-58; no.3 (January 1994), 107; no. 4 (April 1994), 139.



himself in the practice of virtues, especially in the simplicity of heart, living faith, tender obedience, and devotion to the Most Blessed Sacrament, to the Blessed Virgin Mary and to St. Joseph...<sup>90</sup>

In the above note Fr. Leopold remarked that Chavara was a person of simplicity of heart, pure and innocent soul. Moreover, he had great devotion to the Holy Eucharist, to the Mother of God and St. Joseph. At the end of this he added a prayer to Chavara which he recited often after the latter's death: "*la anima bella e' santa, prega Gesu' per me*" (the soul beautiful and holy, pray to Jesus for me). Moreover, Fr. Leopold exhorted the members of the Congregation to preserve all the things used by Chavara. He himself made copies of Chavara's testament and distributed some other things that belonged to Chavara to all the other monasteries as sacred relics.<sup>91</sup>

A relic of Chavara's hair opens a different story of how a Hindu barber respected his holiness.<sup>92</sup> As he was his regular barber once he collected the hair of Chavara and preserved it in a box. Later it was obtained from him by Fr. Varkey Muttathupadathu, a contemporary of Chavara.<sup>93</sup> Fr. Aloysius Perumalil, CMI, and St. Alphonsa were other people who identified the holiness of Chavara. Through Fr. Aloysius, her novice master, St. Alphonsa was encouraged to pray to Chavara as she was suffering from a grave illness and had been bed ridden for many years. She began to pray to Chavara regularly and received favors through him according to

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<sup>90</sup> "Oggi 3 gennaio 1871 martedi alle ore 7 1/4 di mattina [è spirato] il Padre Ciriaco Elia della S. Famiglia, Primo Priore, dopo una vita della più innocenza, (tale che egli stesso poco prima di morire potè attestare di non aver mai perduto l'innocenza battesimale), nell'esercizio della piu' belle virtu' specialmente nella semplicità di cuore, fede vivissima e tenerissima, ubbidienza e devozione verso il SS. Sacramento, Maria Santissima e S. Giuseppe. L. Beccaro, *Piccola biografia del servo di Dio Padre Ciriaco Elia Chavara*, Roma: 1874, 26; L. Vithuvattical, (trans.), *Perspectives of A Heroic Christian Life* (Mannanam: 1988), 14.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. V. Parapuram, *Chronicle of Mannanam Monastery [1902-1905]*, (Mannanam), 14-21.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. T.T. Mundackal, *Kudumbapreshitan Chavarayachan* (Bharananganam: 2004), 14.

<sup>93</sup> He was a grand uncle of St. Alphonsa, who received healing favors through Chavara later. He handed over the relic to his nephew Fr. Yousep Muttathupadathu, uncle of St. Alphonsa. Cf. *Ibid.*, 15.

her testimony. The testimony given by Sr. Ursula, her novice mistress also has great importance.<sup>94</sup> The healing obtained by Joseph Pennaparambil and his testimony was the most vital miracle in Chavara's elevation to the blessed.<sup>95</sup> There are many more such witnesses and signs, and they are still taking place through his intercession. We will discuss these miracles in the following section in more detail.

## 2. Important Miracles as Signs

Though we have mentioned some people and testimonies, it is appropriate to present some of the miracles and their nature. Given the limitations of this work, it is impossible for us to present the vast numbers of miracles and favors worked through Chavara. Therefore we shall only discuss in brief only those important miracles which were presented to the Congregation for the process of beatification after Chavara was declared 'Venerable'.<sup>96</sup> First, there was the instantaneous cure of St. Alphonsa, FCC, of Kudamalloor parish, in 1937. Secondly, there was the miraculous cure obtained by the boy Joseph Pennaparampil of the parish of Koodaranji in 1959. Thirdly, there was the miraculous cure obtained by Sri Rochy Anthikkattu of the Parish of Koonammavu in 1949. We find two important miracles shared by the people who experienced the power of Bl. Chavara.

### a. Experiences of St. Alphonsa of the Immaculate

ConceptionSt. Alphonsa of the Immaculate Conception, popularly known as "the Little Flower" (St. Therese of Child Jesus) in Indian Church,<sup>97</sup> was elevated to the state of blessed together with Chavara in 1986, and recently was canonized as the first woman saint from India. She was a Clarist nun, born only around thirty nine years after Father Kuriakose Elias died. Already at a very young age, St. Alphonsa desired to serve the Lord as a religious and joined the Franciscan Clarist Congregation. Sister Alphonsa experienced great suffering as she fell ill during the early period of her formation and suffered greatly. It was a brief thirty six years of life. The path to holiness for Sister Alphonsa

<sup>94</sup> Cf. K.C. Chacko, *Father Kuriakose Chavara*, 137-46.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 153-54.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. L. Vithuvattickal, "Canonization Process of Blessed Kuriakose Chavara," *Journal of St. Thomas Christians* 16 (2005): 26.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. K.C. Chacko, *Sister Alphonsa*, 7<sup>th</sup> edition (Bharananganam: 2000), 37.

was clearly a different one. It was the way of the Cross, the way of sickness and suffering similar to the life of St. Therese of Child Jesus. For this reason she is known as “the Little Flower.” With the passing of the years, the heavenly Father gave her an ever fuller share in the Passion of his beloved Son. We recall how she experienced not only physical pain of great intensity, but also the spiritual suffering of being misunderstood and misjudged by others. But she constantly accepted all her sufferings with serenity and trust in God, being firmly convinced that they would purify her motives, help her to overcome all selfishness and unite her more closely with her beloved divine Spouse.

She was fortunate to learn about the servant of God, Chavara, from her novice master Fr. Aloysius Perumali,<sup>1</sup> CMI. Thereafter she possessed a personal devotion to Father Kuriakose from early in her religious life. According to her testimony, we find she obtained a cure on three different occasions. She kept a picture of Chavara before her and prayed for his intercession daily. On the first cure St. Alphonsa writes:

.....One night when I was tortured by hunger and thirst, but owing to the bulging of the belly was unable to take in any food, or to sleep. I felt that I saw a person, resembling the picture kept by my side, standing near me and speaking something. Taking the person for our novice mistress, I tried to touch the person saying “oh my mother I feel that before the morning I may pass away due to the bursting of or due to the suffocation. Then it seemed that the person told me, your belly will not anymore swell up; God will bless you. And then the person was not to be seen. By the next morning all my illness abated. .... I believe that this is a favour obtained through the intercession of Fr. Prior.<sup>98</sup>

She narrates also a second event in the same letter suggesting that these events happened within a short period of each other. One year later the third cure occurred, to which her novice mistress also bears testimony to the role of Chavara to St. Alphonsa.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> This particular testimony was written by herself on 10<sup>th</sup> July, 1936. Cf. K.C. Chacko, *Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 137-39.

<sup>99</sup> The narration of the third cure and the testimonies of St. Alphonsa, Sr. Ursula, and Sr. Celine FCC are given in detail. Cf. K.C. Chacko, *Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 139-48.

### **b. Experience of Mr. Joseph Pennaparampil**

Mr. Joseph was the second son of Mathew Pennaparampil in Koodaranji, Kerala. He was born with a deformity to both of his feet.<sup>100</sup> Even after many medical treatments, no doctors could rectify this and, although he grew up healthy, this deformity was a source of unhappiness for his parents and relatives. When he began his school days in 1959 the family came to know about the intercessory power of Chavara. Not much time had passed since the canonization process had begun. In this regard Annakkutty, Joseph's elder sister, played an essential role as she collected the prayers and leaflets of the Servant of God and began the prayer for him after the evening prayer in the family.<sup>101</sup> According to their testimony, "after reciting the printed prayer for the cure, they used to say one Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory be, adding at the end the ejaculatory prayer, said by Joseph: Father Kuriakose Elias, "cure the deformity of my feet."<sup>102</sup> On the 14<sup>th</sup> of June 1960, as usual, Joseph was walking to the school along with his sister when he cried out in pain. They stopped for a while and said the usual prayer to Chavara. Having finished the prayer, his sister told him to rise up and walk. As Joseph stood up, both of them found that the right foot was corrected of the deformity. This event increased their faith in Chavara and they continued to pray to him. In the same way after one year in 1961, on April 14 the deformity of the other foot was also corrected.<sup>103</sup> This miracle was examined by the various groups of consultants; the medical corps of the Congregation, the theological consultants and finally by their Eminences the Cardinals of the Congregation. At the end, the miracle was approved and with the consent of the Holy Father the decree was published in 1985, paving the way for Chavara to be declared Blessed.

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<sup>100</sup> The deformity clinically known as *Talipes equino-varus* means the club foot. It is better described in the following way: the upper side of the feet turned downwards and the lower part of the feet turned upwards so much so that the person while standing or walking has the upper side of the feet touching the ground and the sole of the feet facing each other, turning upwards.

<sup>101</sup> The evening prayer is a set of prayers regularly recited in every Syrian Christian family of Kerala. It includes the Rosary, a reading from the Bible, and intercessory prayers to the saints.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. L. Vithuvattickal, "Canonization Process of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara," 27.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. K.C. Chacko, *Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 153-54.

## Conclusion

From this analysis of his life and personality we could conclude that in his sixty five years of life Chavara achieved much both spiritually for himself personally and for the Church in India. Each stage of his life, as we see in the biographical sketch, inspires us to learn from his life. It highlights Chavara as a hard worker, courageous, a man of prayer and of wisdom. Besides, we see his ardent desire and subsequent efforts to correct the lack of spiritual leadership and spiritual animation of the Christian community. The message, life and achievements of Chavara are really praiseworthy in the Indian Church. Praising his achievements for all, Mr. R. Venkataraman, the former President of the Republic of India hailed Chavara as one of those precious persons who knew how to link India's past with her future destiny.<sup>104</sup> Prof. A. Sreedharamenon, a Hindu writer, says:

Historians have failed in evaluating the life of Chavara. The history of Kerala renaissance used to be limited to certain Hindu associations and reformers. People like Father Chavara should be given the place they deserve. His achievements are relevant for all communities and all ages. He was undoubtedly a great man who lived ahead of his time.<sup>105</sup>

Hence, Chavara was a unique person, loved and admired by many people during his lifetime and today. His valuable contributions in the social, cultural and religious fields, are living memories and useful for the generations to come.

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<sup>104</sup> R. Venkataraman, "Father Chavara represents Indian Christianity at its best," *Herald of the East* 1 (July 1991): 8.

<sup>105</sup> Cf. A. Sreedharamenon, "Renaissance Leader who walked ahead of his Time," *Journal of St. Thomas Christians* 16 (January-March, 2005): 63.

## Chapter Two

### MYSTICISM IN THE WRITINGS OF CHAVARA

#### Introduction

Mysticism is a vast concept and one can perceive it perfectly only by looking from different perspectives. Christian mysticism is one of the classic means by which one can commune with the Divine through simple means. Of course, it is assured that with intense prayer and meditation, one can achieve great spiritual heights, but one of the most penetrating messages from this style of practice is that a simple heart and a clean devotion can prepare one for true spiritual insight and wisdom—well beyond that merited by one’s own simple efforts. It is an affirmation that positive spiritual currents do exist and can provide support and guidance if they are just invited into one’s heart with humility and faith. However, “mysticism” now is most often used to refer to the mode of life and experiences typified by people like St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila. Generally, people of today regard the images such as the *Interior Castle* of St. Teresa, and *the Dark Night of the Soul*, and *the Spiritual Canticle* of St. John as models of the mystical path.

The life and teachings of Kuriakose Elias Chavara also provide a rich contribution to the field of mystical spirituality. The best sources for understanding Chavara’s spirituality are found in two of his writings.<sup>1</sup> Like the works of St. John of the Cross, the poetic works of Chavara which communicate most of his mystical experiences, are greatly valued today. But unfortunately, the articles

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. CWC, vol. II & III.

and works on Chavara presently place more emphasis on his activities than on his inner God-experience. The people who write on Chavara focus on him as a good pastor, an educator, a reformer of the Church in Kerala, and as a co-founder of the first indigenous religious Congregation. But they are quite blind to the great value of his writings which are sources of his mystical teachings. This chapter is an attempt to present the mystical teachings of Chavara. We begin with a discussion on the meaning of mysticism, particularly as analyzed from the Catholic perspective.

## **I. Mysticism: An Overview**

Generally, mysticism is a phenomenon that is grounded on experience. It is a reality one experiences in the realm of stillness and radiates its fragrance silently in darkness like a jasmine flower. It cannot be fully appreciated by the intellect alone, nor can it be adequately explained by sensory or rational modes of knowing. It consists of an inner quest, culminating in certain interior experiences that cannot be described in terms of a sense-experience or of mental images. The following analysis of mysticism will help us to understand this concept better.

### **A. Meaning of Mysticism in General**

Etymologically, the word mysticism is linked with the Greek *mystikos* (secret or hidden) and connected with the noun *mysterion*. Both words have the same root *myo* (to close, referring to the eyes and mouth; eyes should be closed in order to see what is secret, and the mouth should not reveal anything). In the religious world, they refer to an experience of the sacred, or awareness of the powerful presence of the divine Spirit, accompanied by meditation, prayer, and ascetic discipline. It refers to a type of faith that emphasizes the experience of an intimate union with the Divine. Hence, mysticism in general refers to a direct and immediate experience of the sacred, or the knowledge derived from such an experience. The words mystical and mysticism, in the secular world, are used to refer to any experience that is vague, ambiguous, indescribable, sentimental and without basis.<sup>2</sup> Mysticism may be

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. S. Kannath, *A Journey into Mysticism* (Palakkadu: 1993), 1.

defined briefly in a well established phrase as “the belief in a third kind of knowledge.”

Here we need to consider the difference between religious experience and mysticism. They are the same phenomenon but differ in degree. This position stands in contrast to those who would insist on using the term mysticism to refer only to unitary experiences.<sup>3</sup> The religious experience of the ordinary believer is often spoken of as “communion” with God. It may be said that communion is not the same as “union”, but it is not fundamentally different. Parrinder explains it in the following manner: “communion” means ‘union with’, and in religious usage the difference between communion and union can be claimed as a matter of degree. Hence, the religious experience of the ordinary believer is in the same class as that of the mystic; the difference is one of degree but not of kind.”<sup>4</sup> Many mystics have written about their experiences and these could be the best sources imparting knowledge of mysticism. Not all contemplative people are mystics, but contemplation with deep divine experiences elevates one to the state of mysticism. Thus “mysticism” will here be used to refer to the pinnacle of contemplative life and the profound experience of God.

## **B. Nature and Sources of Christian Mysticism**

The Christian life is centered on the person of Jesus Christ, the incarnated second person of the triune God, and the greatest expression of God’s love for man. Similarly, the nature of Christian mysticism is also based on the mystery of God’s love for us in Christ. The word *mystikos* in Christian vocabulary refers to this mystery of God’s love in Christ.<sup>5</sup> The incarnation in the world was needed as man had lost the eternal glory due to the sin of the first parents. Christ’s becoming a human being paved the way to reuniting the hearts of humanity with God. Every Christian moves in the hope of attaining the final glory; the union with God. Hence, Christian

<sup>3</sup> W.J. Wanewright, *Mysticism: A Study of its nature, Cognitive Value and Moral Implications* (Madison: 1981), 1; W. R. Hood, ed. *Handbook of Religious Experience* (Birmingham: 1995), 167.

<sup>4</sup> G. Parrinder, *Mysticism in the World Religion* (New York: 1976), 23.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. A. Louth, “Mysticism,” G. S. Wakefield, ed., *The SCM Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (London: 1983), 272.



mysticism is developed from the perspective of man's return to God; an everlasting union with God. So it is a direct and immediate experience of the sacred, or the knowledge derived from this experience.

In Christianity this experience usually takes the form of a vision or a sense of union with God. "Mysticism is defined as the art of union with reality and a mystic is a person who has attained that union in greater or less degree; or who aims at and believes in such attainment."<sup>6</sup> William Johnston, a well known Irish author, says, "Mysticism is wisdom or knowledge that is found through love; it is loving knowledge."<sup>7</sup> He gives also gives the following definition, "it is nothing other than a transformation of the whole person in preparation for that final transformation that takes place through death and resurrection."<sup>8</sup> In Christianity we can say that the mystical experience is a pre-experience of heaven here on earth. In order to have a clear grasp of Christian mysticism the following sources are considered, namely, Scripture, Tradition and patristic views.

### 1. Scriptural Sources

In Scripture we do not find the word mysticism, rather we find a record of God's mighty deeds or what he did for his people and their response. In Christian experience the word *mysterion* is used to signify the hidden presence of God and Christ in Scripture, in the sacraments and in the events of daily life. The books of the Old and New Testaments provide ample metaphors and instances of Christian mystical thoughts. Scriptural sources for Christian mysticism are found mainly in the NT and particularly in John's Gospel. The noun *mysterion* is used in the Book of Daniel and also in the Deutrocanonical books. In the NT, it is used by St. Paul to signify a secret of God pertaining to man's salvation, the hidden or symbolic sense of narration or anything whose activity or power is hidden.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> E. Underhill, *Practical Mysticism* (London: 1914), 3.

<sup>7</sup> W. Johnston, *The Inner Eye of Love: Mysticism and Religion* (San Francisco: 1981), 20.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. J. Aumann, *Spiritual Theology* (London: 2006), 14.

### a. Old Testament

The language of mysticism is always difficult and symbolic. Through an allegorical reading of it, we can draw the mystical significance of particular texts and biblical images in the Old Testament. It is seen from the creation of man in the image and likeness of God. This event is a fundamental insight for Christian mystical theology in which we find the vital truth about the relationship between Creator and creatures, or God and man.<sup>10</sup> The intimate presence of God was enjoyed by Adam and Eve before their sin. In fact, the sin of man did not prevent God's love for man, which continued to intervene in the life of man because God wanted the intimate relation to be continued. Hence, the events that followed were moments of God's self-communication to man, but in an invisible manner. The covenants with Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Samuel and other people symbolize God's plan to restore humanity's lost union. They experienced an intimate friendship in the event of God's call, their subsequent response to him in faith and their face-to-face meetings with God (cf. Gen 12: 7; 32:30; Ex 33:11, 23; Num 12; 7; Deut 34:10).

Israel, the chosen people of God was loved by Yahweh as His bride. He loved her in an unlimited way (cf. Ezek 16: 4-14). For medieval mystics, Moses' "vision" of God (cf. Ex 33:12 - 34:9) and his reflection of God's glory upon leaving Mount Sinai (cf. Ex 34:29 - 35) were texts that served as proof. When Job could say to God, "now my eye sees thee" (Jb 42:5) his agonizing questions ceased and he repented "in dust and ashes".<sup>11</sup> The lives of the prophets are also viewed in a similar way in that they had the intimate relation with God as they were His spokesmen. They experienced God as overwhelmingly holy and "living water", the source of all authentic life, one upon whom they could always count because of his "everlasting love."<sup>12</sup>

The *Book of Psalms* could be the next source of mystical expressions. One finds the mystic's sense of God's infinity, nearness,

<sup>10</sup> Cf. U. King, *Christian Mystics: their Lives and Legacies throughout the Ages* (London: 2004), 12.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. H. D. Egan, *An Anthology of Christian Mysticism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Collegeville, Minnesota: 1991), 2.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

and joys of communion with him; the hunger and thirst for God the light, love, living water and life itself. <sup>13</sup> “Be still and know that I am the Lord” (Ps 46:10) is a profound call to mystical experience. Yahweh’s unconditional love and kindness for Israel were recalled by the Psalmists because we live, move, and have our being in God (cf. Acts 17:28). The other important images on mystical expressions from the Old Testament are Jacob’s vision of a ladder reaching down from the heaven to earth, Moses’ encounter with God in the burning bush on Mount Sinai; Isaiah’s Temple vision of the Lord in glory. The relationship between God and mankind is given mystical symbolism in the spousal relation as allegorized in the Book of the Song of Songs. These represent rich sources for those who (like Catherine of Siena and Teresa of Avila) compare mystical experiences to the spiritual marriage in the unitive stage.<sup>14</sup>

## **b. New Testament**

In continuation and fulfillment of God’s self-communication to humanity the New Testament is a major turning point where Jesus is the main focus: through and in Jesus the complete fulfillment of the history takes place. Jesus’ Trinitarian consciousness can be called a mystical consciousness in the highest sense. Jesus not only possessed a divine knowledge but also an immediate, direct and unique human knowledge of the Father, of himself as Son and of the Holy Spirit.<sup>15</sup> Several references in the Gospel passages show the oneness Jesus enjoyed with God (Mt 11: 27).

The scenes of the baptism in the river Jordan (Mk 1:9-11) and the transfiguration on Mount Tabor (Lk 9:28-3) guide us to the mystical experience that Jesus enjoyed. The prophetic elements of the baptismal scene are reiterated and strengthened in the account of the Transfiguration event where Jesus is depicted as the realization of what was foreshadowed in Moses and Elijah, the law and the prophets. The message of Jesus must also cohere with the work of Moses, with the Torah established in the covenant at Sinai. In both events the declaration of “Jesus, the Son of God, the

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>14</sup> The way of spiritual union is divided into three significance of stages: Purgative, illuminative and unitive

<sup>15</sup> Cf. K. Rahner, “Dogmatic Reflections on the Knowledge and Self-Consciousness of Christ,” *Theological Investigations 5* (1966), 193-95.

Beloved. Listen to him” have great importance. When we contemplate the overall portrait of Jesus in the New Testament, what stands out as most mystical is his intimacy with God, whom Jesus called Father. The fact that the voice from the cloud calls Jesus “Son” and “Beloved” squares with the fact that the evangelists have Jesus comport himself as a trusting child of God. The greatest example of his trust is the moment in the garden of Gethsemane, when he asks his Father to spare him the coming trials (crucifixion and death; Mk 14:32-42). The Father does not spare him, but Jesus finishes his life commending his spirit into the Father’s hands.

The Pauline and Johannine writings (Gospel, epistles, and Revelation) present Jesus as incarnated divinity and the central sign of what God is like; offering us not only peace and justice but a sharing in what God alone is; symbol of deathlessness, eternal, holy; in imagery such as that of the parable of vine and branches (Jn 15), Christ’s prayer for union (Jn 17), as well as in aspects of the Pauline corpus. The latter include the description of Paul’s rapture into the third heaven (II Cor 12:1 - 4) or statements such as that referring to a life “hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3).

Coming to the epistles there are three important texts which establish themes that recur throughout the recorded thought of the Christian mystics. The first, Galatians 2:20, says:

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

The second important scriptural text is 1 Jn 3:2:

Beloved, we are God’s children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is

The third such text is found in II Pet 1:4:

By which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature.

Other mystical experiences are described in other passages. In 2 Corinthians 12:2-4, where Paul sets forth an example of a possible out-of-body experience by someone who was taken up to the “third heaven”, and taught unutterable mysteries:

I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. -whether in the body or out of the body I do not know: God knows. And I know that such a person –whether in the body or out of body I do not know: God knows- was caught up into paradise, and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat.

Perhaps it is a similar experience to that of the Transfiguration of Jesus in the Gospel. In all of these the essential theological presuppositions involve the belief in a personal God and in the centrality of the incarnation. The intimacy with the Father bestowed on the incarnated Son Jesus Christ, the Word became flesh, was bound to reflect this identity. Certainly, one could call the intimacy of the man Jesus, his full identification with his Father, mystical, if only because it seems to have gone far beyond the ordinary unions with God that human beings have reported, into a directly experiential union with ultimate reality.

In short, two major themes of Christian mysticism are (1) a complete identification with, or imitation of Christ, to achieve a unity of the human spirit with the spirit of God; and (2) the perfect vision of God, in which the mystic seeks to experience God “as he is,” and no longer “through a glass, darkly.” (1Cor 13:12)

## **2. Traditional and Patristic View**

Many attempts have been made to describe the fundamental characteristics of mystical union and experience. All ideals of Christian perfection are forms of response to the presence of God, a presence that is not open, evident, or easily accessible, but that is always in some way mysterious or hidden. When that hidden presence becomes the subject of some form of immediate experience, we can perhaps begin to speak of mysticism in the proper sense of the term. Traditionally it has been asserted that the experiential union of creature and Creator is inexpressible and ineffable, although those who have experienced it seek imagery

and metaphors to describe it. A brief historical survey of Christian mysticism helps us understand the varied ways in which it is explained and defined.

The term mysticism was generally used until the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries to describe “contemplation.”<sup>16</sup> A mystic was a person who had attained mystical experience through deep contemplation and the mystical experience was the end to which he aspired. A distinct mystical or mystery theology emerged in the Alexandrian school of exegesis and spirituality with Clement of Alexandria and Origen, their search for the hidden meaning of Scripture and their exposition of the mystery of redemption.<sup>17</sup> The greatest treatises of the Christian Fathers are commentaries on Scripture, however, and often their literary method is allegorical, with priority of interpretational place reserved for the spiritual sense that a text can bear. This is a somewhat Gnostic revelation of what God may be doing in the mind and heart and soul of the sincere seeker. In this perspective the early Fathers developed mystical theology based on the Book of the Song of Songs where we find a romantic love relationship with God.

Origen (185-254), the Father of allegorical interpretation, commented on how mysticism can develop and that became his greatest contribution on mystical life. He conceived the mystical life as the full flowering of and the explicit realization of Christ’s union with the soul effected through baptism. Clement and Origen developed a synthesis between the true knowledge of God and the Christian faith. They asserted that God, the Unknown, can be apprehended by following the threefold path of purification illumination and union achieved through loving contemplation. Thus they depicted the mystical life of a soul that passes through successive stages of purgation, illumination and unification.<sup>18</sup> By commentary on the Book of the Song of Songs Origen opened a way to explain the mystical life. This was the book for understanding the union of the bridal soul with the bridegroom as Word the union

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<sup>16</sup> J. Aumann, *Spiritual Theology*, 14

<sup>17</sup> Cf. See more details, James A. Wiseman, “Mysticism”, M. Downey, ed., *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, 683.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. H. D. Egan, *An Anthology of Christian Mysticism*, 20; Cf. U. King, *Christian Mystics*, 28

between God and the soul. Through one of his texts we see how he takes the lovers in the Song of Songs as pursuers of God, figures moving along the mystical journey.<sup>19</sup>

Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 335-395), another Eastern Father of the Church is well known for his classics, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, and *Life of Moses*. His *Commentary on the Song of Songs* is a work of contemplative, devotional, mystical theology. In Moses' life Gregory saw a paradigm of the spiritual journey to God. Moses' threefold experience in light, in the cloud and in darkness represents human growth from spiritual infancy to youth to full maturity.

Following their line of thought, the contributions of other leading monastics of the early Church, namely, Evagrius of Ponticus (346 - 399) and John Cassian (360 - 435), Augustine of Hippo (354-430) and Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite provided significant impact for medieval mysticism. Christian mysticism in the medieval period flourished with the important mystical thoughts of Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), Richard of Saint Victor (1120-1173), Francis of Assisi (1181-1226), Bonaventure (1221-1274), Catherine of Siena (1347-1380), and Meister Eckhart (1260-1327). Only in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, with the writings of Richard of Saint Victor<sup>20</sup> and Thomas Aquinas, do systematic descriptive analyses of the contemplative life appear.<sup>21</sup> The classic schools of mystical authors in the Western Church from the twelfth through the sixteenth centuries used union with God as a favored way of characterizing the goal of their beliefs and practices. The ways in which they understood union, however, were both varied and complex.

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<sup>19</sup> D. L. Carmody and J.T. Carmody, *Mysticism: Holiness East and West* (New York: 1996), 198-99; Cf. H. D. Egan, *An Anthology of Christian Mysticism*, 20-30.

<sup>20</sup> Richard of St. Victor was one of the most important mystical theologians of 12th century Paris, then the intellectual centre of Europe. He was prior of the famous Augustinian abbey of Saint-Victor in Paris from 1162 until his death in 1173. His writings on mystical contemplation earned for him the title "Magnus Contemplator", the great contemplator, Cf. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard\\_of\\_St.\\_Victor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_of_St._Victor) [August 23, 2007]; Cf. U. King, *Christian Mystics*, 69-72; Cf. H. D. Egan, *An Anthology of Christian Mysticism*, 186-96.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. J. A. Wiseman, "Mysticism," 685-86.

Though Christian mystical thoughts flourished in both West and East, there were differences over the understanding of the different stages of the mystical way, nature of mystical union and the presence of God. Evagrius of Ponticus distinguished between three stages in the spiritual journey to God: the first was the active life, freed from passions and characterized by purity of heart; the second was natural contemplation, which sees God in all things and all things in God; the third, called *theoria*, was the contemplation of God face to face, in an unmediated union of love.<sup>22</sup> This way corresponds to the teachings of Origen and Dionysian model: purgative, illuminative and unitive. While this model is widely accepted in the West, the Christian East more commonly followed the one modeled by Evagrius.

Then there was a difference over the role of mind and heart in their direct understanding of spiritual truth through intuition. Evagrius described the mind as that faculty whereby human beings apprehend God in contemplative prayer. Arguing against this position, others described the heart as the spiritual center where each person is most authentically “in the image of God.” From these ideas we find the development of the Prayer of the heart, hesychasm and the Jesus’ prayer in the East. In this regard, the contributions of Maximus the Confessor (ca. 580-662), John Climacus (579-649), and Gregory of Palamas (1296-1359) are remarkable. Late medieval concern with practical and methodical prayer contributed to a turning point in the sixteenth century Ignatian and Carmelite schools (Ignatius Loyola, Teresa of Avila, and John of the Cross). Teresa describes mystical experience as a special divine touching, a sense of being lost in God, so that there is no shadow of a doubt that God is within and the soul is in God.<sup>23</sup>

In short, we find that for the Fathers of the Church, mysticism is always the experience of an invisible objective world. As recognized by all writers on this subject, whether they claim direct personal mystical experience or not, both the definition and description of the mystical encounter are difficult. Briefly we could

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<sup>22</sup> U. King, *Christian Mystics*, 193-94.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. K. Kavanaugh and O. Rodriguez, trans., *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, vol. I (Washington: 1987), 105.



say that mystical theology or Christian mysticism seeks to describe an experienced, direct, non abstract, loving knowing of God; a knowing or seeing so direct as to be called union with God. But mystics also experience the vast distance between themselves and their creator due to the sense of sin. The ray of holiness of God in them helps them sense their sinfulness. Like their physical eye, their spirit's eye becomes sensitive to a speck of dust. Their experience of God's undeserving mercy, forgiveness and love enable them to purify themselves from the traces of sin.<sup>24</sup> These experiences take place in different stages (threefold ways of true knowledge of God) as teachings by Clement of Alexandria and Origen. Hence, the Catholic views of the three key stages to perfection are important elements also in mysticism. The soul undergoes a purification (the purgative way), which further leads to an illumination and greater love of God (the illuminative way). After a period, the soul may be said to enter into mystical union with God (the unitive way), which begins with the consciousness that God is present to the soul; the soul progresses through a time of quiet and an ecstatic state to a final perfect state of union with God (spiritual marriage).<sup>25</sup> Many mystics have written of their experiences, and these writings are the best source for our knowledge of mysticism. Poetic language is frequently the vehicle of expression. Fire, an interior journey, the dark night of the soul, etc., are some images or descriptions used for communicating the mystical experience. Among the many Christian mystics who have documented their experiences are Saint Francis of Assisi; Saint Teresa of Avila; Saint John of the Cross. Our work presents Chavara as another Christian mystic of such experiences.

## **II. Foundational Factors of Chavara's Mystical Formation**

The entire life and personality of Chavara was based on certain foundational factors that helped in his mystical formation. These are divided into two categories: primary and secondary. In the first category we find the background features of the way he was brought

<sup>24</sup> Cf. H. D. Egan, *An Anthology of Christian Mysticism*, xvi.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Bernard of Clairvaux (*Sermon* 83), Teresa of Avila (*Interior Castle*. Ch.II, 341-46), and John of the Cross (*Spiritual Canticle*, 474-77 lines 22-40) clearly speak about this stage as spiritual marriage. H. D. Egan, *An Anthology of Christian Mysticism*, xvii- xix.

up from his childhood which were of vital significance, namely, the parental care, education of life and learning, and life in the parish presbytery. The second one consisting of Carmelite, Eastern and Indian spirituality, was also extremely significant to his life as he was growing to the life of holiness.

### **A. The Primary Factors**

In every human person the foundation of spiritual formation takes place in his/her infant stage of life. The foundation of Chavara's spiritual formation could be perceived in his different nourishments, namely, physical, spiritual, and intellectual, from his family, parents, and the teachers in his infancy. They may be regarded as the factors that played an important role in his spiritual life.<sup>26</sup>

#### **a. The Parental Care: Physical and Spiritual**

Chavara was profoundly blessed by God with a good family atmosphere and parents. Both parents hailed from devout Catholic families and were pious Catholics. A good family atmosphere and the life and role of parents are essentially important elements in the formation of ideal families. The parents' way of life is a deciding factor in either integration or disintegration. These are basic factors for a person to experience the presence of God especially in his infancy because childhood experiences have a great impact in the mind of a person, both positive and negative. Chavara himself speaks of how he imbibed spiritual nourishment from his mother in his infancy.<sup>27</sup> Fundamental patterns of a man's relation to God are also formed in his early years.

A child from a broken family or from a family without true faith and religious practices faces great challenges, as a rule, in becoming a whole person. Moreover, these same factors also play an essential role in Christian vocation. The physical and spiritual care of Chavara's parents played an important role in his early life that helped him embrace the consecrated life. His mother was an exemplary Christian lady, who took special care in the Christian education of her son. His biographers speak briefly but sufficiently about this: "From childhood his pious mother was taking great care

<sup>26</sup> Cf. J. Kanjiramattathil, *Pastoral Vision of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 1986, 7- 9.

<sup>27</sup> *Compunction of the Soul*" 2, lines 48-56.

so that her child might grow dear to God. He was educated in the fear of God. He was liked and loved by all, for his piety, gentleness, modesty and restraint.”<sup>28</sup> We have already once quoted where Chavara recalled his mother’s commitment to his spiritual formation and the education he received from his mother.<sup>29</sup> She was sowing the seeds of the spirit of prayer in the mind of little Chavara, to form him into a man of prayer. As the child slowly began to lisp little words the pious mother put on his lips the sacred names Jesus, Mary, and Joseph.<sup>30</sup> At his deathbed he recalled these facts to his confreres with great emotion and how much they had influenced his personal life.

According to the profile of Chavara we find he did his primary education in *Kalari* for five years. Within this short span of time he was not only growing intellectually but also in virtuous life. Chavara regarded his family as the first school and his parents as first teachers before entering *Kalari*, the first “school of alphabets.” The good atmosphere of the family is conducive to one’s future formation. Then one moves to schooling outside where every child experiences a different atmosphere from that of his family. He himself describes the different atmospheres outside his home in his day to day life:

Temptations abounded where’re I cast my looks  
 The scenes around me beckoned me to sin  
 Indecent pranks, immodest words and deeds  
 Nude forms athwart the stage of life  
 Woe to me I beheld but filth around!  
 Rites and rituals fit for powers of Hell <sup>31</sup>

From this small instance, Chavara recalls how God’s valuable graces and the good discipline of his family helped him to grow in accordance with the will of God.

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<sup>28</sup> As quoted by P. Koyippillil, *Short Biography of Reverend Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara* (Pulincunnu: 1929), 3.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *Compunction of the Soul*, 2-3, lines 48-64.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. C.D. Valerian, *Vannya divya sree Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan*, 315; J. Kanjiramattathil, *The Pastoral vision of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 9-10.

<sup>31</sup> *Compunction of the Soul*, 4, lines 107-12,; see the same thoughts of expression ,35, lines 175-80,

## **b. Life in the Parish Presbytery**

The second factor that enabled Chavara's spiritual formation is the two years he spent at the parish rectory. Living in the parish rectory was a custom that existed during Chavara's time to motivate young minds to live a good, religious Christian life. Living in the presbytery one learned the primary lessons of sacred ministry by assisting in the Holy Mass and other prayer services. It was a channel to keep the children away from bad friends and bad habits. Instead here one sees the life of priests, and learns disciplinary life outside the family. The priestly candidates in those days were chosen from amongst the altar boys. Chavara recalls the loving spiritual care he received from his parish priest. The priest there brought him up to participate in and assist at the Holy Mass, and practice virtues and avoid whatever was evil.<sup>32</sup> He grasped that the priest, to be of service to the people, needs to be a man of prayer. Here he discerned his vocation and this inspired his parents to send him to the seminary.<sup>33</sup> An intense prayer life, a genuine sense of service to one's neighbor, and active participation in Church's activities provide families with conditions that favor priestly and religious vocations among young people.<sup>34</sup>

## **B. The Secondary Factors**

The roots of spirituality that influenced the life of Chavara are threefold: Indian, Eastern (Syrian/Oriental) and Carmelite. These three roots we consider as the secondary factors of his self-formation.

### **1. Indian Spirituality**

India is a multi-religious nation where almost all religions are practiced. In this pluralistic context we find that all these religions have their own spiritual ideals, which differ from one another. This peculiar diversity prevents us from distinguishing a pure Indian spirituality. All believe in the ultimate reality and the aim of man's life here on earth is destined to a spiritual transformation.<sup>35</sup> Hinduism,

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 5, lines 136-40.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. *Positio*, 28.

<sup>34</sup> John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*: Encyclical Letter (Rome: 1990), 80.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. J. M. Keller, *The Indian Way* (London: 1982), 62.

the major religion among them, is practiced by more than 75 percentages of Indians and dates back to more than 3,000 years. Indian civilization is one of the most ancient civilizations and Hinduism is regarded as the major contributor to India's culture and reality. Hence, we cannot set aside its contribution when we speak of the spirituality of India. We shall discuss only certain important concepts, texts and mystics of Indian spirituality that really influenced the life of Chavara.

### **a. Key Concepts**

The concept of *satya* or truth (Absolute, God) has a fundamental role to play in the Indian spiritual thought. There is a quest for the Absolute. This is presumed to be the fundamental principle and the objective of human life. Concepts like Being, Reality, or Self also designate to Absolute (God) in Indian philosophical tradition; a quest of union of being (human soul) with Being (God) or unreal with Real or self with Self. The achievement of this goal of the human soul is a spiritual realization. This realization is fulfilled when one attains the truth. To this end, there are other important concepts that help man in his day to day life, namely, *darsan* (vision), *tapas* (austerity), various *margas* (ways), etc. As we analyze each concept we also assess how far it influenced Chavara.

#### **i. Darsan**

*Darsan* means vision, seeing or a glance. It is not a merely simple vision but rather a divine one. It is also part of temple worship, pilgrimage, festival celebrations, and the honoring of saints and *sadhus* (sages) in India. It not only means that the gods keep their eyes open but that we also must do the same in order to make contact with them, to reap their blessings, and to know their secrets. Generally, for Christians, Jews and Muslims, hearing the Word of God and responding to it is all important. In Hinduism, the emphasis is upon the visual — seeing the divine image.

A spiritual transformation is possible through a profound divine vision in Indian spiritual tradition. For an ordinary believer, the *darsan* of a sage has great importance because he considers the sage a holy man, a person who experiences God face to face in his day to day life. To achieve this, one must perform sufficient ascetical

practices (*tapas*): live a life of discipline (*yoga*)<sup>36</sup> and genuinely follow subsequent paths (*margas*) which will be discussed in the coming sections. Rooted in these spiritual traditions of India, Chavara used the word *darsan* which is more important in its mystical sense.<sup>37</sup>

## ii. *Margas*

The *Margas* are three possible ways to liberation or salvation of man described in the Hindu sacred book *Bhagavad Gita*. It is ultimately the union with the divine reality. The *margas*<sup>38</sup> are: *Jnanamarga* (knowledge or exercise of wisdom), *Bhaktimarga* (exercise of love and devotion) and *Karmamarga* (exercise of works). But there is also a mention of a fourth way called *raja marga* (royal way)<sup>39</sup> discussed in *Yogasutra* (a methodical system for attaining perfection). However, the first three practices are considered the most important. *Jnanamarga* is the path to reach the ultimate reality through knowledge. *Bhaktimarga* is the path of devotion to one's chosen manifestation of the divine (*ishtadeva*),<sup>40</sup> more precisely, devotion in love and adoration of *Brahma* (God). *Bhakti* means attachment, or fervent devotion to *Brahma*. The term stems from root *bhaj*, meaning to partake of.<sup>41</sup> The object of *Bhakti* is *Bhagavan* (God). *Bhakti* designates man's love for God. It is 'man's love' response to God's gracious love.

The word karma literally means deed or action, but it implies the entire cycle of cause and effects. According to the law of Karma, every human action—in thought, word, or deed- inevitably leads to results, good or bad, depending upon the moral quality of the action. The *Bhagavad Gita* attempted to give a spiritual

<sup>36</sup> Cf. B. Walker, *Hindu World: An Encyclopedic survey of Hinduism*, vol.2 (New Delhi: 1995), 616-18.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. *Compunction of the Soul*, Canto III, 17.

<sup>38</sup> Some authors speak of these as *yogas* instead of *margas*, but both concepts refer to the three ways of human life of which Hinduism speaks.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. B. Walker, *Hindu World*, 617. Royal *marga* is essentially the path of meditation, that is, of being able to remove one's own consciousness from its awareness of this world of illusions and to focus only on the ultimate reality.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. "Bhakti," J. Bowker, ed. *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, (New York: 1997), 141. *Brahma* is the word used for God in Hinduism.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. B. Walker, *Hindu World: An Encyclopaedic Survey of Hinduism*, 138.

interpretation shifting its value of action to *niskamakarma* (actions are to be done, but with detachment) described in the words of Sri Krishna to Arjuna.<sup>42</sup> This means not to be desirous of or attached to its fruits. Here it is not based on the cause and effect theory but on action that paves the way for the welfare of the other.

### iii. *Tapas, Ashrama and Sannyasa*

These three concepts denote a similar meaning to show the life of renunciation in Indian thought. The power of the austerities of the ascetics was known as *tapas*.<sup>43</sup> Though we often make use of the English terms asceticism or austerity to translate *tapas*, it has a wider connotation. It is conceived as a mighty power. *Tapa* is the creative energy within God.<sup>44</sup> On this Manu writes, “Whatever is hard to be attained, whatever is hard to be reached, whatever is hard to be performed, all (this) may be accomplished by austerities; for austerity (possesses a power) which it is difficult to surpass.”<sup>45</sup> “It is one of the best means to attain supreme bliss.”<sup>46</sup>

*Ashrams* are abodes of asceticism in ancient India. The word *ashram* derives from the Sanskrit word *shrama* which means, ‘to exert’, to achieve a goal.<sup>47</sup> Literally *ashram* means ‘halting or resting place’. The word therefore, signifies a stoppage or stage in the journey of life wherein one rests, in order to prepare for the further journey to attain the final life or goal, the Divine.<sup>48</sup> The term *ashram*, in its strict sense, is applied to the four *ashrams* of Hinduism.<sup>49</sup> *Vanaprastashram* (retreat to the forest), the third stage of life, is

<sup>42</sup>R.C. Zaehner, *Bhagavad Gita*, 2:47.

<sup>43</sup> The term ‘*tapas*’ has its origin from the Sanskrit root ‘*tap*’, which means, to heat, to shine, to do Penance, etc.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. *Taittiriya Upanishad*, I: 1, 8-9.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. *Manusmriti*, XI, 239, These are the Laws of Manu. He (Manu) is a semi legendary Hindu law giver. It is one the standard books in the Hindu canon, and a basic text for all gurus to base their teachings on. This ‘revealed scripture’ comprises 2684 verses, divided into twelve chapters presenting the norms of domestic, social, and religious life in India (ca. 500 BC) under the Brahmin influence, and is fundamental to the understanding of ancient Indian society

<sup>46</sup> Cf. *Manusmriti*, XII: 104.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. B.G. Gokhale, *Ancient India* (Bombay: 1970), 120.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. P. Pattathu, *Ashram Spirituality* (Indore: 1997), 70.

<sup>49</sup> According to Hinduism, every Hindu has to pass through four stages during his earthly life. They are known as ashrams: *Brahmacharya*, (Studentship) *Grhastha* (Householder) *Vanaprastha* (retreat to the forest), *Sannyasa* (Life of renunciation)

<sup>50</sup> Cf. B. Walker, *Hindu World: An Encyclopaedic Survey of Hinduism*, vol. I, 84.

equal to the hermitage of a *rishi* or sage.<sup>50</sup> It connotes a place where holy men lived with disciples in order to meditate and to share their experience of God. But for some, the *ashram* life is not only a withdrawal from the world, but also is a service to society.<sup>51</sup> *Ashram* symbolizes the life of contemplation and service. For this reason some Indian Catholic religious congregations call their monasteries, *Ashrams*.

*Sannyasa* is a state of life in which a person is totally detached from everything in the universe. Possessions, attachments, the concentration of thought are focused ultimately on *Brahman*.<sup>52</sup> *Sannyasa* is a Sanskrit word derived from the combination of two terms, *samyak* and *nyasah*, meaning total abandonment.<sup>53</sup> For Hindus to embrace *sannyasa* means death to all belongings.<sup>54</sup> Both these concepts imply asceticism because a *sannyasin* is also called *tapodhana*, as his wealth is *tapas*. Thus spiritual realization takes place when one strives hard to achieve the union with Brahma. In this state one says that ‘*aham brahmasmi*’ (I am Brahman), *tat tvam asi* ‘Thou art that’. This is somewhat similar to the view expressed by St. Paul when he says, ‘it is no longer I, but Christ lives in me.’ This is regarded as an experience of a mystical union.

## b. Some Key Texts

*Upanishads* are Hindu spiritual treatises composed in Sanskrit between 800 and 400 BC in prose and verse. The *Upanishads* contain the core of Hindu Philosophy.<sup>55</sup> They constitute not only the scriptures but also are a veritable source of mysticism. The very word *Upanishad* means to sit near, *upa* meaning near. It

<sup>51</sup> Sri Buddha even positively approved social service as a duty of monks, so they had hospitals and education centres. The famous University of Nalanda was one of these. Cf. T. Kochumuttam, “Indian Monastic Traditions”, H. C. Perumaly ed. *Chavara Death Centenary 1871-1971*, (Kottayam: 1972), 101.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. M.G. Bhagat, *Ancient Indian Asceticism*, 1976, 43; Cf. C. Kanichai, *Sannyasa*, (Alwaye: no year), 3.

<sup>53</sup> There are different names used in Indian terminology to denote a *sannyasin* (renounced or detached person), such as *swami* (lord), *yogin* (one who practices yoga), *muni* (one who practices internal and external silence), *rishi* (one who attains Divine experience), *tapodhana* (one who possesses the treasure of meditation) etc. Cf. M. Dhavamony, *Classical Hinduism* (Roma: 1982), 369-73.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. P. Pattathu, *Ashram Spirituality*, 111.

<sup>55</sup> Cf., “Upanishad,” J. Ferguson, *An Illustrated Encyclopedia of Mysticism and the Mystery Religions* (London: 1976), 202.



conveys a symbolic expression of acquiring true knowledge (*jnana*); while sitting at the Master's feet the student ardently listens to him. The teacher communicates wisdom that is in him and the student receives that wisdom. When the *Upanishads* were composed, there were no writing materials, no printing facilities; all knowledge was handed down from mouth to mouth. The *gurukula* system<sup>56</sup> of Indian society was developed from this ancient tradition. The students stayed with the teacher and the teacher would speak of his experience, develop its profound truth. The disciples would hear attentively and afterwards note certain high points of the teaching.<sup>57</sup> The *Upanishads* are records of knowledge acquired from experience.

### c. Impact on Chavara's Life

These key concepts and thoughts of Indian spirituality greatly influenced Chavara, who lived in the culture and religiosity of Indian society. His was a life dedicated to the *darsan* of God. The ardent 'longing to see' (*darsan*) is a sign of his profound *bhakti* (devotion) reflected in his poetic writings.<sup>58</sup> *Darsanaveedu* or *Tapasubhavanam* which designates the Indian way of hermitage is a symbol of God's presence. Though the original vision of a *darsanaveedu* or *tapasubhavanam* was held by the other two CMI co-founders, Chavara carried forward its spiritual values and inspired others. Chavara compared the chapel, where the Blessed Sacrament is exposed, to the Sinai-Zion-Calvary Mountains. Those mountains symbolize the majestic and holy presence of Yahweh for Israel. Like the Israelites, Chavara loved the abode of the divine presence. He spent long hours in chapel. Whenever he entered there, he experienced a face to face vision of God: "Behold the

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<sup>56</sup> It was an ancient educational system where a group of students stayed with the *guru* or teacher for a particular period to acquire knowledge. According to this system it was not merely elementary education, but an integral knowledge that helped them to learn everything for their life. It is also called *brahmacharya ashram* -the primary stage of life, according to the Hindu ashram system, before entering the *grahastashram*- married life.

<sup>57</sup> A similar system of education was followed for the priestly training in Kerala in ancient times. Fr. Thomas Palakal, the co-founder of CMI congregation, at Pallipuram during the time of Chavara.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. *Compunction of the Soul*, Canto III, 17-22.

doors are wide open! There my Father himself comes out! Oh, to be in this wretched attire! My Father is out to embrace me!”<sup>59</sup>

Let us look at Chavara’s experience of the *darsanaveedu* in his meditative hymns:

You are my father you are my fortune  
 There is no other treasure for me, but in you  
 You are my love, all my good fortune  
 If not with you, how could I live my life  
 My very breath, my food, my drink  
 What can I find solace but in you <sup>60</sup>

Here his personality is reflected as standing alone in the presence of God in a face to face embracing vision, *darsanam*. A person like Chavara, gifted with mystical insights, can have such profound intuition. On the glorious and mighty presence of Christ in the tabernacle, Chavara considers the one who is enthroned there to be none other than his own Loving Father (*snehamulla appan*):

My Lord is enthroned near me in the tabernacle of this chapel. He is inviting me to Him in order to render me grace for my salvation, to forgive me, to listen to my petitions, to satisfy my needs. He is telling that he will bestow on me profusely whatever favours I am in need of. He promises to listen to me whenever I approach him with supplications.<sup>61</sup>

‘Colloquies with the Heavenly Father’ (*Dhyanasallapangal*) presenting a typical exposition of the Indian disciple ‘sitting near the teacher and listening’ is an *Upanishadic* inspiration. His poetical narrations and expressions aim at the total welfare of humanity, similar to the chants of ancient Vedic mystics of India; *asato ma sad gamaya, tamaso ma jyotirgamaya, mrtyorma amrtam gamaya*, (lead me from unreal to real, from darkness to light, from death to life) <sup>62</sup> In the perspective of three ways (*jnâna, bhakti, karma*) Chavara is an image of a holy man enriched with good knowledge, an exemplary man of God with a deep-rooted life of

<sup>59</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. CSK, vol. II: *Atmnutapam*, 10.

<sup>61</sup> *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 34.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. *Brahadaranyaka Upanishad* I, iii, 28.

prayer and subsequent dedication to the service of man. These particular terms and concepts found in Chavara's life reveal his spirituality which was rooted in and influenced by Indian spirituality.

## 2. Eastern Spirituality

Eastern Spirituality is a wider concept than we have in the West. When we speak about the Eastern spirituality in the life of Chavara, we mean his relationship to the Syrian spirituality of the East. It has some affinity with the Indian mind and especially with the Syro-Malabar Church and its Spirituality.<sup>63</sup> Generally, Eastern spirituality is enriched by a great variety of mystical thought and visions from countries of eastern traditions including India. The major traditional religions like Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Jainism, and other religious sects of the near East, have contributed much to this. *Antarayamin* (indweller) is an important spiritual concept by which Eastern thought understands God as an immanent phenomenon.<sup>64</sup> He is 'within' in the words of Eastern mystical poets like Kabir Das<sup>65</sup> who says "Listen to me, my friend! My beloved Lord is within."<sup>66</sup> The truth or reality is within. As Eastern spirituality is a wider term, we limit our discussion to the Syrian spirituality of the East. This spiritual tradition had vital influence in the thoughts of Chavara. Hence, we discuss some of the concepts which highlight the features of Syrian spirituality of the East.

### a. Asceticism

The term is derived from the Greek *askein*, which in the time of Homer meant, "to practice an art or skill." Later in Greece the term took on a broader meaning of "exercise"; to mean the study of philosophy or the practice of virtue, and it was used in this sense

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<sup>63</sup> Cf. X. Koodapuzha, "The Indian Church of the St. Thomas Christians," *Christian Orient*, no.1 (1980): 23.

<sup>64</sup> In *Rig-veda*, an important Vedic writings, the concept of *antarayamin* is well explained. RV III. 20: 4 and IV, 30: 2.

<sup>65</sup> Kabir Das was an Indian mystical poet, important because (like Mechtilde in Germany and Richard Rolle in England) he turned to the vernacular in singing of the divine Love. He was influenced by the *Vaishnavism* and Islamic mysticism. As with many mystics, his universe has three orders: Becoming, Being, God. Cf. "Kabir", *Encyclopedia of Mysticism*, 99.

<sup>66</sup> R. Van Over, ed. *Eastern Mysticism: The Near East and India*, vol.I (New York: 1977), 403.

by Greek philosophers.<sup>67</sup> So the early ascetics were more skilled in athletics and the military arts. The various Greek philosophical schools, such as the Pythagoreans, Stoics, Sophists, and Cynics, used asceticism as a system of moral practice to free men of vices. Plato viewed asceticism as a means not only of conditioning the body but also bringing it to a point at which the soul—the sum total of ideals—could be free. Hence, asceticism, in its broadest sense, is man's practice of renunciation of his physical self and the world in order to attain a higher ideal or spiritual good.

The term seems to have come into Christian and Western thought through the Hellenistic-Jewish philosopher Philo. In the early Christian era, martyrdom was understood as the apex of the Christian life and as the perfect imitation of Christ in the West. It was followed by a strong emphasis on asceticism as persecutions began declining when Christianity became the official religion in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Therefore those who wished to practice the highest possible perfection opted for an ascetic life.

Asceticism is highly valued and of great importance in Eastern spirituality. The earliest exponents of Eastern asceticism were the Jain and Buddhists whose religious teachings influenced the Essenes. Jain and Buddhist monks had penetrated the courts of Syria, Egypt, Macedonia, and Epirus by the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. They claimed to have gained magical abilities through self-denial. In the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Isaac the Syrian depicted asceticism as the primary means in his description of a three stage-ascent to God.<sup>68</sup> The practice of austere self-discipline was a means to achieve a higher or spiritual ideal in the Eastern tradition. It was the renunciation of the physical, which had been deemed of lesser worth, for the spiritual. This has been the teaching of most cultural and most explicitly all religious training. It is true that almost every society from the primitive to the most sophisticated teaches some type of asceticism in order to impart the self-control that is expected from its members and without which the society could not exist.

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<sup>67</sup> J. Aumann, *Spiritual Theology*, 14.

<sup>68</sup> H. D. Egan, *An Anthology of Christian Mysticism*, 136.

## b. Perpetual Prayer

The real basis of Eastern spirituality is not asceticism but the much more deeply biblical concept of “repentance”. Repentance, which is an important factor of Eastern tradition, truly influenced the spirituality of Chavara. Perpetual prayer is repentance with its baptism of tears which leads to one’s “purity of heart.” In deeper meaning, Bede Griffiths describes that, “it is a genuine mystical prayer, conformity of the soul in its depth with the divine image, an indwelling of God in the soul which has become transformed into his likeness.”<sup>69</sup> Repentance accompanied by “tears of compunction” is, for the Eastern Church, the very basis of monasticism and of Christian life. The Greek root for repentance is *penthos*. According to the Hesychast tradition,<sup>70</sup> true *penthos* is accompanied by “the gift of tears” — the heartfelt experience of sorrow over faults which truly cleanse the soul. “Pray first for the gift of tears so that by means of sorrow you may soften your native rudeness...Pray with tears and your request will find a hearing. Nothing so gratifies the Lord as supplication offered in the midst of tears.”<sup>71</sup> Eastern spirituality is characterized chiefly by its scriptural orientation. OT stories and events present the image of God as one who frequently intervenes in the lives of His people so that they return to Him by means of repentance. In NT teachings also Jesus often spoke of the importance of repentance. “But unless you repent you will all likewise perish.” (Lk 13:3). Jesus taught that slavery to the desires of the flesh — the bondage of self — is an obstacle that must be overcome not by suppression and self-denial, but by a return to simple faith in the indwelling spirit with repentance. “There is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Lk 15: 10).

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<sup>69</sup> B. Griffiths, “Christian Monastic Life in India,” *Journal of Dharma* 3 (April-June 1978), 125

<sup>70</sup> Hesychasm is described in great detail in the *Philokalia*, a compilation of what various saints wrote about prayer and the spiritual life. In practice, the Hesychastic prayer bears some superficial resemblance to mystical prayer or meditation in Eastern religions (e.g., Buddhism and Hinduism, especially Yoga), although this similarity is often overly emphasized in popular accounts. See more details U. King, *Christian Mystics*, 204-05.

<sup>71</sup> E. Ponticus, *The Praktikos Chanters on Prayer*, J. E. Bamberger, trans. (Kalamazoo: 1981), Chapter V, 6.

The concept of repentance accompanied by tears of compunction is presented in Chavara's work <sup>72</sup> in which he means that the barrier of sin, the stumbling block to our relation with God, is removed by repentance.<sup>73</sup> It is always the goodness of God that leads men into true and genuine repentance. Hence, Chavara shares his mystical thoughts based on the biblical concept of repentance. More about his thoughts on repentance will be discussed in the section on his writings.

### c. Prayer of the Heart

Prayer of the heart is the third important feature of Eastern spirituality that influenced Chavara. "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of David, have mercy on me a sinner" the cry of the blind man is the basis of the Jesus Prayer, a personal spiritual prayer and an ancient, accepted prayer method which has long been a tradition in the spirituality of the Eastern Church. Its origins go back to the Old Testament belief that God's name carried a divine energy'. This belief was carried forward by the first Christians' feelings about the name of Jesus.<sup>74</sup> The early Christian monks who went out into the desert to live and pray in the second through the fourth centuries had a preference for short, repetitive prayer. The Orthodox Church has looked to these Desert Fathers as a major source of spiritual wisdom. A favorite repetitious prayer of these monks was *Kyrie eleison* (Lord, have mercy). By the sixth century, the statement of the tax collector "God, be merciful to me a sinner" (Lk 18:12) became more profound in the perspective of the value of humility in Christian prayer. Eastern spirituality emphasizes the discovery of God within the heart, where God dwells as if in a temple. This is what is implied when Jesus says, ".....enter into your room, close the door and speak to the Father, who is unseen" (Mt 6: 6). It consists of a steadfast disposition of the heart. Chavara often recaled his sins and unworthy heart before the Lord in *the Compunction of a Soul* and *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*.<sup>75</sup> He recaled

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<sup>72</sup> CWC, vol. II.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. B. Griffiths, "Christian Monastic Life in India," *Journal of Dharma*, 125.

<sup>74</sup> The name of Jesus in the life of Christian is a powerful reality. Cf. Jn 16:23-24; Acts 4:10.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. CWC, vols. II, III,

that sin is the cause of division and separation while meditation or prayer is a process of love and union.

In addition to the above factors, Chavara's knowledge of the Chaldean way of Liturgy (East Syrian)<sup>76</sup> and the Syrian spirituality is seen in his Scripture centered spirituality where we find numerous biblical allusions and references. Liturgy is the celebration and re-enactment of the paschal mystery of Christ which is in itself a mystical experience because this mystery begins in God, manifested in the world, and experienced by men and finally ends in God. Chavara in his liturgical life could experience it.

### 3. Carmelite Spirituality

Chavara was primarily influenced by the Carmelite missionaries who were then administrators of the Church in Kerala.<sup>77</sup> The activities of the Carmelite missionaries in India, in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, had a great impact on the life of the Christian community in Kerala. Chavara himself was exceedingly fortunate to receive this tradition. The relation with the Carmelite missionaries helped him to direct his spiritual thoughts to the Carmelite spirit and way of prayer. Thereby he came to know the spirituality of the Carmelite tradition.

From a short survey of Chavara's stages of life we find in him a person filled with the zeal of the prophet Elijah. He took Elijah as a great model and inspirer. In this spirit and devotion, he attached the name 'Elias' to his own name. As we have seen, the Blessed Virgin Mary had already been an inspiration to his life since infancy

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<sup>76</sup> After the departure of St. Thomas, the Christian community in Kerala had no able leadership or organization for three or four centuries. Gradually, it came into contact with the Eastern churches. Following the liturgical celebration of the Chaldean Church the St. Thomas Christian community received the liturgical tradition of the East.

<sup>77</sup> The historical evidence shows that the Carmelite missionaries reached India between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries when *Propaganda fide* took charge of sending missionaries from Europe. They extended their pastoral activities to the coastal areas of Kerala. The Malabar Coast was entrusted to the care of the Carmelites who governed the major sections of the St. Thomas Christians as Vicars Apostolic of Malabar (1700-1853) and later Verapoly (1853-1886). The last Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly was Leonard Mellano of St. Louis OCD (1868-1887). But soon the Carmelites were forced to return to Rome after the Dutch invasion. Cf. J. Edassery, *Carmel and Malabar Province* (Thiruvanthapuram: 1995), 7-8.

and this now became stronger by following the Carmelite Way of life. The elements that formulate the Carmelite life, that give the basic spiritual orientation to its original form, have greatly influenced mystical thought. Their works had a great influence on Chavara when he founded a religious congregation and accepted its charism and spirit.

The mystical experiences and works of St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross enlightened his mystical mind. A filial devotion to St. Teresa of Avila is seen profoundly in his writings. Chavara calls her, “O! My mother, St. Teresa of Avila”<sup>78</sup> and she was a great model for his life of prayer. He speaks with Teresa in the form of a soliloquy:

I see from your accounts (your attitude to meditations) ...so my dear Mother, if I love my Lord Jesus truly, I will have enough matter to discourse with Him in meditation or if I can't talk, I can be happy staying near Him. So if I can have much love, then you will not have the trouble to teach me how to speak with Him, for soon I will learn such talk. So you exert to secure for me such love. <sup>79</sup>

Chavara considered St. Teresa as his teacher in prayer because of his deep understanding of her writings. But after all it was divine providence that enabled him to accept the Carmelite spirituality because we find young Chavara was active in preaching and teaching after the model of St. Dominic. Even Fr. Thomas Palackal, under whom Chavara underwent his priestly formation, was an ardent devotee of St. Dominic.

### **III. Writings of Chavara: an Overview**

We have already come to know from his profile that he was a great poet and a writer. Two of his writings, namely, the Literary Works and the Spiritual Writings are considered as great sources of his teaching on mysticism in which most of his mystical thoughts are expressed. Here we discuss them under the title of the poetical and prose writings of Chavara.

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<sup>78</sup> *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 2.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*



## A. Poetical Writings

The Literary Works (*Sahityakritical*) is considered an important poetic work that elevated Chavara to the level of one of the “great poets” (*Mahakavi*) of 19<sup>th</sup> century Kerala. He is distinctive because he is the first poet to compose a poem in Malayalam in a new genre called minor epic (*Khandakavya*) before A.R. Rajarajavarma’s popularly accepted work.<sup>80</sup> The structure, the style and the language used highlight the richness of his gift of writing. The work is undoubtedly a treasure of inspiring and informative pious reflections. There are numerous outmoded usages that create difficulty for modern readers as he was writing at a time when the Malayalam language was still in its infancy. The verses abound in metaphors and similes, even long ones. In fact, it is not only a literary work, but also a mystical one. The codified poetical writings consist of *Compunction of the Soul*, *Dirge* and *the Martyrdom of Anastasia*.

### 1. Compunction of the Soul: *Atmanutapam*

The “Compunction of the Soul” is the exact word used by the translator of Chavara’s work commonly known in Malayalam as ‘*Atmanutapam*’. Later, titles like ‘Lamentations of a Soul’ or ‘repentance of a soul’ came into use to convey the meaning of *Atmanutâpam*. Etymologically, the term *compunction* comes from the Latin word *compunctio*, from *cum-pungere*, meaning ‘to puncture with’: anxiety arising from awareness of guilt ‘compunction of conscience’ or distress of mind over an anticipated action or result.<sup>81</sup> It is found in the works of the Fathers of the Church in a number of different patterns; compunction of fear, compunction of desire and compunction of heart. The first ecclesiastical usage is found toward the end of the second century, transposing the meaning

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<sup>80</sup> *Malayavilasam* written in 1885 by A. R. Rajarajavarma is regarded as the first *Khandakâvya* in Malayalam literature according to the historical record. But Chavara composed the *Martyrdom of Anastasia* in 1862, 23 years before Rajarajavarma’s work. Chavara’s work was not popular to all as it was limited to the Christian circle and it was intended to help the Christian community during the crisis of faith. Cf., Z. M. Moozhoor, “Anastasiayude raktasakshitvam,” *Chavarayachan-Deepika Special*, 122; Cf. S. Poonoly, “Writings of Chavara,” P. Kalluveetil, and P. Kochappilly, eds., *The Lord of Heaven and Earth* (Bangalore: 2004), 120.

to signify the pain of the spirit, a suffering due to the actual existence of sin and human concupiscence as a result of our desire for God. In *Atmanutapam*, we see the image of a soul praising and thanking God for all his graces. At the same time the soul repents over its drawbacks in cooperating with the grace of God. Thus Chavara who represents this soul expresses a desire for renewal and a cry of hope.

### **a. Author and Composition**

The following aspects undoubtedly prove that Chavara was the author of this work. First, Fr. Leopold Beccaro, his spiritual father, had published some parts of the poem along with “*A Brief Life History of the Sainly Soul*” of Chavara in 1871, the year of the poet’s death. He describes Chavara in the biography as the one who had composed these devotional verses.<sup>81</sup> Secondly, the chronicles of the time make several references to this poem as the work of Chavara. Authors like Rev. Fr. Zachariah Ephrem Kalathil, Fr. Mathai Mariam Palakunnel, Fr. Varkey Parappuram and others have referred to this work. For the date of composition of the poem we have a reliable piece of evidence in the editorial note written by Fr. Leopold. He writes that the book was composed in the evening of Chavara’s life, probably in the year of 1869-70. He was bed-ridden in September in 1870. The original writing of *Atmanutapam*, which has come to us, is in twelve chapters of 143 pages (19x 12cms). The corrections seen here and there in the manuscript are in the poet’s own handwriting. It is evident that the poet had the verses copied down by someone and, while reading through them, made his own corrections.

### **b. Theme of *Compunction of the Soul***

This is a canticle of Chavara’s prayer experiences. The mystical thoughts are similar to the canticle of St. John of the Cross. He experiences the merciful love of God as the greatest gift in his personal life. His work synthesizes biblical stories and events taken from the Old Testament and New Testament. The majority of events are those in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ and His Bl. Mother.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, Microsoft Corp., 2000.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. CWC, vol. II, xi.

According to some, *Atmanutapam* is indebted to the Spanish book “The *Mystical City of God, Divine history of the Mother of God*”<sup>83</sup> by Maria de Agreda in 1665.<sup>84</sup> Chavara knew the work of Agreda as it was a popular work in his time. Certain descriptions that Chavara gives in his work are similar to the work of Agreda. Chavara describes the main events related to the events and happenings in the life of Jesus and Blessed Mother.

Though he had depended on this work to compose his own work, there are many positive reasons proving that his own God-experiences are being shared in this work. First, Chavara narrates his own childhood events in a meditative way and often he loses himself in reflections on his own life. His sins and imperfections caused the Son of God to bear all the tribulations and painful passions and finally an ignominious death on the cross. From these personal references we obtain a satisfactory knowledge of his early life. Secondly, the work is structured and written against the original cultural background of his native village Kuttanadu,<sup>85</sup> showing that he identified with his own people and their culture.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. The *Mystical City of God* consists of eight books in three parts. Chavara was influenced by this particular work and certain thoughts reflect in his poetry. He composed his works based on its fourth and sixth books. The content of the book IV of Agreda are : the journey to Bethlehem; Christ our Saviour is born of the virgin Mary in Bethlehem, Juda; the adoration of the shepherds; the circumcision; the adoration of the magi; The presentation of the infant Jesus in the temple; the flight to Egypt; the sweet and intimate communications. The content of book VI are Mary accompanies Jesus on his journeys ;the transfiguration and triumphal entry into Jerusalem of our Lord; the Last Supper; the prayer in Gethsemane and how Mary joined therein; Jesus brought before Annas and Caiphas, Jesus brought before Pilate; the scourging and crowning with thorns; the way of the cross; the crucifixion; Mary the heiress of the merits of Christ; the victory of Christ over hell; the resurrection, and the ascension of Christ. Cf. *Ibid*.

<sup>84</sup> Maria de Agreda, a Catholic nun, was born of wealthy parents, in a castle at Agreda, Spain, on April 2, 1602. Her parents were Catherine and Francis Coronel who also had another daughter and two sons. Accepting the will of God, the wealth and castle were given to the Franciscan Order and the castle became the Convent of the Immaculate Conception. Her father and brothers became Franciscan monks and Maria, her mother, and her sister became nuns. In 1627, Sister Maria was elected Abbess of the convent and remained so until her death in 1665. She received apparitions from Our Lady who requested her to write her biography. This work is called *The Mystical City of God* containing the most intimate details about the Queen of Heaven. Cf. <http://www.sacredheart.com/> (accessed June 12, 2006).

<sup>85</sup> *Kuttanadu* is a region in Kerala and is of unique natural beauty. It is a very green land famous for its rice and coconut production. It is also famous for its boat race

### c. The Important Highlights in the Work

The entire *Atmanutapam* consists of thirteen *cantos* with non specific titles used by Chavara. Interestingly, the poems contain autobiographical material especially the first two sections and the conclusions are a heart felt prayer for the protection of the Bl. Mother in the last moments of life. As a spiritual treatise the poem stands supreme. Strangely enough, it is not any grievous sin but simple faults, imperfections that send him into spasms of compunction. He is even conscious of the ugliness of sin that pains the heart of his Heavenly Father: “Father, my loving father, I regret my offences”, is his attitude expressed throughout the whole poem. The main features of *Atmanutapam* are Chavara’s sincere repentance, conversion and gratitude in the perspective of the events related to the redemptive mission of Christ in the world. Here we have a short presentation of the entire work of Chavara, not as a direct presentation of each *canto*, but compiling certain chapters and focusing on the above mentioned aspects.

#### i. Acts of Gratitude and Praise

Acts of gratitude and praise are specific aspects that Chavara expresses throughout the work. He enumerates a series of undeserved blessings which God in his boundless mercy showered upon him:

God almighty, who was in the beginning  
 You created me, a son of Adam  
 O God, wherefore this grace, reveal to me  
 O Lord eternal, your infinite mercy <sup>86</sup>

The important acknowledgement of God’s blessings he describes is his creation as a human being without any deformity, the grace of sonship in God through baptism, and protection from grave danger. From the first canto he begins with praising the Merciful Love of God,<sup>87</sup> who formed him as the “son of Adam” “creating him as a

and the entertainment involved in this, the folk songs or *vanchippattu*. These songs are composed in the style and culture of the locality so that ordinary people can easily follow them. Chavara uses the tone of the *Vanchippattu* in his work.

<sup>86</sup> *Compunction of the Soul*, 1, lines 1-4.

<sup>87</sup> There are different concepts in his work that denote the mercy of God. namely, *Karunyanatan*, *Karunakaran*, *karunnyan* (Lord of Mercy), *karunanidhi* (Merciful Lord with treasures)

human being” in this world, who “created him in the image of the divine glory” (canto I:2). He recollects that one’s status as a human being is due to the merciful love of God and is the gracious gift of God. God’s merciful love is an experience of God’s love for each human being. Chavara praises the greatness of the gift of human nature he received from God. This nature is God’s own image shared in the form of man.

At the same time Chavara points out the relation of man as a creature and God as the Creator. This relationship exists and is guaranteed as long as one is faithful to the will of God. In the second canto, his narration of protection from an epidemic and his birth without any deformity is an important reflection on God’s abundance of mercy. In addition he describes how he was initiated into the devotion to Our Lady by recalling the moment that his mother dedicated him to this experience.<sup>88</sup> By this special act he began to grow under the care and protection of Our Mother and his devotion to her continues in his own words.<sup>89</sup> Together with the Blessed Mother, who sang the *Magnificat* to the Lord, Chavara expresses praise and thanks to God for all his gracious gifts. He received numerous graces from God, the Almighty, in spite of his unworthiness.

Me, you treated with kind predilection  
 Wedded to your dear chosen people  
 What thanks shall I render thee my Lord,  
 For this your kindness, so unlimited<sup>90</sup>

In this chapter Chavara sings the hymns praising God with Mary, who sang the *Magnificat* as a sign of her act of humility. “My soul praises the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant” (Lk 1: 46-47). The praise and singing of Chavara continue as follows:

.....my God, my only good  
 What joy, peace or wellbeing can be mine?  
 You my Love, my joy and all my good fortune  
 If not with you, how could I live my life

<sup>88</sup> Cf. *Compunction of the Soul*, 6, lines 1-12.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 13-14, lines 245-78

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 8, lines 73-76.

My very breath, my food, my drink  
 What solace have I save in you<sup>91</sup>

The God experience of individuals always differs from person to person. Chavara experienced God as his loving Father (*appan*), a Father in whom he could trust in everything. This experience of Chavara is mostly reflected in his spiritual writings,<sup>92</sup> about which we will have more to say. But for people like Chavara, this rich God experience is recalled in every moment of their lives, no matter what the context. Chavara narrates the father-son relationship in this work.<sup>93</sup> The experience of filial love is expressed in two ways, namely, his profound sense of gratitude to his Father, the source of every good in and around him and the heartrending sense of sin born out of this love. At the end of this *canto* Chavara demonstrates sincere compunction for not having sufficiently fought against his temptations through mortification of his senses in his childhood days.<sup>94</sup>

## ii. Acts of Contrition

The most mystic souls of intimate friendship with God are gifted with the sense of sinfulness. Chavara was not an exception in this and his laments and repentance are often reflected in his poems. As a creature, man has many intrinsic limitations and the relationship towards God, the Creator is distanced by man's sins. Thereby in certain moments creatures are distracted by feelings of guilt at having failed to fulfill the will of God, but with a repentant heart man can be united with Him. Chavara, being conscious of his sinfulness, considered himself as the most ungrateful of creatures and least worthy of being called a human being, as we see when he calls himself a sinner, (CS1:129, 2:242,361-70, 3:55, 5:142,144); the least one (CS 3: appendix 39-40), unworthy one (CS 7:162) one who does not have any ability (2:278). All these expressions are similar to the cry of Prophet Elijah at the sight of the holy God, "Woe to me! I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among the people of unclean lips" (Is 6:1-5). Chavara moves ahead with a contrite heart in the following lines:

<sup>91</sup> *Compunction of the Soul*, 10, lines 143-46.

<sup>92</sup> *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. *Compunction of the Soul*, 10, line 135.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 16, lines 361-64.

Through Baptism you raised me to sublime sonship  
 Ignorance drove me far from grace divine  
 Severed me from that fountain of life  
 Worse, Satan's slave had become!

With suff'ring intense caused by sin  
 My eyes sank in depth of despair and pain  
 Severed from you, my God my only good  
 What joy, peace or well-being can be mine?<sup>95</sup>

These words of repentance and contrition are not to be misunderstood as expressions of his despair, but reflect his confidence in the merciful forgiveness of God. The reality of guilt feelings lead to awareness of God's providence, not to death but to life. He praises and thanks almighty God for all His gifts:

What shall I render you, my Lord, my God,  
 For all your wondrous gifts of mercy and love  
 For cleansing my soul, so holy, spotless and fair  
 At the very *start* of journey of life?<sup>96</sup>

Finally, the chapter concludes with the exemplary life of his mother who guided and formed him as a child of God. He was well nourished spiritually and was taught the lessons of prayer by his mother. There are many sections which describe the poet's repentance and lamentations and subsequent trust in God's grace. The child-like simplicity, total dependence on Mother Mary and intense devotion inspired him to confess that he is a sinner.

Mother mine, alas, this picture so fills me  
 With dread, O Lady, I shudder with fear  
 I find my soul, O misery! Packed with vice  
 Bitter agony unsettles my mind!<sup>97</sup>

You alone my hope, none else have I  
 Behold your son gently on your bosom rests  
 Reclining quiet, sleeps in unmolested peace!  
 Breathe unto His ears, a word of prayer for me,<sup>98</sup>

<sup>95</sup> *Compunction of the Soul*, 10, lines 139-42.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 2, lines 37-40.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 42, lines 201-04.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 42, lines 206-09.

The last section indicates Chavara's ardent devotion and faith that the Blessed Mother will intercede for him with her son Jesus.

### *iii. Image of a Mystical Poet*

In the hundred lines of the third *cantos*, we find an image of a great mystic. "I long to see" is a recurring expression which Chavara uses forty seven times in this section. The profound expression of great desire and longing for God is an Indian spiritual tradition, i.e., a quest for the Divine vision (*darsan*); craving for God-realization or craving for intense spiritual experience. The 'longing' expressed by Chavara is a 'longing to see Christ'. It is Chavara's experience of Christ that articulates his whole work *Atmanutapam*. Taking different events related to the life of Christ, he enters into this life of Jesus Christ; the incarnate Word becomes a human being; God becomes one with us-Emmanuel. Chavara longs to see this Emmanuel in all His spiritual endeavors.<sup>99</sup>

The beautiful narration starts with his imagining the moment of the incarnation of the Word in the immaculate womb of Blessed Mother and subsequent events relating to Mary's journey to Bethlehem.<sup>100</sup> This section mainly covers the flight to Egypt, the return to Nazareth and life thereafter, ending with the beginning of Jesus' public life with the miracle at Cana. He also creates a very beautiful image of the Good Shepherd.<sup>101</sup> We find Chavara's mystical narration again in the eighth chapter where he presents the union of the soul with God in a language of love, of intimate and affectionate experience.

Chavara espouses the Christian traditions in the style of Indian *bhakti sadhana*, as described by Mirabai<sup>102</sup>; comparing the God-man relationship to a spousal relationship.<sup>103</sup> There are many mystical writers who have compared the union of God and the human soul to that of the bride-groom. Like St. John of the Cross

<sup>99</sup> Cf. *Compunction of the Soul*, 17.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 17-19.

<sup>101</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>102</sup> Mirabai is regarded as a great mystic in Hindu tradition and *bhakti-sadhana* is the way she expresses her mystical thoughts through her intense devotion towards lord Krishna

<sup>103</sup> Cf. P. Kalluveetil, "Christian Portrait of a Bhakti Yogi," *Journal of St. Thomas Christians* 16 (2005): 42.



and Teresa of Avila the human soul is the feminine character also here in Chavara's writing. The uniqueness of the groom in Chavara's imagination is expressed in his writings.<sup>104</sup> His contribution to the mystical espousal is found in his contemplation of the Calvary episode. In a detailed description of Jesus' journey to Calvary, he compares the royal procession of the Divine Bridegroom towards the marriage tent or *manapantal*.<sup>105</sup> The Divine bridegroom eagerly and impatiently waits the day of the nuptial procession and the bridal bed of the Cross.

#### *iv. Glory and Devotion to the Holy Spouses*

*Cantos* four to seven highlight Chavara's thoughts on the Nativity of Our Lord, particularly reflecting on the miserable life situation of Jesus' parents. In this way, the poet illustrates the dignity of the holy spouses and expresses his personal devotion to and sentiments for them. Chavara was an ardent devotee of Our Lady and her spouse, St. Joseph, the greatest models of holiness. In this fourth chapter he reflects on the hardships and tribulations the Holy spouses faced at Bethlehem in order to fulfill the will of God. They resemble the models of miserable suffering in the midst of the greatest gift they received from God. The tedious journey, rejections and helplessness of a father and a mother! In this section, he praises the greatness of the Virgin Mary. "Mother of benign, Crown of woman kind" (CS, IV, 1), "Woman blessed" (IV, 12), "Child of Adam without the trace of sin and good Lady pure", "Woman who crushed the serpent's head" (IV, 16) "Blessed" (IV, 12), "Obedient wife" (IV, 25).

Even after the special attributes from God, the Almighty allows her to suffer and she humbly accepts the will of God, facing these difficult situations to the full. By her loving cooperation with the will of God (*fiat*), the redemptive mission of God is fulfilled in Mary. Hence she is worthy to be the "Blessed", pure Lady of Mother, Ark of the Covenant, (IV, 53). Chavara narrates the untainted nature of Mary, her position as the Queen of Heaven, her blessed death, her Assumption, glory and her coronation etc., at the end of this

<sup>104</sup> Cf. *Compunction of the Soul*, 67-68.

<sup>105</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 67; the word *Kalyanapantal* is another synonym he used in prose works to designate the marriage tent.

work. This lengthy narration reflects the poet's profound thoughts on her life.

Chavara also sees the "suffering person of St. Joseph" (IV, 72) who was "Holy" and "prime among the just" (IV, 71) and his cooperation in fulfilling the mission of God together with his spouse, Mary (IV, 72). He describes the feelings and emotions of St. Joseph as those experienced by someone in a particularly difficult situation. Despite all these tribulations he did not murmur against God, instead simply accepted His will. Chavara sees that all these sufferings happened to them due to his sins. Reflecting over his past life Chavara regrets and repents:

It pains me deep, on my sins to reflect  
My God, my Sire, I listless, made my foe  
How small their guilt, ungrateful me  
My sins many a fold, deeper so  
You, my loving Father, aware of my lot  
Draw me close to your beloved Son  
And by the prayers of your dear spouse  
Forgive the misdeeds, in my childhood I've done<sup>106</sup>

On reaching the stable, while the blessed couple awaits in holy expectation, the Nativity of our Lord takes place. The choir of angels sing their celestial praise and sing praise to the couple. The poet with sincere feelings of love describes the scene of St. Joseph fondling Child Jesus in his arms. After so many tribulations, hardships and suffering the holy parents find joyful and peaceful moments, bringing to mind the Word of the Lord to his disciples that "your sorrows will be turned to happiness" (Jn 14). The Word of God is anticipated in the life of His own parents, won after the sufferings they have already faced and that are yet to come as they flee to Egypt to save the Child Jesus from the brutal acts of King Herod. Chavara conveys the message of the importance of suffering and its effects. He reflects on his own past sins and asks pardon from the Lord who is in the manger. With full confidence in the Lord's mercy, Chavara believes a merciful look or gaze from the Infant Child Jesus will save him. Hence he prays:

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<sup>106</sup> *Compunction of the Soul*, 29, lines 197-04.

When your bright visage I see  
 My gloom effected, Love glows  
 In your look of mercy I behold  
 A gentle saviour, not a judge

.....  
 .....

Abide with me, save me from troubles  
 Guard me, O Your grace draw me  
 Devoutly I pray, in the words of David  
 Your blessed ancestor thus  
 The sins of my youth, remember not  
 By your mercy, infant save me<sup>107</sup>

At the end, Chavara asks the Mother of God to intercede to save him from the wrath of God. His confidence in the Mother is expressed when he prays to her for a happy death and salvation.<sup>108</sup>

#### *v. Dignity of Shepherds and Magi*

With his special poetic skill, Chavara narrates other personalities involved in this great event of Our Lord; the Shepherds and the Magi. The good news of the birth of the Saviour is announced to the shepherds by an angel. Chavara reflects on the dignity of the shepherds and the poor, to whom the good news was announced before to the wise and the rich. He offers us a beautiful image of the shepherds zealously rushing to the manger of Bethlehem.

The young and old, children and mighty men  
 Wives and dames came to see the babe  
 Little lambs some, others milk to drink  
 To the Baby Shepherd they gave  
 Fruits of trees, garlands of blossoms sweet  
 Babes in glee, tiny birdies they bring  
 Off 'ring these before His Sacred Feet  
 To the infant bright as the Sun, they bow!<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 35, lines 163-66, 179-83.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 29, lines 205-09.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 36-37, lines 21-28.

The lines describing the image of the new-born baby seen by the shepherds are extraordinary: “the beautiful red lotus is on the lap of Mary, the pure and white water lily.”<sup>110</sup>

Chavara brings some novelty to this scene by narrating the conversation between Our Lady and a Shepherdess, Shanti by name.<sup>111</sup> The subject of their conversation is the life and mission of Jesus. For Shanti, as for others, it is unbelievable that the Messiah is born in such poor surroundings. The Blessed Mother clears up the doubts that Shanti has about various aspects of Christ’s life, explaining the two objectives of God’s coming into to this world. First, the Word becomes flesh as the coming of the Lord to redeem the world. Second, the *parousia*; the second coming of the Lord to judge the world. In this perspective Chavara pictures the role of the Mother of God in the redemptive mission of her Son.

The visit of the Magi, their offering of gifts, the presentation of the holy infant in the temple, the prophecies of Simon and Anna are first described in the next *canto*. This is followed by a solemn meditation of the poet on the sorrows and passions foretold by the prophet, to be endured by Our Lady and then a solemn confession of the fact that it was his innumerable sins and failures that caused these pains. With his sincere repentance for all, Chavara finally makes a heart-felt prayer that he may be converted and sanctified. He also refers to the converted life of St. Andrew Corsini.<sup>112</sup>

#### *vi. Impact of the Passion and Death of Christ*

The descriptions of the passion of our Lord are given in canto eight. Christ’s cheerful acceptance of the cross, his being led to the summit of the Mount Calvary, Simon being enjoined to help him bear the Cross, our Blessed Mother and St. John bearing witness to the painful journey and the Crucifixion of our Lord on reaching Calvary are the highlights of this section. The *canto* concludes by enumerating the Seven Sacred Utterances of Jesus on the Cross.

The events that followed the crucifixion of our Lord form the theme of this *canto*. It describes how, after breaking the legs of

<sup>110</sup> Cf. *Compunction of the Soul*, 37, lines 33-36.

<sup>111</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 37, line 37.

<sup>112</sup> Saint Andrew Corsini was born in Florence in 1301 of the illustrious Corsini family. It is said that Florentine Corsini family gave life to a wayward, bad-

the thieves suspended on the Cross with Him, the blind Centurion Longinus thrust his lance right through the heart of Jesus, and then how his sacred Body was borne down and laid in the lap of His blessed Mother and afterwards placed in the sepulcher. It contains the Hymn of thanksgiving sung by Longinus, whose vision was miraculously recovered; and the lament of the Blessed Mother over the corpse of her son placed in her lap, lips sealed in silence and her being consoled by Peter, the repentant disciple, add to the signal charm of this canto. The poet narrates the inner feeling of a mother whose son was brutally killed..

**vii. *On the Role of Mary in the Church and its Life***

Chavara's narration in *cantos* ten to twelve highlights the relationship between Mary and the Church. We shall have a quick glance at the important events Chavara describes in these cantos. The initial section narrates the events in the life of Our Lady immediately after the death of her son, Jesus. She makes the first Way of the Cross, visiting the places through which her Son was taken to His crucifixion. Then she consoles and helps the dear disciples.

The Resurrection of Jesus and visit to His Mother Mary, and his glorious ascension into Heaven is given in *canto* X. The poet then describes the event of Pentecost, the growth of the Holy Church, the role of the Mother in the conversion of Saul, the assembly in Jerusalem in her presence and her presence at the

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tempered youth, Andrew, though he was the fruit of his parents' prayers and was consecrated by solemn vows to God before his birth. He spent his money on vice and carousing with evil friends. One day his grieving mother, Peregrina, told Andrew of her deepest fears. Just before his birth, she had dreamed that she was giving birth to a wolf and Andrew realized that he was indeed living like a wild animal. She also revealed that he was dedicated to God's service under the protection of the Blessed Virgin while he was still in her womb. He hurried to a church to pray, and became a new man while praying at Our Lady's altar. He was so touched by God that he entered the Carmelite Order. He was elected provincial of Tuscany at the general chapter of Metz in 1348. He was made bishop of Fiesole on October 13, 1349, and gave the Church a wonderful example of love, apostolic zeal, prudence and love of the poor. He died on January 6, 1373 and was canonized in 1629 by Pope Urban VI. Cf. <http://www.saintpatrickdc.org/ss/0204.shtml>. (accessed September 6, 2006). Chavara does not give any details of the saint's life, but knew well of him and other such saints through his Carmelite friends.

scene of martyrdom of the apostle James. Her parting message before the Assumption, her submission to Peter, the Vicar of the Church, and the counsels she imparts to him are poetically and elaborately narrated. Chavara describes the moment God the Father along with his Son Jesus entrusts Our Lady with the care of the Church. “O, daughter, you may protect the believers in the newly built Church founded by Your Son and my Son Jesus when he was in the world.”<sup>113</sup>

Chavara describes the death and assumption of the Virgin Mother as a profound experience. Knowing that her death is near she visits Peter, the Head of the Church, and seeks his apostolic blessing. After describing the Assumption of our Lady, the poet, moved by genuine devotion to her, seeks her blessings. The *canto* describes the internment of the Blessed Mother and certain graces the poet had obtained. There are references to the efficaciousness of our Lady’s intercessory prayer. Chavara also reflects on the benefits of Maria Agreda who received special graces from the Virgin Mary as she revealed all the blessings given to her. In Chavara’s view, Mary is Mother as well as a mediator. Always remaining in prayer, the Holy Mother fights against evil and protects the sheep of Christ.<sup>114</sup> Again in another instance the Church is symbolized as a ship sailing through the oceans of the world. During periods of darkness and struggle the Holy Mother extends her tender help to the Church.<sup>115</sup> Most of the images invoked by the poet towards the end here are similar to the revelation received by Maria Agreda. At the end of the *Atmanutapam* Chavara prays for Our lady’s grace and blessing to obtain solace from the attacks of the devil.

## **2. Dirge: *Maranaveettil padanulla parvam***

Chavara intended this to be sung before the funeral when a corpse is placed in the coffin for public homage. It contains and enumerates the articles of faith related to the death of a man and beautifully illustrates stories and incidents to enlighten the hearts of the living.

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<sup>113</sup> Cf. *Compunction of the Soul*, 87, lines 79-84.

<sup>114</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 89, lines 137-140.

<sup>115</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 91, line 221.

### a. Structure and Composition

*Dirge* is a poem of 1162 lines in a popular chant style called *parvam* or *pana*.<sup>116</sup> *Maranaveettil padanulla parvam* (the song to be sung in a bereaved family) is the original name given by Chavara who is supposed to be its author.<sup>117</sup> Chavara illustrates several didactic stories to attract the people and concludes with good, solid messages. There are no sections or separations to indicate each story, but they are written in one stretch. He states that neither the world, nor relations nor one's own abilities can stand up to the hour of death but that only virtues and good works accompany one to eternal glory. Good deeds or virtues are the only reliable things that befriend man once he meets with his death. This is the central idea of this poem, that by death one becomes helpless and is left to the mercy of others.

### b. Objectives and Theme

Chavara presents the Christian meaning of death in a practical form that can be understood by ordinary people. He contributes a theology enriched with spiritual values and the meaning of Christian death. The poem imparts true knowledge to the people who arrive to greet the bereaved family, inspiring a feeling of salvific hope. Death liberates man from the vanity of creatures.<sup>118</sup> It gives priority to Eternal Life rather than mere death. The style of presentation affects and effects deeply the spiritual life of each individual. It poses a personal responsibility and accountability. *Dirge* highlights and reconfirms the 'need to be prepared', that death is an unexpected reality at any moment.

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<sup>116</sup> *Pana* is originally a word designating a chant or song sung during the Lenten season by the Syrian Catholics of Kerala. The old custom was to sing these as preparation for a fruitful Lent, during the final phase which culminates on Holy Saturday. It is a set of songs recalling the suffering and death of Christ. In tune with this, Chavara prepared *Dirge* to be used when a corpse is placed in the coffin for public homage. As soon as someone in a family dies, he or she is placed in a decorated coffin. There are then continuous prayers with rosary and divine office until the body taken for the last rites. Apart from these prayers, Chavara thought to use *Dirge* for fruitful reflection on the meaning of Christian living and death.

<sup>117</sup> The *parvam* was called *pana* in 1939 by then publisher Cf. "Dirge," CWC, vol. II, 131.

<sup>118</sup> Cf., G. AranjanayiL, "Eschatological Perspectives in *Dirge*," *The Lord of Heaven and Earth*, 334-42.

*i. A Reminder for Vigilance*

The *Dirge* begins with a reminder to living persons that it is not meant to frighten, rather it is an invitation for conversion. According to Chavara it is better to go to a funeral function than to a wedding.<sup>119</sup> This is similar to the thoughts found in the Book of Ecclesiastes (cf., Ecc. 7: 2). A moment of frivolity rarely serves as a reminder to a conversion of life and still less to think about death. The attitude of the unfaithful and foolish is compared to the servant who thinks that his master will not return soon (cf. Lk 12: 45). Death approaches like a thief, and no one knows the hour as Jesus pointed out on several occasions. We find that the dead impart the message, reminding the living as we find in Chavara's verse:

We enjoyed each other's company  
 But today, alas, I am far from you  
 .....  
 Yesterday, I was as you are now  
 And you'll be like me tomorrow<sup>120</sup>

Chavara adapted Jesus' method of illustrating his messages with different stories and parables found in the Gospels: the parable of ten virgins who were vigilant at the arrival of bridegroom, the parable of the talents, which inspires people to be engaged in meritorious works and become rich in what God has granted to each one. This parable also indicates the value of time. Hence, it is a time of vigilance to face death.

*ii. Beware of Real and Unreal Friends*

Chavara reminds the living of the need to distinguish between true and untrue friends. He describes this aspect in *Dirge* with a beautiful narration of a person who was condemned by an emperor to be beheaded. As a result he approaches his friends whom he considered to be very dear and near to him. But no one could help or save him from the wrath of the king's penalty.<sup>121</sup> Chavara compares these friends to the world, relatives, one's own body and the virtues. In the *Dirge* Chavara's verses are the voice of a dead person:

<sup>119</sup> Cf. *Dirge*, 129, lines 1-4.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 129-30, lines 11, 12, 21, 22.

<sup>121</sup> *Dirge.*, 131-35.



Bear you, this always in mind  
 Friends are many, when we are alive  
 When die, all will leave  
 Companions several had I  
 But who will now befriend me <sup>122</sup>

By this illustration of four friends Chavara imparts the message of recognizing the real friend in one's life, and this is nothing but the virtues one earns. The proverb "all that glitters is not gold" becomes true when we read the thoughts of Chavara. The Sankara thought of *maya* (illusion) <sup>123</sup> is also clearly present in his writings. Chavara viewed the human mind as always tending towards the evils of the world, body and self. The 'good works' are considered as the real friend who accompanies a person at the moment of his death. Death is really a moment of fear, but a person of virtuous life does not fear death as he is secure with his meritorious works, the real friend who accompanies him at his death. As we have already seen, Chavara himself was fearless on his death bed. So Chavara says it is very foolish to depend on the friends in the world.

### *iii. Stage of Purgatory*

Several stories and images in *Dirge* show that Chavara reconfirms the existence of purgatory. Chavara shows that purification from every sin, even those we consider the slightest, is necessary. He clearly states this through 'the story of a holy old woman' <sup>124</sup>: even though a man may be found very holy in the sight of God, he can enter heaven only after passing through the purifying stage of purgatory. Chavara frequently made acts of contrition for the slightest sins he committed and cautioned others to save themselves from even venial sins.

### *iv. A Call to Conversion and Renewal*

*Dirge* calls for a conversion and renewal of one's life. *Metanoia* or conversion of heart is the modern theological expression to show

<sup>122</sup> Ibid 130, lines 26-30.

<sup>123</sup> The term *maya*, (illusion) is pivotal in the Vedanta system of Sankara, where it signifies the world as a cosmic illusion and also the power that creates the world. Sankara (c. 700 C.E.), also known as Sankara or Sankaracarya, Hindu metaphysician, religious leader, and proponent of Advaita Vedanta, is generally

the real change in Christian life. The actual practice of Christian life demands an interior conversion. This is true and clear in every field of Christian action. In *Dirge* Chavara touches the hearts of men and makes them conscious of the salvation of precious souls and the means to attain this end. This song is a call to renewal and conversion of hearts of many more lives.

#### v. *Identifying Three Churches*

The Catholic Church traditionally identifies three classifications of the Church in the context of the doctrine of the Communion of saints. The Church commemorates this in support of asking the intercession of the saints and praying for the dead: the triumphant Church (already in glory), the suffering Church (in purgatory) and the militant Church (on the earth). We can see that Chavara already shared a similar view as revealed in his poetic work, *Dirge*. In the attainment of perfection, the triumphant Church helps the militant one through the communion of saints. The suffering Church in purgatory is to be helped by the militant Church on earth by their prayers, penance, and works of charity. By these meritorious acts both become beneficiaries and thereby there is a double effect.<sup>125</sup>

Chavara's work provides guidelines to the pilgrim Church on earth to help the Church of the suffering. His thoughts on the mutuality of the Church might have been influenced by Paul who describes the mystical body of Christ. "If one member suffers, all suffer together, if one member is honored, all rejoice together" (1Cor 12:26). This principle is the basis of the spirituality of communion.

At the dawn of the new millennium, Holy Father John Paul II said: "The spirituality of communion indicates the heart's contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity dwelling in us, and whose light we must also be able to see shining on the face of the brothers and sisters around us. A spirituality of communion also means an ability to think of our brothers and sisters in faith within the profound unity of the Mystical Body, and therefore as 'those who are part of me'".<sup>126</sup>

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acknowledged to be the most influential of all Hindu religious thinkers. Cf. "Maya," *The Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia*, Sixth Edition (Columbia: 2003).

<sup>124</sup> Cf. *Dirge*, 136-38.

<sup>125</sup> *Dirge*, 158, lines 1065-70.

<sup>126</sup> John Paul II, *Nuovo millennio ineunte*, Apostolic Letter, no.43.

Because of this bond of the living and the dead based on the communion of saints, even small actions inspired by love benefit all.

### 3. The Martyrdom of Anastasia

St. Anastasia, the elder, was a martyr along with Cirillose during Valerian's persecution under the Prefect Proba.<sup>127</sup> She is believed to have been a young woman who lived with a group of Christian virgins in Rome. During the persecutions of Emperor Valerian, Anastasia was arrested and cruelly tortured by a Prefect named Proba. When she asked for some water, a man named Cirillose assisted her, giving her some and, for this, he also was beheaded along with her.<sup>128</sup>

#### a. Background of Composition

This is the third and final part in the second volume of Chavara's literary works. The 19<sup>th</sup> century Church of Kerala, as we have already discussed in the previous chapter, was disturbed by several schisms and other threats to its unity and faith. The important factors that inspired Chavara were his love for the Church and his ecclesial vision of the future of the Church in Kerala.<sup>129</sup> The chief aim of this work was to impart the value and importance of Christian suffering to the Catholic faithful of Kerala. Available sources suggest that this work was probably composed in 1861. We also find that Chavara imparts the true meaning of religious life. The life of Anastasia symbolizes the soul that makes the journey to God with a mind that is undaunted by the persecution. True Christian discipleship and holiness is drawn from the courageous person of Anastasia. Deep rooted faith, obedience and love for Christ strengthened her to die for Christ and the Christian faith. In

<sup>127</sup> There are different women martyr saints known as Anastasia. Chavara speaks of Anastasia, the elder martyred in 249 A.D. Cf. [http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint\\_id=1353](http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=1353); (accessed September 15, 2006). St. Anastasia mentioned in the Canon of Mass and commemorated by the Church on December 25 was martyred in 304 AD during the persecution of Emperor Diocletian.

<sup>128</sup> Cf. CWC, vol. II: *Anasthasia's Martyrdom*, , 165; Cf. "St. Anastasia II," [http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint\\_id=1353](http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=1353) (accessed September 15, 2006).

<sup>129</sup> A. Thekkudan, "Anastasiayude raktasakshitvam," *Chavara: vyaktium siddhium*, (Ernakulam: 1994), 190.

presenting such heroic people's lives, Chavara was building the Christian community as well as the religious communities in the Syro-Malabar Church.

### **b. Structure**

The shortest poem of his writings consists of 182 lines<sup>130</sup> and has the status of an unknown classical epic poem in Kerala's literary field because Chavara followed the method and rules applied to the *khandakavaya*.<sup>131</sup> It is written in simple language and set to the rhythm of a boat race song (*vanchippattu*) popular in Kerala.<sup>132</sup> He wrote in the poetical style and simple language in order to instill religious zeal and fortitude in the faithful. The work was intended to be committed to memory and sung by the people. Chavara has used several Italian words in its composition

### **c. Content and Theme**

Valerian, the Roman Emperor, insisted that Christians give up their faith and instead burn incense at the shrine of 'Jove'. In those days a nun named Sophia was superior of a convent of which Anastasia was a member. One of the imperial consuls, attracted by Anastasia's charms, summoned her to his presence and tempts her with gold and pleasures. He tried to compel her to renounce her Christian faith and her virginity and adore the pagan deity. Sophia had already instructed her how to be prepared to become the bride of Christ before she was captured. Through this theme the poet narrates how she bravely faced indescribable sufferings and death and merited a glorious martyrdom; 'either suffer or die'. Based on this narration we shall find the feelings and expressions of a close follower of Christ. As a real disciple of Christ, Anastasia sacrificed her precious life for the love of Jesus. The figure of Anastasia is the symbol of closely following of Christ.

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<sup>130</sup> According to the original text one may find only 182 lines. But the translated English version is cast in the ballad metre in a number of quatrains and so the numberings of the lines is different from the original although the ideas are strictly adhered to. Hence, the translated version has of 230 lines. Cf. *Anastasia's Martyrdom*, 165.

<sup>131</sup> It simply means 'short poem'. *Khandakavaya* are short poems telling stories that are written in the language of Malayalam. There are different types of poems written using certain rules or following certain methods and styles to attract people's attention and thoughts.

### *i. Fight between Good and Evil*

The fight between good and evil is a common phenomenon in every religion. The basis of sin is the presence of evil. When one survives evils by good thought and acts one really fights against evil. St. Paul presents the constant struggle in the life of a human being. Man is composed of body and soul and these are in a constant struggle. Soul and body represent good and evil powers. The story of Anastasia is also a fight against the powers of the world, namely, worldly pleasures, money and beauty for the closer following of Christ. As we have seen in *Dirge*, in this episode too Chavara gives importance to the fight against evil. Here we find the good is represented by Anastasia, Sophia and Chirillose, whereas evil by Emperor Valerian and the Minister Proba. Chavara advises people to distinguish between good and evil. The world of illusion (*maya*) ruled the minds of the king and his minister so that they strove after the happiness of the material world (lines 31-34).

But her strong friendship with the Lord enabled Anastasia to renounce this happiness. She considers bearing the name of Christ and becoming the real bride of Christ to be greater than everything in this world: “Bearing the name of Christ is greater than the name given by her parents”.<sup>133</sup> As a bride of Christ she says;

My Saviour kind and Lord Supreme  
Christian is a term of joy

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<sup>132</sup> Boat races are very popular even today in Kerala. During Chavara’s period the Snake Boat (*Chundanvallam*) race was very popular. Snake Boat races festivals are held in connection with Onam, the harvest festival in August/September. Scores of long snake boats and other smaller crafts participate in these events. The largest team sport in the world, the snake boat races are preceded by colourful water parades. Usually, a snake boat is manned by four helmsmen, 25 singers and 100-125 oarsmen, who row in unison to the fast rhythm of *vanchipattu* (song of the boatman). It carries a cox, and leaders who maintain the rhythm of rowing through chants, songs and exclamations. Thousands of people crowd the water’s edge to cheer the huge black crafts as they slice through the waters to a spectacular finish. The oldest of these events have curious legends and myths attached to their origin, myths closely linked to the rustic people and their beliefs. Cf. “The Origin of The Snake Boat Races Festival in Alappuzha, Kerala,” <http://www.keralabackwater.com/festivals-in-kerala-backwaters/snake-boat-races-in-kerala.html> (accessed September 18, 2006).

<sup>133</sup> *Christiana* is the word used in the original work of Chavara. Cf. “*Anastasiayude raktasakshitvam*,” CSK, vol. II : *Sahityakrutikal*, 177, line 71.

A term of glory and in my life  
 Virgin am I, bride of Christ  
 Jesus is my Lord and groom <sup>134</sup>

Her bridegroom was great. He was not like the bridegrooms of the world. She sang the hymn of worship looking at the beautiful face of her bridegroom that was inscribed in her own heart. To be faithful to Christ she even sacrificed her life.

### *ii. Process of Persecution*

Anastasia's murder is committed in different stages of cruel persecution. We find people engaged in this brutal act, especially the King Valerian and the minister Proba. They have hard hearts, full of selfishness, and act only for worldly pleasures. The denial of wealth and money and unbroken faithfulness to the name of Christ is the initiation into the process of persecution. The process began with different torments of her body, after which various parts of her body were cut off. Until her tongue was plucked out she continued her praising of her 'beloved groom'. She was wise and stored the oil of love in her heart so that her lamp of life would not fade out. Therefore, she was among the five virgins who entered the bridal chamber with the bridegroom (cf. Mt 25: 10b). <sup>135</sup>

### *iii. Defending of Faith and Praising of God*

The threats of torments or pains did not shake her faith in Christ. To the emperor's command that she adore Jove she replied with "Let God almighty be praised forever" (line 162). She praised the Lord immediately after drinking the water from Cirillose (line 186) and gave thanks and praise for the gift of faith. She recalled the salvific act of God for sinful mankind. She showed her readiness to offer herself as a holocaust for the Lord in return to God's grace (line 191-196).

### *iv. Greatness of Charity*

Most of the story is about the martyrdom of Anastasia, but Chavara also presents an important figure of charity in the person

<sup>134</sup> *Anastasia's Martyrdom*, 169.

<sup>135</sup> Cf. F. Vallapura, *Bl. Chavara: The Vibrant Educationalist and Spiritual Guide* (Kottayam: 2004), 80.

of Cirillose. He is said to be the person who gave Anastasia a cup of water in her final moments. Ignoring the threats of persecutors Cirillose moved towards Anastasia and gave her water. This simple act of ‘giving a glass of water’ is highly valued and enlisted him as meritorious in the Christian virtue of Charity. Soon after he also was beheaded and lost his life on earth. He won his glory. Chavara beautifully narrates these events and teaches how the occasion for charity enters into the situations of one’s life.

v. *Other Personalities in the Story*

Sophia is presented as the symbol of a spiritual mother, wisdom and guide to Anastasia. The poet describes her as “A nun of fame filled with the grace of love, joy and spirit of the Lord.”<sup>136</sup>, and continues with his narration of her role “She brought her up with tender heart, care and concern, love and joy, trained and taught her well (lines 11-13). As spiritual guide and mother, she directs Anastasia, “Daughter dear, your blessed groom calls you with a longing love, go, be quick.....it is the Lord, your holy groom” (lines 51-55). She continued with the advice that Jesus is great and mighty in whom you recognize your real friend, rather than yielding to the powers of evil on earth. (cf. lines 61-66). In the Indian context a person with knowledge is a *jnani* or guru. One who is full of wisdom is a person with the knowledge of God who is thus able to guide others to God. Ignorance is a sign of a sinful state. One who is liberated from ignorance is a spiritual person. Sophia is modeled here as a spiritual guide to Anastasia in her hours of temptations of the world.

Cirillose, of whom mention was made in the previous section, is another ideal character in the poem. He is a young Christian; anointed in the name of Christ by the Holy Spirit. He stands by (line 149) Anastasia throughout her persecution, like St. John and the Virgin Mother at the Crucifixion of Christ. He has the special courage to quench the thirst of Anastasia, and this is the same power that Our Lord Jesus promised to his disciples when they are at the moment of persecution; a special power from God (line 151-2). Cirillose is extremely fortunate to receive this special power when he risks his life for the sake of the Lord.

<sup>136</sup> *Anastasia’s Martyrdom*, 166, lines 1-5.

As Valerian and Proba are the two representatives of evil in the poem, Chavara describes the King as selfish, despotic, 'bad and cruel' (lines 13-15). The minister is the person who actually carries out the persecution. Though the king does not actively participate, his very silence is an expression of his internal characteristics mentioned above. He failed to be faithful to his first and foremost duty as a king. His authority is to serve and protect his people. He was supposed to be the guarantor of justice and mercy to his citizens who suffer. But here he is arbiter, selfish and cruel to his own people. He is led by the evils of the world and is careless of the dignity of kingship which is a gift from God. Following the path of the King, Proba also failed to honor his status as a minister.

In short, we find that Chavara expresses his thoughts on this event with a wonderful demonstration of his imagination. He enriches the virtues of faith and fortitude in the minds of those who are led by the evils of the world. Through his literary works, Chavara's intellectual and spiritual skills made a great contribution to both spirituality and literature. When we compare the literary status he enjoyed in the society of his day with the present it is a remarkable one. Today it is widely recognized and appreciated as a great work by many. Even non-Christian authors have praised his extraordinary skill in writing. A Sreedharamenon, a famous Hindu literary writer in Kerala, has commented, "Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara was a holy light with the memorable writings to the Malayalam literature in the 19<sup>th</sup> century."<sup>137</sup> S. Perumpadawam another writer praises his writings and says that "Chavara is a mystic who imparts the God-experience to the readers."<sup>138</sup>

## B. Prose Writings

In the prose writings we find three works, namely, *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, *the Chronicles* and *The Letters*. The

<sup>137</sup> A. Sreedharamenon, "Renaissance Leader Who Walked ahead of his time," *Journal of St. Thomas Christians* 16 (January-March, 2005): 56. In those days when most of the poets used to write Sanskrit, Chavara worked out a miracle by composing his poems in Malayalam. People of those times realized the beauty of folk songs in Sanskrit. Thus Chavara reformed not only the face but also the body of Malayalam poetry.

<sup>138</sup> S. Perumpadawam, "*Chavarayachan, Marubhoomi pookunna anubhavam*", *Chavarayachan*, 23-24.



first is the most important as it is an important writing for his mystical teachings, whereas the other two provide glimpses of his apostolic activities which we will examine in the third chapter.

## 1. Colloquies with the Heavenly Father

The most important mystical experiences of Chavara are found in his major prose work called *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, written presumably between the years 1867-68. Chavara did not give a title to its manuscript that contained 83 pages.<sup>139</sup> It is in two parts: the ‘Colloquies in Meditations’ (*dhyanasallapangal*) and ‘a Collection of Prayers.’ These prayers were found after his death and now are preserved in the monastery of Mannanam, Kerala. Originally there were 218 pages but many are now missing and the text begins on page 138 and ends on page 225.

### *a. Main Features and theme*

The main content of this work are closely related to Chavara’s own daily meditation and prayer: Prayer before meditation, Prayer to the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Morning Prayer, Evening prayer, Prayer for custody of eyes, and Prayers to be said by priests, etc. The prayer section consists of the act of contrition, act of humility, prayer to St. Joseph, and preparatory prayer for meditation. The ‘Colloquies in Meditations’ are the living expressions of Chavara’s inner God experiences. Here we find his constant filial conversations with God while, at the same time, he expresses grief for his shortcomings with a repentant heart. Jesus was *abba*, Father, for Chavara. Besides his filial devotion and company with St. Joseph, and Bl. Mother, the Carmelite Saints are also invoked here. ‘The Colloquies in Meditations’ bears testimony to his sanctity and mysticism<sup>140</sup> in which Chavara is depicted as a *dhyanyogi* (one who has reached higher levels of spiritual enlightenment).<sup>141</sup> Observing his life of prayer, people used to call him a

<sup>139</sup> It was collected and printed as *adhyadmika krutical* (the Spiritual writings). It is not a well codified work but a collection of manuscripts consisting of a series of meditations and prayers that Chavara used. The present form of the work, the *Colloquies with Heavenly Father*, is a modified name given to the text by its translator. Cf. *CSK*, vol III, *Prologue*, p. 11; Cf. D. Manickathan, *Kerala sabhadeepam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Ernakulam: 1985), 56.

<sup>140</sup> T. Panthaplackal, *A Pearl Truly Indian* (Ernakulam: 2004), 32.

‘*daivikamanushyan*’ (a man of God). From a closer analysis of his spiritual writings we find the following particular aspects to be the main features of this work.

*i. Praising the Providence of God*

In all of his writings his consciousness of divine providence fills his heart with a continuous feeling of gratitude towards God. Chavara was convinced of his own being and his unworthiness before God. He describes his vocation, the greatest gift of God, as the result of God’s unlimited mercifulness and unconditional love for everyone whom He chooses. His work begins with a hymn of praise to God and appreciation of God’s gift to him. Thus he writes:

I deem not myself worthy to reach high degree of prayer and sanctity. As I am a greater sinner with a heart impure and opaque without virtues of cleanliness and modesty, I realize that I am not worthy to receive the spirit of contemplation and to attain to perfection..... For is it because of my power and skill that I did things whatsoever? How is it that you came hither? Who called me from home? How did I become a priest? How could I join the community and became a member of the congregation? Why should anyone address me as Prior? Do you think I deserve any one of these favours? Not at all, to be sure. If so, remember it is God’s will that is being accomplished.<sup>142</sup>

People fail to understand the continuous grace of God in their vocation. This passage is followed by another instance of the story of a man without a wedding garment who was cast into the darkness. Chavara imagines this in a beautiful way and writes, “even without a proper dress on, had he asked for one in all humility, he would have certainly granted it by the divine generosity.”<sup>143</sup> Here Chavara emphasizes the necessity of prayer; one must ask the Lord. According to him the guest, in the story, would not have been denied at the banqueting hall if he had asked before! It was his self-reliance and self complacency that threw him to the torturer.

<sup>141</sup> Generally we say everyone who believes in God is in some way or other oriented to a life of prayer. A *dhyanyogi* is an Indian concept which profoundly expresses a person who is fully dedicated to a life of prayer.

<sup>142</sup> *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 1.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

## ii. *Concept of Meditation*

Chavara describes real meditation as “a free and friendly colloquy with God.”<sup>144</sup> He responds in a simple and easy way to ordinary minds. It is a thought similar to another Carmelite saint, St. Therese of Lisieux. Meditation is a conversation which presupposes a friendship with God. “For, when friends sit close to each other, they find enough topics to talk about without cessation. If there is love, conversation goes unlimited. No one needs teach either of the two friends how to go on talking. For, the heart has a language of its own”.<sup>145</sup> A genuine love can bring these two people nearer in conversation and unite them in unlimited conversation.

## iii. *Intercession of the Saints*

The work reveals Chavara’s great confidence in the intercession of the saints. He regularly prayed to St. Joseph and Bl. Mother and the Carmelites saints, especially St. Teresa of Avila, whom he considered his teacher of meditation. He was also greatly influenced by the penitent saints like Mary Magdalene, who was converted by Jesus himself; Margaret of Cortona,<sup>146</sup> Mary of Egypt,<sup>147</sup> and Mary Magdalene of Pazzi,<sup>148</sup> about whom probably he came to know through the Italian missionaries. His special filial devotion to these saints can be seen as we go through his prayers and meditations.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>145</sup> *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*.

<sup>146</sup> She was a penitent of the Third Order of St. Francis, born at Laviano in Tuscany in 1247; died at Cortona, 22 February, 1297; Cf. “The Lives of the saints: St. Margaret of Crotona <http://www.spxasia.com/Documents/Saints/St-Margaret.htm> (accessed November 9, 2006).

<sup>147</sup> Mary of Egypt (ca. 344-ca. 421) is revered as the patron saint of penitent women most particularly in the Orthodox and Oriental churches, but also in the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches. She was born in Egypt, and at the age of twelve ran away to Alexandria where she lived an extremely dissolute life from approximately 356 to 373. For details see, “Mary of Egypt,” in <http://www.newadvent.org>, (accessed November 11, 2006).

<sup>148</sup> Carmelite Virgin, born 2 April, 1566; died 25 May, 1607. When Chavara speaks of Mary Magdalene he speaks also of the saint Magdalene De Pazzi (1566-1607). She was born into a noble family and baptised as “Atrina.” Her life was similar to that of other women who have become great mystics; an early love of prayer and penance, charity to the poor, and an evangelical spirit.

#### iv. *Hymns of God's Merciful love*

Another feature of this third work is a series of praising God's merciful love for sinners. Chavara compares the room or cell of meditation to Mount Sinai.<sup>149</sup> He presents the experience of Moses and the Israelites with a terrible God in OT. "Whoever ventures to look at the splendor of his face deceases immediately. Except Moses none of the Israelites that thronged at the foot of the Mount Sinai mustered enough courage to ascend the mount where he appeared"<sup>150</sup>. He is described as "a natural fire accompanied by thunder and lightening."<sup>151</sup>

But God is no longer a frightening factor in the life of Chavara. He describes God who, with his majestic presence in the chapel, is "not a frightening judge but a loving and friendly Father who is generous, kind, and affectionate."<sup>152</sup> Even when we continue to commit sins and become enemies, God continues to love us with "the depth of His patience"<sup>153</sup> Chavara admires and praises God's unconditional love and goodness. This continues with his repentance for his sins. Chavara always identifies the passion and sufferings of Christ with his sinfulness.

#### v. *Laments and Repentance*

Chavara depicts himself as the son described in the parable of the prodigal son who returns after despoiling his father's wealth. The 'father' is so generous and patient upon the return of his 'son'. The '*abba* consciousness' of Chavara flows in addressing Jesus as '*appan*' (Father, *abba*) throughout the work. Chavara trusted in Jesus' generosity and mercifulness in his life. This faith aspect is doubled when he trusts in the help of other saints.<sup>154</sup> The 'act of father kissing the son' in the story highlights God's 'much love, forgiveness, full restoration, strong assurance, overflowing comfort, intimate communion, exceeding joy'. These elements guide Chavara in picturing this story in his contemplation. Also when he meditates

<sup>149</sup> *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 25.

<sup>150</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>153</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

on the passion of Jesus, he calls Him ‘*abba*’: “Oh merciful Father, I am unable to raise my eyes and look at your face.”<sup>155</sup> The episode of Zacheaus is also included in this chain of conversion of the soul. This event also remarkably shows the depth of God’s mercy and love for mankind.

*vi. Overflowing of the Virtue of Humility*

The acts of men are the reflection of their hearts. The acts of Chavara were truly reflected in his life and writings. The virtue of humility can be seen very clearly in his writings, especially, the *atmanutapam* and *dhyanasallapangal* which also reveal to us Chavara’s views regarding this virtue. He does not hesitate to confess his own faults, shortcomings and unworthiness. “O my God! a greater sinner as I am, I am struck with fear to enter this chapel, the abode of your presence.”<sup>156</sup> There is a special discourse in *dhyanasallapangal* set apart for the virtue of humility, probably the longest discourse we find in this work.<sup>157</sup> When we turn to events that occurred in his life we find several examples of his humility. Monsignor Baccinelli<sup>158</sup> himself writes on this point:

I only wish to note that the said subject, who is called Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara, prior of the *Ter-tiaries* of the Immaculate conception of Mary of Mount Carmel has the simple vow of humility and so he will not, at any cost, accept such a title or dignity without a precept, as I have had to give to make him accept the dignity of the Vicar general.<sup>159</sup>

In the words of Fr. Leopold Beccaro, OCD: “All those who knew him, had no doubt about his profound humility.”<sup>160</sup>

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>156</sup> *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 9.

<sup>157</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 24-44. Chavara’s original work consisted of about twenty one pages under the title of humility, whereas only fourteen pages are found in the translated version. The reasons could be the omissions of many words as it is not a direct translation. And also we find a new title of ‘prayer to St. Joseph’ is added. In the original work Chavara had not given a separate title to the prayer to St. Joseph, so readers may confusedly think that the translated version is one long discourse. Cf. *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father* 9-22

<sup>158</sup> He was the Vicar Apostolic at Verapoli Vicariate (presently known as the Diocese of Varapuzha) during Chavara’s time.

<sup>159</sup> L. Vithuvattickal, *Perspective of a Heroic Christian Life*, (Mannanam: 1988), 41.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

*vii. Meditation on Mortal Sins*

The meditation on mortal sin focuses very much on the holy life of priests. Even the slightest sins will become a cause for the damnation of the souls of priests, if one is careless regarding venial sins. In order to clarify his view, Chavara recollects the words of various saints who received special revelations on sin: St. Alphonse Ligouri, St. Teresa of Avila, St. Bridget, and St. Chrysostom.<sup>161</sup> Chavara points out few striking words from them which seem to be more valuable. St. Bridget shares her experience on what Jesus inspired her to say: “My daughter, do not think that venial sin is a slight sin”<sup>162</sup> St. Chrysostom speaks on the dignity of priesthood as follows, “a priest must be more afraid of venial sin than mortal sin, for if he happens to fall into mortal sin, he will be frightened and make reconciliation with God. But in the case of venial sins he may not be concerned. And this will lead him to commit venial sins without any qualm of conscience. This habit will eventually lead him to be less afraid of mortal sins.”<sup>163</sup> Here we find the same attitude of a wealthy person whose carelessness leads to a great deal of money being lost through simple expenses, whereas he always takes the greatest care over spending large amounts. Recalling the word of St. Gregory the Great Chavara says “a little scratch (venial sin) on the body of a priest is more fatal than a deep wound or a carbuncle on the body of a lay man.”<sup>164</sup> Hence, in this section Chavara wanted to specify the utmost care that priests should take in dealing with venial sins.

*viii. Meditation on Priesthood and Holiness*

There are three meditations in which Chavara highlights the value and importance of priestly life: the meditation on vocation, on the worth of two priests, and the death of an impious priest. To avoid repetition let us analyze all three together. The first one is a personal level of query in each of us, the second is a query put to us by another person for us to think about personally and the third is an allegory to help priests live a better life. Chavara’s instructions

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<sup>161</sup> *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 30.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

were always aimed at the overall well being of priestly life. Vocation is a great gift for every priest's life, and the 'meditation on vocation' starts from the very beginning of one's life. Chavara enumerates how God is active with his plan for each one of us in a different manner.

Many in the world are ignorant of God and loving Him, instead he has inscribed in you the knowledge of God and not allowed to be born from 'ignorant' parents. Saved you from the threat of death in the womb of your mother, and privileged to be baptized and liberated from the original sin. It is not your mother but the almighty God through your mother protected and grown you from your childhood until you became a priest. It is a time to reflect back on how we responded to God's gifts.<sup>165</sup>

In the second meditation, Chavara points out two aspects of the theme. One is in accordance with the saying of Jesus in the Gospel that, "no one can serve two masters" (cf. Mt 6:24). God and wealth are two options before us to choose from. Choosing the former and living an authentic life is vitally important for the success of priestly life. Constant prayer, sincerity and permanency in thoughts and living make the priestly life an ideal one. With this in mind, he points out that certain persons are zealous for a day to fulfill the daily prayers, service and charity works. In fact, the next day or moment they become careless of their duties and status of life as consecrated people. Their life, according to Chavara, will find a very horrible end as he described in the story of the death of an impious priest in the third meditation.<sup>166</sup> Unfaithfulness, repetition of sins, and scandalous thoughts led him to the wrath of God.<sup>167</sup> God is merciful, loving and patient, but the non-cooperation on the part of man ruins him, even if he is good before the world.

## Conclusion

We have tried to have a comprehensive picture of Chavara's mystical spirituality from the above sources. Chavara's works, particularly the second and third volumes, are great sources of his

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<sup>165</sup> *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 27-28.

<sup>166</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>167</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

deep God-experiences and, at the same time, are valid contributions to the literary world. These works stand as profound means of transforming a literary world into a world of spiritual experiences. They are not merely an intellectual exploration from his 'self'; rather, they are a sharing of experience with the Self. As a whole they are centered on his spiritual personality. As we have already seen, the writings deal with different themes and the stories and events are drawn from his personal readings and insights.

As a hardworking and committed person, Chavara made a rich contribution to the field of spirituality, inspiring his readers to profit from their wisdom, received from God, into their own practical life. Affirming Chavara's rich contribution to spirituality, Cardinal Varkey, the Major Archbishop of Syro-Malabar Church hails his achievement in the following words:

He was a person who lived in God. It was a life absorbed in the love of God. He did not go after fame and position.. What he had learned from the Gospel was to empty himself and serve others. He was a great scholar. He had deep knowledge of the Bible. He has written poems. But what touches us most is his spirituality.<sup>168</sup>

In short, from all that has been said, we can legitimately affirm that Chavara was a mystic. The sources mentioned are the best expression of Chavara's spirituality. Today when we look back on these works, we can see that they are truly great treasures. Though these writings and teachings belonged to a period of 150 years ago, they can still inspire every one of us very powerfully even today.

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<sup>168</sup> Cardinal V. Vithayathil, "Blessed Chavara: Shining Star of the Indian Church," *Herald of the East* 6 (July 2004), 5.



## Chapter Three

# MISSIONARY SPIRITUALITY AND APOSTOLATE OF CHAVARA IN THE SYRO-MALABAR CHURCH

### Introduction

The tradition of the Church in India testifies convincingly to the Christian Faith and Christian Communities which have flourished in India from the first century. St. Thomas, the apostle, the father of Christianity in India, landed at Kodungallur (Cranganoor) in Kerala in 52 A.D., according to the unanimous and living tradition accepted by many.<sup>1</sup> Even several centuries after the formation of the St. Thomas Christian community in India, it could not flourish like the Churches in other parts of the world because of certain negative elements which affected its growth.<sup>2</sup> First of all it was a Church that struggled for a long time to regain its original tradition of the St. Thomas Christian community and its autonomy. Secondly, the socio-cultural factors of Indian society had negative impacts which meant that it was kept from knowledge of the concept of a

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<sup>1</sup> E. Tisserant, *Eastern Christianity in India, A History of the Syro-Malabar Church from the Earliest Time to the present Day* (London: 1957), 10; A. M. Mundadan, "Origins of Christianity in India," Perumalil and E.R. Hambye, eds., *Christianity in India* (Aleppey: 1972), 18.

<sup>2</sup> Kerala, one of the states in India, is where St. Thomas landed for the first time and formed the first Christian community which is known as the St. Thomas Christian community. As centuries passed, this community was divided into different groups and known as different Churches, namely, the Syro-Malabar Church, the Syro-Malankara Church and other denominations. The Syro-Malabar Church, one of the leading Churches that claims a major number of followers, was always united with and faithful to the Holy See. Some historical events related to our theme will be clarified in the historical section of the chapter on the Syro-Malabar Church.

universal Church. Its culture and tradition were so limited to its own surroundings that the idea of a universal Church remained unknown for several centuries. Thirdly, the Thomas Christian community in India lacked a vibrant spiritual leader of its own for many centuries and thereby lacked a specific agenda for the spiritual needs of the Christian community. These negative elements slowed down the proper orientation of its missionary consciousness in early periods. These facts compelled the Church historians to accept the fact that the St. Thomas Christians kept their faith under a ‘bushel’ in spite of its long presence there.<sup>3</sup>

The Church in Kerala gained momentum in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the appearance of Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara. He could be proud of being the second apostle to the Kerala Church, and a descendent of the Pakalomattam family.<sup>4</sup> He realized the true status of the Christian community and its defects in his time. He had as his priority a determined agenda for the future of the Church action, an integral growth of human dignity and corresponding life. In this perspective, the role played by Chavara is remarkable in the history of the Syro-Malabar Church in India. The “good works” of Chavara opened the way to a new direction for the missionary consciousness in the Syro-Malabar Church. This chapter has three main sections, the first of which deals with the concept of missionary spirituality. Secondly, we provide a brief sketch of the historical background of tradition and practice of the St. Thomas Christian community to which Chavara belonged. Thirdly, we consider the impact of the missionary spirituality and life of Chavara in the Syro-Malabar Church, and his importance as an inspiration for future generations.

## **I. Meaning of Missionary Spirituality: An Overview**

There are numerous discussions on the Christian mission, new mission theologies, methods of evangelization and on updating methods to cope with the challenges that arise in the day-to-day life of the Church. However, we do not find much attention being

<sup>3</sup> P. Thenayan, *The Missionary Consciousness of St. Thomas Christians* (Cochin: 1982), 79.

<sup>4</sup> The Pakalomattam family is regarded as one of the ancient Christian families who received baptism from St. Thomas the apostle. Cf. C.D. Valerian, *Vannya divya sree Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan*, 7-8; Cf. P. J. Podipara, *The Thomas Christians* (Bombay: 1970), 20.

given to the field of missionary spirituality. The spirituality and the mission (activity) of the Church are so entirely different that often we are led into confusion. The emphasis of the “send” aspect receives more stress than the aspect of “living” in the Church’s missionary life. Christ, who was sent by the Father, sent the apostles and disciples to continue the missionary activity of conquering the whole world. Christ came into the world as a missionary who emerged from the experience of an interior life in the triune God. His mission was to reveal the true love of God to humankind and win them over to the love of the triune God. Missionary spirituality aims at an interior experience of God and the sharing of this experience with other fellow brethren.

### **A. Concept of Missionary Spirituality**

A discussion of the concept of missionary spirituality poses two key aspects in our minds related to the life of a missionary, namely, spirituality and mission. Mission spirituality connects these two Christian realities.<sup>5</sup> What are mission and spirituality? Is there a specific spirituality for mission? How do we integrate our spiritual life in the missionary activities of the Church? In what way is the Spirit active in the various expressions of socio-cultural human conditions? Only from this standpoint can we grasp the meaning and clear definition of missionary spirituality.

#### **1. Mission**

The concept of mission has a wide meaning according to its context and time. We shall avoid a wide ranging discussion on this topic and limit our analysis to the Christian perspective in an attempt to find answers to the above questions. From the Catholic perspective, particularly in the scriptural sense, mission is understood in accordance with the concept of *Missio Dei*, meaning that mission basically originates from the very nature of God.<sup>6</sup> Mission in term of *missio*, meaning “sent”, is understood as the realm of activity in the mission of the Church. This aspect of ‘sending’ is a mission that basically proceeds from the triune God and this process being

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<sup>5</sup> J. Esquerda Bifet, *Spirituality for a Missionary Church* (Rome: 1994), 50.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. D. J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: 1991), 389.

continued in the life of the Church is a sign of participation in the mission of the Triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit sending the Church into the world.<sup>7</sup> So it is a Trinitarian mission, “for it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that the Church takes her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father.”<sup>8</sup>

From the scriptural point of view the Church’s mission is well founded and is to be understood against the background of Jesus’ mission. From the OT to the NT period we find a chain of “sent people.”<sup>9</sup> Their call symbolizes God’s mission to the world being carried out through them until this mission culminates in Jesus. In fact, the Old Testament events are fundamental to the understanding of mission in the New Testament. In the NT texts, St. John’s Gospel describes many “send” concepts. Jesus, is the Son of God “sent” by the Father (Jn 10:3). As the Father has sent me, I am sending you (Jn 20:21). He “sent” the Twelve (Mt 10: 16; Lk 10:3). He “sent” seventy Two disciples into all towns (Lk 10:1).

But our concern in this work centers on the interior life or spiritual life of a missionary rather than the activists of mission in the perspective of the ‘sent’ aspect. ‘Witness as mission’ has more value in our search for true mission and its spirituality. A “witness” is someone who attests to a fact. In order to be an effective witness for Christ, one must be enriched with the knowledge of Christ, as John the Evangelist states (cf. 1Jn 1:1-3). The importance of “witness as mission” could be better underlined in Jesus’ commandment to the disciples based on two biblical passages. One of them is found at the end of the Gospel of Matthew as a command of the risen Christ to his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:16-20) and the other is in the Acts of the Apostles as a directive of the same risen Christ given to the same disciples to become his witnesses throughout the world (Acts 1:8). The emphasis in the first passage is on what the disciples have ‘to do’ in relation to others, by making them the disciples of Christ. The focus of this

<sup>7</sup> Cf. J. Esquerda Bifet, *Spirituality for a Missionary Church*, 12 ; D. J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 390.

<sup>8</sup> AG 2; RM 1, 4, 32-46.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Moses (Ex 3:15), Gideon (Judg 6: 14), the Prophets (2 Chr 24: 19; Jer 7:12; Is 6: 8ff etc.).

mission in the history of the Church is all about a spiritual conquest of the world. It implies that Christianity is the only true religion which brings about the salvation of the whole world. The emphasis in the second passage is on what the disciples themselves have to become during their mission, namely, to be the true and authentic witnesses of Christ in the world. Here the obligation and the burden of bearing witness lay on the missionaries themselves.

We could say that the theme of witnessing is the main task of the disciples of Jesus. Taking for granted that this is the second of a two-volume work written by Luke, the third Gospel and the Acts, the Gospel had already announced the mission of the disciples as witnessing, when the risen Christ told his disciples: “You are witnesses of these things” (Lk 24:47). But it is important to bear in mind that the evangelist, already at this stage, wanted to qualify the nature of this witnessing by associating it with the power of the Spirit. Hence we read: “I am sending upon you what my Father has promised, so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high” (Lk 24:49). Here it means to explore what one has been enriched with. It points to the interior religious experience that is to be shared with others. One cannot share unless he or she has a sufficient and interior particular religious experience. Witnessing to someone in the biblical sense means reproducing the personality of the one whose witness one claims to be. The disciples of the risen Jesus are asked to reproduce in their life the personal qualities of Jesus, whose historical witnesses they were during his earthly ministry.

The truth about these two passages is that during the past few centuries exclusive attention was given to the first passage by missionaries of the Churches in recruiting members, as if in obedience to a divine command, while very little attention was paid to the equally demanding directive to become the authentic witnesses of Christ in the world. Therefore, we emphasize the role of ‘witnessing’ in the search of the true spirituality for mission.

## **2. Spirituality**

The word ‘spirituality’, derives from the Latin *spiritualitas*, an abstract term related to *spiritus* and *spiritualis* both used to translate the Greek words *pneuma* and *pneumatikos* as used in the Pauline

epistles.<sup>10</sup> For Paul, spirituality is a “life according to the Spirit” (Cf. Rom 8; Gal 5, 25). Thus the “pneumatic” or “spiritual” person is one whose whole being and life are ordered, led, or influenced by the “Spirit of God.” Paul did not intend a dualism between the spiritual realm and the material realm but rather referred to the opposition between two contrasting ways of life.

If spirituality refers to the life in the Spirit then it presupposes that the human person is spiritual. It implies a vision of life itself which is not reflected primarily in actions but rather in a stance towards the world. In addition, other terms are used besides spirituality either to signify the same meaning or are closely related to it. Terms such as interior life, inner life, devotion, piety and mysticism are frequently occurring words which sometimes are used interchangeably. Spirituality is a word used to describe “attitudes, benefits, practices which animate people’s lives and help them to reach out towards supernatural realities.”<sup>11</sup>

We can define spirituality as a gift from the Spirit of God that helps by adopting and developing certain attitudes and that shapes one’s inner being through the terms given above. However, centuries later we find changes and new meanings appear as philosophy creeps into theology. The influence of Greek philosophy advocated a dualism based on the dichotomy of matter and spirit, body and mind, senses and soul.<sup>12</sup> Until Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae*, theology was a reflection upon the experience of faith, particularly, spiritual theology. The divisions of his *Summa Theologiae* set the divisions of Theology into dogma, morals and Christology.<sup>13</sup> However, many documents on the spiritual life were written outside the sphere of formal theology in various literary genre, thus supplying Christian tradition with a rich variety of lifestyle models. Christian spirituality thus becomes the personal way in which the Christian lives his or her daily life in accordance with his

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<sup>10</sup> W. H. Principe, “Spirituality, Christian,” J. A. Komonchak, M. Collins and D. A. Lane, eds., *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality* (Minnesota: 1992), 931.

<sup>11</sup> G.S. Wakefield, ed. *A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, 361.

<sup>12</sup> E. Dreyer, “A contemporary Spirituality: Blending the Past and the Present,” *Spiritual Life* 33/3 (1987), 133.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. J. A. Komonchak, ed., *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, 972.

personal assimilation of the mystery of Christ under the direction of the Holy Spirit.<sup>14</sup> For Christians, spirituality is rooted in the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Jesus the Christ. The Spirit dwells in the heart of each believer, impelling, urging, and inspiring us in our discipleship. Christian spirituality is an expression of one's experience of God through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit, in a particular style of life, prayer and apostolate. Therefore, for a Christian it is a wholehearted fundamental response to the presence of the risen Christ and to the Spirit.

### **B. Nature of Missionary Spirituality**

From the above discussions on the concepts of mission and spirituality we begin to find the true essence of missionary spirituality today. The synthesis of both these concepts constitutes its substance in our work. When we speak of missionary spirituality the emphasis is on Christ, the first missionary of the Father, who came to fulfill the mission of redemption of mankind. In a general sense every Christian is a missionary and his or her spirituality has a missionary dimension with the sacrament of baptism. Missionary spirituality is one kind of spirituality which is primarily founded on the mystery of Christ as one "sent to evangelize" (RM 88). The spirituality that is derived, originates or flows from the mission of Christ is missionary spirituality. It is the spirituality by which every Christian is able to live up to the Christian vocation as a missionary as he participates in the mission of Christ. Its vitality is made concrete by union with Christ and his ideals for accomplishing the salvific design of the Father through the power of the Spirit.<sup>15</sup> By the event of Pentecost a special transformation took place in the apostles when they were filled with the Spirit. It was a radical transformation in which they were invaded by an irresistible dynamic fervour.<sup>16</sup> Missionary spirituality is nothing but a principle of Christian life experienced and lived in a particular style in the form of witnessing. It is the lifestyle of those called and sent on mission to witness Christ before

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. J. Sudbrack, "Spirituality," K. Rahner, ed., *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology* (New York: 1968), 153.

<sup>15</sup> J. Esquerda Bifet, "The Spirit of Evangelization," *My Witnesses* (Rome: 1982), 7-8.

<sup>16</sup> John Paul II, "Message for Mission Sunday," *L'Osservatore Romano* (October 21, 1985), 1.

others who do not believe or fully accept him.<sup>17</sup> The following sources will better clarify and enrich our understanding of missionary spirituality.

### **1. Scriptural Perspective**

Missionary spirituality from the scriptural perspective of our discussion mainly centers on NT foundations. Accordingly, we find several gospel instances and stories that impart a strong basis for this. One could multiply illustrations of authentic spirituality from the Bible, but they are also illustrations of spirituality for mission. Traditionally Mt 28:18-20 has been honoured and obeyed as the Lord's great missionary mandate. It stands as the model for Christian mission and missiology. But the missionary spirituality of the Church changes in the perspective of its mission which is guided and illumined by the Holy Spirit. Jesus himself, who was anointed by the Spirit, set forth the vital role of Spirit in the spirituality of missionaries. "The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free..." (Lk 4: 18-19).

Jesus pronounced this at the time when he acknowledged himself and his mission. There are several other instances in the NT which reflect what Jesus meant by missionary spirituality. Another important text for missionary spirituality is found in the story of the Wedding at Cana (Jn 2: 1-11) where the Blessed Mother speaks to the missionaries. We could imagine today as Blessed Mother explains that the jars were empty at Cana, they were first filled with water, and then they were filled with wine to refresh all the wedding guests. As a missionary, every one must be the empty jar which can be filled with water which can then become wine by the power of Jesus that will nourish others.

The episode of Jesus' dialogue with the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:1ff) is an important source for his missionary spirituality. Jesus often wanted to reach out from his strength to others in their need. But in this incident Jesus took the initiative and approached the Samaritan woman in order to fulfill His mission. Jesus was more

<sup>17</sup> J. Esquerda Bifet, *Spirituality for a Missionary Church*, 58.



anxious to hear the woman's story and listened carefully to her religious opinions. The account of Jesus' washing the disciples' feet and the new commandment: "I give you a new commandment: love one another; you must love one another just as I have loved you. You also should love one another" (Jn 13:34). This indicates that to love is the ministry and mission of the disciples; it is to be the distinctive mark of every Christian and the Church: "It is by your love for one another that everyone will recognise you as my disciples" (Jn 13:35). The commandment is then repeated with a dynamic Trinitarian structure: there is the Father, there is Jesus, and their shared Love reaches out to draw us in: "I have loved you just as the Father has loved me... This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you... My commandment to you is to love one another" (Jn 15:9, 12, 17). Its true praxis is pre-shadowed in the words "Go and do the same" of the Samaritan story (cf. Lk 10:29-37). The story depicts one's responsibility and love, and it portrays faithfully the authentic face of a spirituality of mission. The true assimilation of Jesus' commandments and words constitutes our missionary spirituality and the Spirit guides us in the activity of the Church's mission. When we read the Bible and remain open to the Spirit, we are sure to find passages which will inspire, challenge and nourish our missionary spirituality.

## **2. Missionary Spirituality in Council Teachings and Church Documents**

Many Popes have taken a personal interest in formulating the principles of the Church's missionary activity. This is reflected especially in a series of missionary encyclicals and documents on the theology of mission, its methods, ecumenical relations, the relationship of Christianity with world religions, the relationship between mission and social justice, human development, liberation and promotion.<sup>18</sup> The attitude in the pre-Vatican II teachings and

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Benedict XV, *Maximum Illud* Apostolic Letter on the Propagation of the Faith throughout the World, AAS 11 (1919) 440-455; Pius XI, *Rerum Ecclesiae*: Encyclical Letter on Catholic Missions, AAS 18 (1926) 65-83; Pius XII, *Evangelii Praecones*: Encyclical Letter on the Promotion of Catholic Missions, AAS 43 (1951) 497-528; Pius XII, *Fidei Donum*: Encyclical Letter on the Present Condition of the Catholic Missions especially in Africa, AAS 49 (1957) 225-248; John XXIII, *Principes Pastorum*: Encyclical Letter on the Missions, Native Clergy, and the Lay Participation: AAS 51 (1950) 833-864; Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*:

ideas of the Church was more exclusive, following more closely the rigid ideas of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (outside the Church there is no salvation), *sine ecclesia nulla salus* (without the Church no salvation), and *extra Christum nulla salus* (without Christ no salvation). These theological views are expressed in the missionary encyclicals of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>19</sup> The first of these was *Maximum Illud* which has been called the magnacarta of Catholic mission. *Fidei Donum* of Pius XII inspired the growth of mission societies in Asia and the missionary movement from these young Churches to other countries. With a few exceptions, the majority place greater emphasis on missionary activities than on missionary spirituality. *Maximum Illud* and *Princeps Pastorum* of Pope John XXIII make special mention of the vitality of the holiness of life necessary for effective missionary activities, since what a missionary needs most is holiness.<sup>20</sup> Whoever preaches God should be a man of God. In order to be holy he must be faithful to prayer and in close union with God. Charity towards unbelievers should be linked to the love of God so as to see in them the children of God.<sup>21</sup>

Following Vatican II, however, we can detect a shift in the Catholic attitude towards other faiths. The Council's document on non-Christian religions echoed the document on the Church in admitting that salvation was possible for those who have not come to explicit faith in Christ and who have not accepted Baptism (LG 9, 16, NA 2), and this conviction was also present in the documents on mission and on the Church in the Modern World (AG 9; GS 22). Through the Conciliar teachings, the Church clearly recognized the positive values stating that "it rejects nothing of what is true and holy in other religions" (NA 2b). The Church's mission was certainly a major concern during the Council, and its importance was stressed in many of its documents (e.g. LG 1, 5, DV 7, SC 6, GS 3, AA 2, NA 2). The following Church documents, which we discuss in short, state some important features of the missionary spirituality of the modern Church.

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Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelization in the Modern World, AAS 68 (1976), 5-76; John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*: Encyclical Letter on the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate AAS 83 (1991) 249- 40.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *Maximum Illud*, *Rerum Ecclesiae*, *Evangelii Praecones*, *Fidei Donum*, *Princeps Pastorum* (1959).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. MI 64; PP 14.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. MI 65-67.

**a. Ad Gentes Divinitus**

*The decree on the Church's Missionary activity (Ad Gentes Divinitus)* reminds us that the very nature of the Church is evangelical and missionary (cf. AG 1). The decree begins a process of reflecting on the evangelizing role of believers which will be filled out and placed in the modern context of different societies by *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and *Redemptoris Missio*. *We can be neither the Church nor model of the love of the Trinitarian God unless we reach out beyond ourselves, as our God did in sending Christ and the Spirit. We go to God "not merely singly, without any mutual bond"* (AG 2), but molded together as a people, made one by the Spirit. The primary work of the mission is about building right relationships with God and with others. It is about transformation: healing ourselves and our world; building up and being taken into the Reign of God. This work requires inward conversion and that conversion "must become evident with its social consequences" (AG 13).

**b. Evangelii Nuntiandi**

*Evangelii Nuntiandi* was promulgated on the tenth anniversary of the close of the Second Vatican Council, but the occasion was also the anniversary of the promulgation of Vatican II's document on missionary activity, *Ad Gentes*. This encyclical offers an authentic summary of missionary spirituality which is real and relative. It devotes a chapter to the spirit of Evangelization (ch. 8) which speaks on the fidelity to the Holy Spirit (EN 75), authenticity and witness to the experience of God (EN 76), apostolic brotherhood (EN 77) unity in service of the truth (EN 78), pastoral charity (EN 79-80) and Mary's presence and attitude (EN 81-82). According to this document, the fundamental elements of missionary spirituality should be taken from the figure of the Good Shepherd, who is seen through the missionary figures from Peter and Paul down to the present age.<sup>22</sup>

**c. Redemptoris Missio**

By his encyclical document *Redemptoris Missio*, Pope John Paul II gave a clear and valid structure to the Church's missionary spirituality. There is a full presentation of the theme in the final chapter. According to its teaching, the basis of all missionary activity

<sup>22</sup> Cf. J. Esquerda Bifet, *Spirituality for a Missionary Church*, 52.

demands a specific spirituality and it applies in particular to all those whom God has called to be missionaries. It enumerates the ideal principles of the Church's mission and the life style of missionaries. Pope John Paul II underlines four dimensions, or closely-linked components, of the missionary spirituality in the Church: pneumatological, Christological, ecclesiological, and pastoral.<sup>23</sup>

The pneumatological aspect is expressed in one's "fidelity to the Holy Spirit" (RM 87). It commits us to be molded from within by the Spirit, so that we may become ever more like Christ. This docility then commits us to receive the gifts of fortitude and discernment, which are essential elements of missionary spirituality. One's intimate relation with Christ creates the Christological dimension. "An essential characteristic of missionary spirituality is intimate communion with Christ. We cannot understand or carry out the mission unless we refer it to Christ as the one who was sent to evangelize" (RM 88). In the Ecclesiological dimension the encyclical states that, "Those who have the missionary spirit feel Christ's burning love for souls, and love the Church as Christ did. The missionary is the universal brother, bearing in himself the Church's spirit, her openness to and interest in all peoples and individuals, especially the least and poorest of his brethren" (RM 89).

By the Pastoral dimension we understand that, "Missionary spirituality is also marked by apostolic charity, the charity of Christ who came 'to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad' (Jn 11:52), of the Good Shepherd who knows his sheep, who searches them out and offers his life for them. In order to proclaim to all his brothers and sisters that they are loved by God and are capable of loving, he must show love toward all, giving his life for his neighbor" (RM 89). This spirituality particularly concerns "all those whom God has called to be missionaries" (RM 87) to have a new ardour for holiness (RM 90), being "a contemplative" in order to become a "credible" sign (RM 91). He underlines the necessity of inspiration by the Holy Spirit, who is the principal agent of Christian mission, in every missionary and a reciprocal response to the Spirit.

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 54.

In essence, therefore, missionary spirituality has its own particular charism and orientation. It is a call for holiness. A radical conversion in thinking is required in order to become a missionary (RM 49). In short, “Mission can be studied on the theological level (what mission is), on a pastoral level (how mission should be lived by individual apostles and by the whole community) (AG 4; EN 7; RM 8). From the theology of mission one passes spontaneously to pastoral theology and spirituality.”<sup>24</sup>

## **II. The Syro-Malabar Church in the Pre-Chavara Period: a Historical Overview**

The St. Thomas Christians of Kerala are regarded as the oldest Christian tradition in India.<sup>25</sup> The Catholic Church in India is a communion of three individual Churches: the Church of St. Thomas Christians from the first century a major heir of the St. Thomas Christians at present known as the Syro-Malabar Church- and now a Major Archiepiscopal Church, the Syro-Malankara Church<sup>26</sup>- another Major-Archiepiscopal church- historically linked to St. Thomas Christians and the Latin Church from the sixteenth century.

Chavara belonged to the St. Thomas Christian community, at present, the Syro-Malabar Church. We find the use of the term “Syro-Malabar Church” for the first time in the letter of Vicar Apostolic Bishop Aloysius Mary of Jesus to the Propaganda Fide in 1786. He writes, “*gli antichi cristiani cattolici seguono un rito misto Syro-Malabarico.*”<sup>27</sup> The historical account of this

<sup>24</sup> J. Esquerda Bifet, *Spirituality for a Missionary Church*, 51.

<sup>25</sup> The history of Christianity in India, until the arrival of the Portuguese in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, is mainly the history of St. Thomas Christians of Kerala understood as the relatively small geographical area of South India: Kerala on the western coast, and Tamil Nadu on the eastern coast, where St. Thomas preached. The Christians in Kerala from early times were called *Nazranikal* (the Followers of Jesus of Nazareth). Cf. T. Bernard, *Marthomacristianikal*, Second edition (Ernakulam: 1992), 35-7, 250-51.

<sup>26</sup> For detailed study of the origin and growth of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church, see P. Pallath, *The Catholic Church in India* (Rome: 2003), 136-55.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Archive of *Propaganda Fide.*, SOCG, 18 February & April 1788, vol. 878, f. 153v as quoted A. F. Thonipara, “*Saint Thomas Christians of India: A Period of Struggle for Unity and Self-Rule (1775-1787)*” (master Thesis, Pontifical University of Oriental, Rome, 1995), 5. But “Syro-Malabar” came into existence officially with the declaration of two Syro-Malabar vicariates apostolic, Trichur and Kottayam, for the Syrian Christians by Pope Leo XIII on 20 May, 1887. Cf.

particular Church records different historical phases in which it came under the rule of different external ecclesiastical administrations for many centuries, a factor which slowed down its growth and development. First, the main reason could be the absence of proper leaders immediately after the departure of St. Thomas which resulted in later centuries in the imposition of Latin jurisdiction over the Church of St Thomas Christians. This led to their unhappy division into several Churches and caused tensions between the Latin Church and the Syro-Malabar Church. These inter-Church divisions and tensions in some cases still continue to affect adversely the progress of mission in India and elsewhere. Therefore, it is true to some extent to say that the St. Thomas Christian community lacked the right orientation in missionary activities in former times. In the following sections we discuss in short the historical background, tradition and practice, and missionary consciousness of the Syro-Malabar Church in the pre-Chavara period (until 19<sup>th</sup> century).

## **A. Historical Background**

In the pre-Chavara period we analyze three periods, namely, apostolic, medieval (Persian) and Latin (16<sup>th</sup> to beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> centuries). The historical events from the fourth to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries in the St. Thomas Christian community also had a great impact on its life and growth. So we cannot be blind to the positive elements the Indian Church received in different historical conditions.

### **1. Apostolic Period: the Activities of Thomas the Apostle**

This period begins with the arrival of St. Thomas, the Apostle, in India, his activities, and the lifestyle of the Thomas community until the 4<sup>th</sup> century. After his preaching in Arabian countries, Thomas reached Kerala. He died as a martyr at Mylapore near the present town of Chennai (Madras) and was buried there. His tomb is still venerated there. There also exists the claim that the Christian message was brought to India either by St. Thomas, or by St. Thomas and St. Bartholomew, two apostles of Jesus.<sup>28</sup> Here

Leo XIII, Lett. Apostl. *Quod Iampridem*, 20 May 1887, *Leonis XIII, Pontificis Maximi Acta*, vol. VII (Romae: 1888), 106-08.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. A.M. Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India*, Vol. I (Bangalore: 1984), 3.

we are not very concerned about the issue of actual proof of Thomas' preaching, but rather the early existence of Christian communities. The majority of historians and of those traditions which are available today strongly support the reality of the preaching of St. Thomas and the existence of a strong practicing Christian community. The records of the early history of Christianity in India are only available from the Acts of Judas Thomas, early historical records<sup>29</sup> and reports of several travelers.<sup>30</sup> For scanty and early information in this regard, we have to depend on Syriac and Greek sources and the Fathers of the Church.<sup>31</sup>

As a Christian community that existed outside the Roman Empire, the Church of St. Thomas Christians had little contact with the Roman or the other Churches. The communion with the Church of Rome was initiated only centuries later through the East Syrian or Chaldean or Babylonian Church.<sup>32</sup> The ancient history of India has recorded the commercial relation that existed between south India and Persia. According to the Church in Persia, St. Thomas introduced Christianity to the Persian Empire on his way to India. Hence, the Christians in India had contact with these Christians of Persia.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> This includes *Veeradian pattu*, *Rambban pattu*, *Margamkali pattu*. These are a series of various songs of local traditions, folklore and social ballads dealing with the missionary endeavours of Thomas the Apostle. Cf. P.J. Podipara, *The Thomas Christians*, 20; P.J. Thomas, *Thomas the Apostle: A Souvenir of the 19<sup>th</sup> century of His arrival*, 52-1952, (Ernakulam:, 1952), 5-7.

<sup>30</sup> After the death of St. Thomas we find, that pilgrimage to Mylapore was a regular custom of Thomas Christians, and other foreign visitors. The accounts of important visitors strongly support the idea that he died and was buried at Mylapore. Theodore of Syria (6<sup>th</sup> cent), Arabian trader Betumah in 841. He reports the town as the house of Thomas. Alfred the Great of England (883), John of Monte Corvino (1200), Marco Polo of Venice (1220), Blessed Oderic di Perdone (1318) and John Marignoli are the prominent visitors. Cf. J. Nedumkunnam, *Kerala Kristianikal* ((Kochi: 1972), 64-65.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. L.W. Brown, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas*, (Cambridge: 1956), 45.

<sup>32</sup> The East Syrian Church or Persian Church existed in the Persian Empire before the rise of the political power of Islam. This part of the world was under the rule of the Babylonians, Assyrians, Chaldeans and Persians in different periods. Hence, the Church in these areas was known by different names. Now it exists as the Church of modern Iraq and Iran. Cf. A.M. Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India*, 80.

<sup>33</sup> P.Pallath, *The Catholic Church in India*, 9.

## 2. Medieval Period: Relation with the Chaldean Church

This age is marked by the arrival of Persians and the relation of St. Thomas Christians with the East-Syrian Church of Persia (Chaldean). According to Church historians, there are two sources for the relation to the East Syrian Church namely, the roles of Bishop John the Persian and Thomas of Cana.<sup>34</sup> However, most historians agree that with the arrival of Thomas and several families from Cana in the 4th century new blood was infused into the sagging old church established by St. Thomas, the Apostle. After the departure of the apostle, the community moved under the leadership and guidance of the priestly families whom the apostle himself ordained. But from the 4<sup>th</sup> century on, this community was in contact with the Persian Church. Gradually the deficiency of leaders in this community forced them to accept the hierarchical leadership of Seleucia-Ctesiphon.<sup>35</sup> The *Chronicle of Seert*<sup>36</sup> makes reference to a Bishop named David, who allegedly evangelized the Indian people between A.D. 250 and 300. In later years Bishop John the Persian is found in the list of bishops who attended the Nicean Council and signed for both Persia and India. He was then the bishop of all of Persia and greater India. He is also known as the Bishop of Fars as he signed for both Fars and India.<sup>37</sup>

According to another, but rich traditional view, relations between the Church of St. Thomas Christians and the East Syrian Church were established through Thomas of Cana (Chaldean) in the year

<sup>34</sup> His name is differently known. He is either Thomas of Cana or Kana. But some people claim that *Kana* or *Cana* is a corrupt form of *Qnanaya*, a Chaldean word, which means merchant. Cf. P. J. Podipara, *Marthomachristianikal*, 40.

<sup>35</sup> Seleucia Ctesiphon, the capital of the Persian Empire which comprised Mesopotamia (Iraq) and Persia (Iran) emerged as the primatial see and the ecclesiastical centre of the Churches outside the Roman Empire. As the Thomas Christians had relations with the Church in Persia, they accepted the primacy of the "Great Metropolitan" or Catholicos of Selucia Ctesiphon. Cf. P. Pallath, *The Catholic Church in India*, p. 10; According to the available sources we see Patriarch Iso Yahb II (628-646) sent bishops to India. Later on the roles of his successors Iso Yahb III, Sliba Ska, Theodosius are clear evidence for its active presence Cf. P.J. Podipara, *The Thomas Christians*, 65

<sup>36</sup> It is an East Syrian document of the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> century. Cf. A. M. Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India*, 78.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. A. M. Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India*, 79.



345 A.D.<sup>38</sup> They began to organize the Christian community and this tradition is chiefly inherited by the Soudhists who claim to be the descendants of Thomas of Cana.<sup>39</sup> This reinvigorated the weakening old Church established by St. Thomas. Later, in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, it became hierarchically subordinate to the Chaldean Church. In addition to this, the Copper plate grant known as *Tarissappally Chepped*<sup>40</sup> also is a strong basis to prove the activities of Thomas of Cana among St. Thomas Christians. Those who speak of the apostolic origin do not deny the role of the East Syrian Church and merchants in reinforcing Indian Christianity.<sup>41</sup> Their active role in this Church continued for the next eleven centuries. Thereafter, the St. Thomas Christian community came under the jurisdiction of the East Syrian (Chaldean) Church and Eastern bishops began to exercise their authority over it.

### 3. Latin Period: St. Thomas Christians under Double Jurisdictions

There are different opinions on the origin of the Latin tradition in India.<sup>42</sup> The history of the Latin tradition in India and its influence on the St. Thomas Christians are essentially connected with two ecclesiastical institutes; the Portuguese *Padroado* and the Roman

<sup>38</sup> Cf. G.A. Moraes, *A History of Christianity in India, From Early Times to St. Francis Xavier: A.D. 52-1542*, 64-66.

<sup>39</sup> The Thomas Christians were known as Soudhists (*Thekkenkuttukar*) and Nordhists (*Vadakankuttukar*), two groups in respect to their claims to descend from particular traditions. Nordhists regarded themselves as the descendants of the converts of St. Thomas the Apostle while the others were the descendants of Thomas of Cana. Cf. L.W. Brown, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas*, 73-74.

<sup>40</sup> These are ancient written documents. At that time any grants or privileges, perquisites or land made by rulers were usually recorded on copper plates as these were durable and permanent records. The *Tarissappally* copper plates contain grants and privileges given by *Ayyanatikal*, Governor of Venad in South Kerala. A. M. Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India*, 166-67.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. A. M. Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India*, 21.

<sup>42</sup> Some Western records of the Franciscans and Dominicans contain evidence of the early Latin Mission in India. John of Monte Corvino, a Franciscan missionary visited Mylapore in 1292 and baptized around one hundred people. Jordan Catalani of Severac, a French Dominican, was the first to introduce the Latin Church into India and can be called the founder of the Latin Church in India. He reached Quilon, in 1320. Pope John XXII (1326-34), in recognition of the Jordan's zeal, erected the diocese of Quilon with the Cathedral Church on August 9, 1329, and nominated him as the first Latin Bishop. For details, A.M. Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India*, Vol.1, 126-31.

Congregation of *Propaganda Fide*.<sup>43</sup> The Church of St. Thomas Christians was an autonomous metropolitan Church, headed by a metropolitan appointed by the Chaldean Catholic Patriarch until the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century and was active in the spiritual leadership of the St. Thomas Christians.<sup>44</sup> The succession of the Chaldean Metropolitans was interrupted only at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century with the colonizing policy of the Portuguese and the death of the last Metropolitan, Abraham in 1597. Thereafter, the Portuguese began to look after the spiritual needs of the Christian community in India.

### **a. Under Portuguese Padroado**

The arrival of the Portuguese explorer, Vasco De Gama in 1498 and the political atmosphere of Kerala in those times<sup>45</sup> had a further impact on the life of St. Thomas Christians in Kerala. In the beginning, the activities of the Portuguese were centered on the north western part of India, but commercial relations with the Kings

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<sup>43</sup> *Padroado*: The Portuguese word for patronage; in Church history this word indicates the sum total of the rights and privileges which in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries the Popes conferred upon the Kings of Portugal for spreading the Christian faith in the territories of Asia and Africa. *Propaganda Fide* refers to one of the departments of the Roman Curia coordinating the missionary activity of the Church throughout the world. Today there are different expressions known in the Church, namely, "Congregation of Propaganda Fide" "Congregation for the Propagation of Faith", and finally it is known as "Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples.

<sup>44</sup> In 1490 we find three people went to Patriarch Mar Simon IV and returned with two bishops, John and Thomas. In 1504 two more bishops, Mar Yabalaha, Mar Denha, and Mar Jacob, were appointed. Cf. P. J. Podipara, *The Thomas Christians*, 121; P. Pallath, *The Catholic Church in India*, 63.

<sup>45</sup> There were very many royal dynastic rules in Kerala before the arrival of the Portuguese; *Kulashékara*, *Villarvattam*, *Perumpadappu* were some of them. Kerala was separated into small states and Cochin was one of these. According to the historical records the Villarvattam were a Christian royal family who reigned for several years and were a great help for the Christian community in Kerala. Their rule lasted until towards the end of 1500. The decline started after the death of King Jacob and the immediate decline began with the death of the Queen. The King of Cochin brought this area under his control. Cf. J. Nedumkunnam, *Keralakristianikal*, 175. As the Villarvattam family lost its political and social status, this also had an impact on the Christian communities. For this reason we see that in 1502 a group of representatives of the Christian community met Vasco de Gama in order to ask for protection from the Portuguese King. Their request was granted over the course of time. This provided strong support for the establishment of the Portuguese in the Cochin area. Cf. J. Nedumkunnam, *Keralakristianikal*, 176; P. J. Podipara, *The Thomas Christians*, 121.

of South India paved their way to discovering the St. Thomas Christians. In the course of time they came to know them better, but did not like their connection to the East-Syrian Church. They began a friendly relation with Mar Jacob, who was a chaplain in Cranganore.<sup>46</sup> The Portuguese had already obtained the patronage and authority over Christianity in India during the time of Pope Nicolas.<sup>47</sup> As they found some expressions in the liturgical texts of St. Thomas Christians which the Portuguese alleged as indicating the presence of elements of Nestorian heresy,<sup>48</sup> they set out to Latinize the Syrian Christians.<sup>49</sup> They adopted drastic measures under the leadership of Menezes, the Archbishop of Goa. He succeeded in his attempt and forced the Syrian Christians to submit to the Latin jurisdiction. The Synod of Diamper (Udayamperur) in 1599, convened by the Latin Archbishop Menezes of Goa, brought an end to the connection between St. Thomas Christians and the East-Syrian Church. The St. Thomas Christian Church thus became a colonial Church of the Portuguese. Being of forced submission, the Syrian Christians were not inwardly reconciled to the altered situation. In fact, they were only waiting for an opportunity to express themselves. Portuguese rule was soon found to be oppressive in both words and deeds. The Thomas Christians continued their reactions through the *Angamaly Padiyola*.<sup>50</sup> Their revolt against the Portuguese culminated in the *Coonan Cross Oath in 1653*.<sup>51</sup> This was a period of numerous ups and downs for the

<sup>46</sup> Cf. P. J. Podipara, *The Thomas Christians*, 122.

<sup>47</sup> Pope Nicolas V (1447-1455) granted them ecclesiastical patronage in 1452. See details, V. Nicholas, the Bull *Dum diversas*, *Bullarium Patronatus Portugalliae Regum in Ecclesiis Africae, Asiae Atque Oceaniae*, L. M. Jordão, ed., Olisipone: Roman Documents, 1868, 22-23.

<sup>48</sup> All the Syrian Christians were considered then to be Nestorians in faith and continued to be alleged so for many years. The Portuguese did not tolerate this and ill-treated the three bishops who came after Mar Jacob; Mar Joseph, Mar Abraham and Mar Simon. They were arrested and two were sent to Rome. Cf. K.P. Padmanabhamenon, *History of Kerala*, Vol. 2, New Delhi: 1983, 494.

<sup>49</sup> One Penteado sent by the king of Portugal is said to have initiated this. Cf. P. Podipara, *The Thomas Christians*, 122.

<sup>50</sup> This is a document written on Palm leaves in 1787 by the representatives of 84 churches citing the sins of omission and commission of the foreign missionaries and making a strong demand to Rome for native bishops.

<sup>51</sup> The Coonan Cross Oath in 1653 at the Church of Our Lady of Life at Mattanchery was the culmination of several years of Latinization by the Portuguese, and the crowd that gathered there took an oath that they would not be subject to the Portuguese Archbishop of Goa, Francis Garcia. This revolt eventually split the

Thomas Christians, and one in which growth of the local church was running slow.

### **b. Under Propaganda Fide**

In an attempt to shore up the strength of the mission territories in India (and also in Asia), noting the weakness of Portugal, the foundation of the Congregation of *Propaganda Fide* on January 6, 1622, by Pope Gregory XV introduced a new epoch in mission history.<sup>52</sup> As we have already seen, the Latinization initiated by the Portuguese Prelate led to divisions among the St. Thomas Christians. From 1600 onwards European Bishops from the Latin Church were appointed by the Pope to govern the St. Thomas Christians. Meanwhile the political situation in Portugal and India terminated the patronage of the Portuguese over the Christians in India. The Holy See began to erect Vicariates<sup>53</sup> under the jurisdiction of *Propaganda Fide*. Thereupon the St. Thomas Christians experienced the double jurisdiction of the Latin hierarchy. The erection of these Vicariates, independent of the control of Portugal, increased the tensions between the *Padroado* and *Propaganda Fide*. A good number of the laity and even the priests were unable to reconcile themselves to this breaking off of contacts with the *Padroado*. In 1633 by the brief *Ex Debito Pastoralis* Pope Urban VIII formally abolished the religious monopoly of Portugal. But the

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Church into two: one group continued to recognize the prelates appointed by Rome and the other broke away from Rome and joined the West-Syrian Jacobite Church of Antioch. Its Patriarch was Mar Gregory from Persia. The Jacobites were further divided into two groups: *Methran Kakshi* and *Bava Kakshi* Syrian Orthodox Church of India. The Marthomites separated from the Jacobites in the 19th century leading to the Antiochean bishop's group (Syrian Orthodox Church of India) whose Catholicos or supreme head resides at Devalokam, Kottayam and the *Bhava Kakshi* or Patriarch's Group (Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church of India) whose head is the Antiochen Jacobite Patriarch

<sup>52</sup> *Collectanea Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide*, (Romae: 1907), vol. I, 2-4. ; P.Pallath, *The Catholic Church in India*, 45.

<sup>53</sup> The first of these Vicariates was that of Deccan (erected in 1637 in what is now Mumbai), followed by that of Malabar (erected in 1659, now Verapoly) located on the Malabar Coast, India, having the Diocese of Quilon as suffragan; this diocese extends northwards to the River Ponany, southwards to the Rani River, and is bounded on the east by the Ghaut line and on the west by the Indian Ocean. For more details about the diocese of Verapoly, Cf. "Archdiocese of Verapoly" <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15345a.htm>, (accessed December 16, 2006)

Portuguese patronage continued until the eighteenth century and began to decline due to French and British colonialism in India. The Portuguese prelates had already lost their hold and, the *Coonan Cross Oath* at Mattanchery set off divisions among the Christians who were one Church up until that time. The arrival of the Jacobite Bishop Mar Gregory from Persia in 1665 marked the beginning of a formal schism among the Thomas Christians.

*Propaganda Fide* took positive steps to send the missionaries directly from Rome, and we see the presence of active missionaries of different religious Orders from Europe, namely, the Discalced Carmelites, the Capuchins, the Theatines, and later the Paris Foreign Missionary Society. In short, we could say the missionary activities under *Propaganda Fide* progressed in different parts of India.<sup>54</sup> Those who remained in communion with the Pope after the *Coonan Cross Oath* later came to be known as the Syro-Malabarians who were under the jurisdiction of the Latin Vicariate of Verapoly till its separation in 1887.

In this regard the Vicariate of Verapoly and the presence of the Carmelite administrators of it from 1700<sup>55</sup> had great significance on the growth of the community and an impact also on the life of Chavara. The period of Chavara is well related to the ecclesiastical administration of the Latin Rite under the Vicariate of Verapoly. Their influence initiated with the intervention of Rome after the divisions among the St. Thomas Christians. In response to the desire expressed by Archdeacon Thomas<sup>56</sup>, Rome sent two Carmelite missionaries to find a solution. Accordingly, Joseph Sebastiani OCD and Hyacinth of St. Vincent OCD reached Kerala.

Hence, this short historical sketch reveals to us certain truths regarding the life of St. Thomas Christians. We could say that they

<sup>54</sup> Cf. H.C. Dominic, "Latin Missions under the Jurisdiction of Propaganda," H. C. Perumalil and E.R. Hambye, *Christianity in India*, (Aleppey: 1972), 102-28

<sup>55</sup> It was in this year that the Holy See appointed Fr. Angelo Francis of St. Theresa, the first Carmelite Prelate as the Vicar apostolic for Malabar. Cf. J. Thekkedath, *History of Christianity in India*, Vol. II (Bangalore: 1988), 17.

<sup>56</sup> He was said to be the last archdeacon of the community. After the Coonan Cross Oath, 12 priests, at the instigation of one of them, laid their hands on the head of the archdeacon and "ordained him Bishop". There are two letters addressed by him to the Holy See in 1647 and 1649 expressing his for the presence of Carmelite missionaries. Cf. J.Thekkedath, *History of Christianity in India*, 97.

had to undergo a period of many ups and downs, and for many years it was the struggle for its identity and autonomy that hindered their church's overall growth. During these years it witnessed a chain of events<sup>57</sup> in reaction to the competition by outsiders regarding the ecclesial jurisdiction over the Syro-Malabar Church. The concerned authorities and the community were engaged in those matters rather than the spiritual growth of the Christian community. Ultimately, this affected the life of the Christian community in Kerala which splintered into different groups, like a flock without proper shepherds.

## B. Tradition and Practices

From the historical point of view, we do not find any other Christian tradition in India before the 14<sup>th</sup> century other than the Thomas Christians of Kerala founded by St. Thomas. Until the coming of the Portuguese missionaries, the Catholic Church in India could be identified only with the Church of St. Thomas Christians.<sup>58</sup> The converted community followed the purely Indian way of life in all things except their faith. They remained attached to the society, and shared Hindu culture. So P. J. Podipara coined an axiom denoting their life as following: "Hindu in culture, Christian in religion and Oriental in worship"<sup>59</sup> This continuity of social and cultural interactions did not affect their status in society. This particular feature of the South Indian Christian community differentiates it from the north and the new converts to Christianity in India. In the beginning of the first century people came to know Christ and had traditional Christian practices.<sup>60</sup> In the following sections we analyze the tradition and practices of St. Thomas Christians before they came into contact with foreign missionaries.

<sup>57</sup> *The Angamali Padiyola, The Coonen Cross* events and several divisions followed.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. P. Pallath, *The Catholic Church in India*, 1; Cf. A.M. Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India*, 21.

<sup>59</sup> P. J. Podipara, "Hindu in Culture, Christian in religion, and Oriental in Worship", *Osterkirchliche Studien* 8 (1959): 82-104; Also quoted by Varkey Cardinal Vithayathil, "St. Thomas Christians and Struggle for an Authentically Indian Church," in *Journal of Dharma*, 1 (1976): 57-58

<sup>60</sup> Cf., M.O. J. Nedumkunnam, *Keralakristianikal*, 47-48.

## 1. Christian Life

St. Thomas Christians were strict followers of the way or law of Thomas (*Thoma Margam*), which contained the faith, liturgy, spiritual life, discipline, traditions and customs.<sup>61</sup> For them Christianity was not a set of doctrines, concepts or dogmas, but a way of life (*margam*) to obtain salvation and to reach God the Father, which was introduced into India by the Apostle Thomas. He converted a number of high class Hindu families<sup>62</sup> in Cranganore, Palayur, Quilon and some other places, organized the Christian groups of Malabar under a number of guides (priests) and erected some public places of worship. The old traditional families of Malabar Christians of the present day trace their descent from high class Hindus who were converted by the apostle.<sup>63</sup> The Thomas Christians had great respect for these families, a respect that continues to this day. St. Thomas ensured that the community would function correctly after him by ordaining priests and even consecrating some bishops<sup>64</sup> before he moved to Coromandel.<sup>65</sup> Some historians like Francisco Dionysio S. J. and J.P. Maffai agree with this view.<sup>66</sup> The teachings of St. Thomas were eventually integrated into the beliefs and traditions of the local communities, their family history, songs and dances. They had certain folk songs praising and commemorating the life and miraculous deeds of St.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. P. Pallath, *The Catholic Church in India*, 63.

<sup>62</sup> According to the caste system, Hindu society is divided into four caste groups. Among them the *Brahmins* occupy the highest position. Then follow *khsatrya*, *vaisya*, and *sudras*.

<sup>63</sup> Some of the important families are Pakalomattam, Sankarapuri, Kalli, Kalikav, Koykkam, Madeipur, Muttodal, Nedumpally, Panakkamatam and Kottackal. Chavara is a descendent of the Pakalomattam family, each of whom regarded themselves as the 50<sup>th</sup> or the 61<sup>st</sup> and so on, counting from the first who is believed to have been ordained by St. Thomas. Cf. P.J. Podipara, *The Thomas Christians*, (1970), 1; Among these, the 48<sup>th</sup> priest of the Maliekal Family was the author of *Rabban Song*. Cf. *Keralakristianikal*, p.95.

<sup>64</sup> It is said that St. Thomas consecrated two bishops: Kepha and Paul, for Malabar and Coramandel (Mylapore), <http://memberstripod.com/Berchmans/apostle.html>; the statements of the following Church historians reconfirms that St. Thomas consecrated also the bishops during his time. Cf. P. Pallath, *The Catholic Church in India*, 9; Cf. T. Bernard, *Marthomacristianikal*, 62,121-23 & 147-49. Bp. Paul was supposed to be the one who presided over the apostle's last rites at Mylapore, Cf. J. Nedumkunnam, *Keralakristianikal*, 61

<sup>65</sup> A.M. Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India*, 31.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. A.M. Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India*, 36.

Thomas.<sup>67</sup> The seven Churches established by St. Thomas are living sources of the continuity of this life and practice even after the death of the Apostle.<sup>68</sup>

### ***a. Ecclesial Structure and Units***

The ecclesiastical units of the community were well structured. On the administrative level the community had the traditional office of the archdeacon as the head of the ecclesial community.<sup>69</sup> But we know very little about the origin of this office and its dignity. According to the available sources the office was permanent and was conferred for life.<sup>70</sup> The indigenous priests were known as *Cathanars* (priests)<sup>71</sup> and they were generally married, but they never remarried if their wives died. There was a great impact on the demand for celibate priests after the arrival of the Portuguese. By the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century the thrust for celibacy had assumed priority and became a necessary condition for ordination.

The position of the laity and the power of the *Palliyogam* (Parish Council) had great importance among the St. Thomas community.  
<sup>72</sup> As a powerful unit of the parish, every major decision concerning

<sup>67</sup> Some details of this combined tradition may be found in songs - the *Rambban Pattu* or *Thoma Parvam* (Song of Thomas), the *Veeradyan Pattu* (sung by a particular Hindu Caste, the *Margam Kali Pattu* (song-play of the Way) and others that now exist in written records..

<sup>68</sup> The seven churches are at Kodungalur (Cranganore), Kottakkavu, Palayur, Kollam, Kokkamangalam, Niranam and Chayil, but this does not mean the forms of well structured churches that we see today. It is to be understood that there were community halls in each place where the faithful gathered to worship, a cross being affixed in each one. Cf. M.O. J. Nedumkunnam, *Keralakhrstianikal*, 74.

<sup>69</sup> The Archdeacon's duty was to take care of the ecclesiastical as well as the temporal administration of the community. In practice, he executed the moral powers of a bishop. This could be a Persian tradition that the Thomas Christians received. According to a Portuguese report of Amador Corria in 1563 the Archdeacon had a special role on the commemoration day of St. Thomas. And from the 16<sup>th</sup> cent his role was of a Vicar General also. When the bishop expired, he was in charge until a new bishop took charge. Hence, he performed many roles. For more details see, A. M. Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India*, 180-85; J.Kollampampil, *The Archdeacon of All-India*, (Kottayam: 1972), 23-58

<sup>70</sup> In an ancient account the name of Ittikuriath Pothanikakdu appeared as the Archdeacon. Cf. J. Nedukunnam, *Keralakristianaikal*, 94.

<sup>71</sup> This word is derived from *Kaseesa* of Syriac language.

<sup>72</sup> Generally the parish council consisted of President or Chief trustee (*kaikaran*) Vice-President, treasurer and a Secretary. But ultimately the final decision is vested in the parish priest. The members are elected by the representatives of the



its affairs was decided there. It functioned as an executive body to look after the temporal affairs of the parish. The candidates to priesthood were admitted only with the approval of the *Pallyyogam*. The parish councils of the Syro-Malabar Churches are still of great importance even today.

### **b. Liturgical Life**

There is no proper evidence to show that the Thomas Christians developed a liturgy of their own. But they were convinced of the fact that the liturgy, sacraments and other rites which they were celebrating according to East Syrian tradition, had been bequeathed to their forefathers by the Apostle Thomas, in the Aramaic or Syrian language.<sup>73</sup> According to some early historical references, St. Thomas instituted an indigenous form of worship among his converts in India.<sup>74</sup> We are unable to prove the definite shape of such liturgical celebration. By its apostolic origin, naturally, it must have followed a liturgy centered life, with days of fasting and abstinence in accordance with traditional belief.<sup>75</sup> In addition, their devotion to the St. Thomas Cross was absolute. The commemoration of the death of St. Thomas by the community was a usual practice for them. July 3<sup>rd</sup> is regarded as the day of St. Thomas' martyrdom according to the historical sources. This proper day was commemorated as *Thorana*, a corruption of the Syriac word *Dukhrana*, meaning commemoration.<sup>76</sup> The Syrian Christians practiced these in ancient days and it is an obligatory day for the Syro-Malabar Church even today. As Dr. Minagna asserts, history has preserved no trace of any of the Indian languages being used for ecclesiastical purposes in the pre-16<sup>th</sup> century period.<sup>77</sup> The parish for a particular term of service. The rules and regulations depend on the norms of each diocese.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. P. Pallath, *The Catholic Church in India*, 63.

<sup>74</sup> Cf., B. Puthur, ed., *The Life and Nature of the St. Thomas Christian Church in the Pre-Diamper Period*, (Kochi: 2000), 130.

<sup>75</sup> The different historical events in the life of the St. Thomas community had a great impact on the history of its liturgy, too. An analysis of the Syro-Malabar Liturgy in different stages made by Fr. Narikulam is a rich resource for our study. For details see Cf. A. Narikulam, "Syro-Malabar Liturgy," *Journal of St. Thomas Christians* 17, no. 3 (July-September, 2006): 31-42.

<sup>76</sup> Originally, it is derived from the Hindu custom of *chatham* or *sardham*, an annual funeral meal in honour of a deceased ancestor, Cf. A.M. Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India*, 34.

liturgical services found in Malabar from the 4<sup>th</sup> century on were bequeathed to it in the Chaldean language from St. Thomas.<sup>78</sup> There are different opinions regarding the use of Chaldean or an indigenous language. The usage still today of several Syriac words strongly supports the idea that the Chaldean language was used.<sup>79</sup> Therefore, it proves that this community had a firm Catholic faith and liturgy, maintained and shared the socio-cultural life of the people of the land and was considered to be a religion of India. There were continuous efforts on the part of Portuguese Church authorities to suppress the practices of the Thomas Christians which led to tensions and divisions. Many ancient books, especially liturgical books, were destroyed after the Synod of Goa (1585) and Diamper (Udayamperur, 1599) as Portuguese missionaries wrongly suspected Nestorianism in the Malabar Church.<sup>80</sup>

## 2. Socio-Political Situation

The history of St. Thomas Christians and the life of Chavara are chiefly centered in Kerala, which is one of the states with the largest Christian population in India. In this regard we analyze its socio-political situation until Chavara's time. Kerala's social relations were entirely different from the rest of India, determined by the most primitive transactional concepts of pollution or the irrationally discriminative institution popularly known in the land as 'aiyatham' [pollution relating to concepts such as unseeability, untouchability, unapproachability, etc., altogether constitute this taboo].<sup>81</sup> The specific conditions of Kerala's pollution relations [aiyatham] were not simply an affair of Brahmin versus Sudra social formations.

<sup>77</sup> A. Minagna, "The Early Spread of Christianity in India," *Bulletin of John Rylands Library* 10, (Manchester :1962): 9.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. B. Puthur, *The Life and Nature of the St. Thomas Christian Church in the Pre-Diamper Period*, 131; A Babel Patriarch named Avadiso Kayyath reported that the liturgy of Syrian Christians of Kerala was originally in the Chaldean language. Kayyath, Syri. Orientales, quoted by J. Nedumkunnam, *Keralakhrisianikal*, 100.

<sup>79</sup> *Isomisihā* (Jesus Christ), *Mar* (attribute word used before a bishop's name), *Sleeha* (apostle), *rushma* (benediction), *Ruhadakudsa* (Holy Spirit) *Sleeva* or *Sleeba* (Cross) *Kurbana* (Divine Liturgy) and *Mammodeesa* (Baptism) are the words used even in the original language. Cf. J. Nedukunnam, *Keralakhrisianikal*, 99.

<sup>80</sup> Z. L. Ellenkil, "Is it time to make our *Qurbana* more appealing," <http://www.ghg.net/knanaya/houston/WhyHolyEucharist.pdf> (accessed February 14, 2006).

<sup>81</sup> For details, see A. Sreedharamenon, *A Survey of Kerala History* (1970), 267-69

The ruling social ideology of this land, i.e., the compartmentalized *jati* [caste] system, differed from the *chaturvarniam* [traditional four fold caste system] that was practiced by the conventional Hindu society of the bygone days of India in general.<sup>82</sup> In short this *jati* system was once the basis of all social justice of the land. These are some of the contradictions and paradoxes that governed pre-modern Kerala.

Politically, Kerala was under the dynastic rule of different rulers for many centuries.<sup>83</sup> It was divided into three political units - the princely state of Cochin, the kingdom of Travancore,<sup>84</sup> and the Malabar district which was the former Kingdom of the Zamorin of Calicut. Until the arrival of the Portuguese, Thomas Christians enjoyed great royal privileges and attained high status under these emperors. Royal grants were, in effect, their charters for a place, and a high place at that, in the caste system of south India, a system more intricate in that region than in any other. St. Thomas Christians were considered high caste, along the lines of Hindu tradition, with special privileges granted by the kings. In the course of time, Thomas Christians won a place for themselves at least as high as that of the Nairs, the Hindu warriors. And like them, Christians were highly prized for their martial skills in the local kings' armies. The two communities took part in each other's festal processions, visited

<sup>82</sup> The *jati* hierarchical order in Kerala are known as *Nambootiris*, *Nair*, *Velutheda* [washer men] and *Chaliya* [weaver] in respect to *Brahmin*, *Kshatrya*, *Vaysia* and *Sudra* in the social ladder of status. "Nairs by virtue of their association with the *Nambootiris* had a high status in the society and they observed the rules of caste in all their rigidity." The same Nairs without any fear of pollution or loss of *jati* status usually kept concubines from the *Velutheda* caste [washer men]. The Nairs, being a warrior community, could touch persons of low castes [*jatis*] while they were at the battlefield, and eat and drink in their houses without the fear of losing their caste. In the specific case of Kerala all *jatis* other than *Nambootiri* [native Brahmin *jati*] were part of the *Sudra* social structure. Cf. District Gazetteer-Kozhikode, State Gazetteer Dept. Trivandrum, 1962, 133

<sup>83</sup> In the history of Kerala, Chera, Chola and Pandya were the important kingdoms of South India in the early centuries of the Christian era

<sup>84</sup> The dynasty of Travancore is one of the most ancient in India. The original name of Travancore was Chera. It was the first of the three Southern Kingdoms. Subsequent to the dismemberment of the main part of the Chera Kingdom, the first name was '*Tiruvarumcode*' - abode of prosperity - which was modified to Travancore as it is known today. Today the whole area is called the state of Kerala. During Chavara's time Kerala was politically ruled by the three dynasties of Travancore, Cochin and Malabar.

each other's holy places. Thomas Christians were given right of access to Hindu temples. They themselves observed the practice of untouchability and closely followed the customs of high-caste Hindus. Christians were known also as *Nazarani* or Nazarenes in India.<sup>85</sup> Christians, Muslims, and Jews lived side by side with the Kerala Hindus in a perfect state of understanding and amity, respecting each other's customs and prejudices, avoiding all interference.<sup>86</sup>

The historical folk songs<sup>87</sup> describing the apostle's mission place great emphasis on the conversion of Brahmins. They highlight the customs and rituals the Thomas Christians shared with Brahmins - in ceremonies celebrating birth, coming of age, marriage: for example, bestowal of a sacred thread (with cross added) on infants, adornment of children with gilded mongoose teeth and panther toes, similar marriage rites, descent of property through a patriarchal line (unlike Nairs, who have a matriarchal system), wearing a long tuft of hair on the head. In marriage processions a Christian bridegroom, like a prince of the land, would ride an elephant, the bridal party could be sheltered by a canopy, and members of the procession would carry silk umbrellas.<sup>88</sup> But the privileges and status of early Christians gradually declined as the political situation changed from local dynasty to foreign colonialism and rule.

### C. Missionary Consciousness and Endeavours

There are mixed opinions on the early missionary zeal and activities of the Thomas Christians. Some argue that the St. Thomas Christian community had sent out missionaries for evangelization

<sup>85</sup> The primitive Christians were called Nazarenes before they were called Christians at Antioch. Cf. Acts 24:5b. Nasrani Mappila (Respected Nazarene) became a frequent appellation. *Mappila* is an honorific in the Malayalam tongue; it became a common appendage to Christian names. An old Malayalam proverb says that "Flies, cats, dogs, and Nasranis have no pollution" — a saying with an edge, perhaps, but one recognizing that to touch a Thomas Christian was not polluting for high-caste Hindus. Cf. H. C. Merillat *The Gnostic Apostle Thomas*, ch.16.

<sup>86</sup> K.M. Panikkar, *A History of Kerala 1498-1801* (Madras: 1960), 16.

<sup>87</sup> *Rabban Pattu*, *Veeradyian Pattu*, and *Margam Kali Pattu* which we have already seen as historical sources.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. H. C. Merillat, *The Gnostic Apostle Thomas* (Philadelphia: 1997), ch.16.

from the early period onwards.<sup>89</sup> By the relation with the Persian Church, surely, Thomas Christians would have received extraordinary vigor in their missionary effort and zeal. On the other hand, some view St. Thomas Christians in India as not being missionary-spirited and accuse them of having kept their faith under a 'bushel' because of the glaring fact that Christianity in India represents a tiny minority in spite of its long presence there.<sup>90</sup> The possible reason for the lack of missionary orientation in this Church could be the socio-cultural background of society in its very beginnings. The original converts of St. Thomas were high caste Hindu community (*Brahmines* or *namboodiris*),<sup>91</sup> and the caste factor continued to play a role even after their conversion in that they did not like to mingle with the other lower castes.<sup>92</sup> such affirmations and comments are mainly based on the information given by the European missionaries about St. Thomas Christians. And this information is gathered directly from the contact they had with Christians in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. But it is more appropriate to conclude that the Chaldean Church played a vital role in the formation of missionary consciousness in the initial stages of the Syro-Malabar Church as conversion work was possible during the early centuries. Their presence and missionary zeal could not but have led the native Christians to consciousness of their missionary call. From the historical survey of St. Thomas Christians in different phases, we find it was a struggling community in search of its autonomy. Most of the Church leaders were engaged in accomplishing this goal for many centuries, with the consequence that the spiritual animation of the Christian community was neglected. Lack of proper guidance for evangelization works really affected the missionary thrust and consciousness and slowed down its missionary activities. There are several arguments and reasons which are not our concern.

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<sup>89</sup> A.M. Mundadan, "Emergence of the Missionary Consciousness of the St. Thomas Christians in India", K. Pathil, ed., *Mission in India Today* (Bangalore: 1988): 25.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. P. Thenayan, *The Missionary Consciousness of St. Thomas Christians*, 79

<sup>91</sup> Cf. G. Mundadan, "Missionary Enterprise of the Syro-Malabar Church", *Tanima*, A Quarterly Review of St. Thomas Academy for research (September-December, 1996): 117

<sup>92</sup> Generally, people of high caste never mingled with lower ones and distanced themselves from them.

Our concern here is to see the role of Bl. Chavara in the missionary endeavours of Syro-Malabar Church

### **III. Blessed Chavara as a Missionary Inspirer in the Syro-Malabar Church**

Based on the historical background of the Syro-Malabar Church before Chavara's time, we begin our discussion of his role as a missionary inspirer in the Kerala Church. As a profound mystic, his rich contemplative life found tremendous expression in serving the Church through his active life. He was a great missionary not because of the number of people he converted, but in the way he adapted in order to attract non-Christians. In this respect we shall consider his life and activities as a missionary, by which we mean his active role in the apostolic activities as both spiritual and social reformer through which he presented a new way and meaning to the missionary life in the Church. Pope John Paul II himself acknowledged and hailed Chavara's role as a missionary inspirer in the Syro-Malabar Church when he visited India. On the occasion of Chavara's beatification the Pope said:

Father Kuriakose's life was dedicated to the service of the Syro-Malabar Church. Under his leadership or inspiration, a good number of apostolic initiatives were undertaken: the establishment of seminaries for the education and formation of the clergy, the introduction of annual retreats, a publishing house for catholic works, a house to care for the destitute and dying, schools for general education and programmes for the training of catechumens. He contributed to the Syro-Malabar liturgy and spread devotion to Holy Eucharist and the Holy Family.<sup>93</sup>

The Holy Father observed here the way Chavara led the Syro-Malabar community to a missionary oriented path, adapting new measures of activities.

#### **A. Chavara's Missionary Zeal Reflected in His Writings**

We now come to the depth of Chavara's missionary zeal and life from two of his works, namely, *the Chronicle* and *the Letters*.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>93</sup> Cf. John Paul II, "A Heroic Son and a Heroic Daughter of the Church in India," *Herald of the East* 1 (January 1992), 82.

<sup>94</sup> These are two other writings of Chavara compiled and named the Complete Works of Chavara Vol.I, *The Chronicle* and the Vol. IV, *The Letters*.

There is a third source known as *Nalla appante Chavarul* (Testament of a Loving Father)<sup>95</sup> by which the ordinary faithful of the Syro-Malabar Church remember him as an apostle of Christian families. *The Chronicle* of Chavara inspires us to foster the aptitude of recording one's day to day events. *The Letters*, on the other hand, became a means of communication. So we consider these writings as the sources that impart his views on missionary spirituality. They are important records which provide vital information on his missionary activities.

### 1. Chronicle ( *Nalagamangal* )

The simple definition given to history is that it is a record of past events, thus, this Chronicle also serves as history. According to Chavara's own words, a chronicle is a means of "sharing of our joyful and sorrowful moments handed down from generation to generations."<sup>96</sup> Chavara was convinced of the fact that the tradition of writing a chronicle is a good thing and will serve as great source for future generations to know about past events. He himself wrote the first pages of the chronicle of the convent at Koonammavu. Then Sr. Anna, one of their first members, was given training to continue the writing. He writes to the sisters of CMC community, "I had urged Sr. Anna to note down every detail in the chronicle. I think she has realized it now. If she notes down everything without being lazy I am sure you will enjoy it while reading after some time."<sup>97</sup>

The entire work of Chavara's *Chronicles* is collected and codified from all the chronicles that he wrote and has undergone various scientific analyses.<sup>98</sup> He kept a handwritten diary for over a period of forty one years from 1829 to 1870. It was not only for the members of the religious community he founded but also for the entire Church, particularly the Church in Kerala. The original bound manuscript form, preserved in the archives of Mannanam, was arranged by

<sup>95</sup> It is published as a part of the fourth book of Chavara. Cf., *The Letters* IX/6, 102. In our work we analyse it as another important work of Chavara

<sup>96</sup> *Chavara, pratibhayum prabhayum* (Ernakulam: 1996), 111.

<sup>97</sup> *The Letters*, VII/1, 75. As quoted by Sr. Jossey, *CMC in the Shadow of the Most High*, 54.

<sup>98</sup> This includes the *Chronicles* of Mannanam, Koonammavu and Ampazhakadu monasteries written by Chavara.

Fr. Jerome of St. Mary.<sup>99</sup> In 1960, on the occasion of the process of the cause of the saints, experts approved the writings as the authentic handwritten work of Chavara. Chavara's *Chronicles (Nalagamangal)* consists of different sections in which we find the historical narrations connected with the beginning of the two indigenous religious Congregations of CMI and CMC along with their important monasteries. This work is comparable to St. Teresa of Avila's *Book of the Foundations*.<sup>100</sup> In addition, Chavara recorded some of the historical events which occurred in the 19<sup>th</sup> century pertaining to the Kerala Church.<sup>101</sup> It includes also important descriptions related to the history of the Malabar Church during Chavara's time. The simple language used in his Chronicle unveils an icon of Chavara's inner personality, namely, his transparency, openness, sincerity, and accuracy.<sup>102</sup> The Chronicle also reveals the traits of thoroughness, honesty, humility and simplicity which Chavara possessed in great measure. His Chronicle not only set a model for the religious communities that he founded, but also inspired his contemporaries and succeeding generations to record events of ecclesiastical importance and to preserve documents. Chavara does not merely give us a sketchy account of facts and figures, but provides sufficient details of the matters as a keen observer. Based on these general features of his work we shall discuss some of them in detail.

### ***a. Source of Several Historical Events***

The Chronicle of Chavara is a valuable source on different historical events of his time. It enumerates the history of the religious Congregations of CMI and CMC, the history of the Syro-Malabar

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<sup>99</sup> Fr. Jerome of St. Mary was a close friend of Chavara. He was 19 when Chavara died. He was in charge of the Library of Mannanam from 1902 to 1917. Cf. CSK., Vol. I: *Nalagamangal*, Introduction, ii.

<sup>100</sup> The *Book of Foundation* of St. Teresa tells the story of each of the houses she founded. Similarly, the Chronicle of Chavara provides ample historical aspects of the religious communities he founded, the house at Mannanam, the monastery at Ambazhakadu and the convent at Koonammavu.

<sup>101</sup> The historical events of the struggle over the Roccas Schism, appointment of the first Vicar General in the form of Chavara of the Syrian Christian Church of Malabar and the safeguarding of the Church from divisions.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. S. Poonoly, "Writings of Chavara", P. Kalluveetil and P. Kochappilly, eds. *The Lord of Heaven and Earth*, 117-118.



Church and the socio-political and cultural history of society of his time. In addition, it also gives details of many events related to the growth and development of Kerala society. His literary works helped not only the growth of the spiritual field but also of the language.<sup>103</sup> Hence, his works are recognized as making a great contribution to the literary field.

With regard to the history of the religious Congregations, Chavara gives more detailed accounts about the foundation of the CMI and related events.<sup>104</sup> It is an important source on the true history of the Congregation from 1855-1870. The first part of the Chronicle gives importance to the foundation of its first house at Mannanam. The writings resemble the zealous and hard work of its founders for the realization of their dream of a religious community. The newly founded community began to sprout different branches in different zones of Kerala day after day. Hence, we find other monasteries at Koonammavu (1857), Elthuruthu (1858), Vazhakulam (1859), Pulincunnu (1861), Ampazhakadu (1868) and Mutholy (1870). The Chronicle gives authentic information on the change of Servants of Mary Immaculate to the Third Order of Carmelites on 1<sup>st</sup> October<sup>105</sup> and its rules which were approved on 3<sup>rd</sup> April, 1860.<sup>106</sup> The General Synaxis on 28th October 1867 elected new office bearers for the community. It gives details of the CMC Congregation for women. Chavara and Fr. Leopold collectively decided to begin a Congregation for women,<sup>107</sup> and Prelate Bernadine approved their suggestion and named it the Third Order of Carmelites. With a lot of prayer and reflection on this project, both of them executed their plan. Hence, on 13th February 1866 their long cherished dream came to be fulfilled. Chavara was very keen to describe the initiation ceremony for the new members.<sup>108</sup>

In his historical accounts of the Syro-Malabar Church Chavara records the ecclesiastical authorities who gave leadership and

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<sup>103</sup> Cf. B. Puthur, “*Nalagamangal, Kathukal*,” D. Manickathan, ed., *Kerala sabhadeepam*, 93.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. *The Chronicles*, 1.

<sup>105</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>109</sup> See the details of the whole episode in Chavara’s writings. Cf. *Chronicles*, 161-69

nourished the Malabar Church in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Bp. Maurelius Stabilini, (1828-1831), Bp. Francis Xavier (1832-1844), Ludovic Martini (1845-1853), Bp. Bernardine Baccinelli (1853-1868) and Leonard Mellano. He also provides a record of Carmelite missionaries like Marceline, Leopold Beccaro, Philipose, Gerard and Nicholas.

The births of the first indigenous religious Congregations are recorded as the historical part of the Syro-Malabar Church. They are viewed as signs of the growth of the Syro-Malabar Church as well as the growth of the universal Church. Chavara records many events which occurred in the period 1861 to 1870 when he was its Vicar General. The Roccas episode<sup>109</sup> and its consequences were important events in the history of the Kerala Church. Fr. Deneha Baryona,<sup>110</sup> and Thomas Roccas were regarded as evils and thereby, at various times, their deeds badly affected the peaceful life of the Syrian Christians in Kerala. It is well known that Chavara played a vital role in fighting them. Even after eradicating the evils from outside, the Malabar Church witnessed the evils of schism from within as it is clear from Chavara's narration about Kuriappu Panamkuzha's,<sup>111</sup> Anthony Kudakkachira's<sup>112</sup> and Anthony Thondanattu's activities. They shared certain common features: none of them were satisfied with their past life and all were led by selfish motives, personal grudges and revenge. They had no genuine authorization from the official ecclesiastical authorities. As the Roccas' episode progressed, Chavara succeeded in convincing the people of their mistakes because of the special reforms initiated by Archbishop Bernardine.<sup>113</sup>

Chavara describes the manner of investiture of bishops as it was in those times.<sup>114</sup> The details from the moment of announcement and the Episcopal ordination of Bp. Leonard are

<sup>109</sup> A Chaldean schismatic priest from Persia reached Kerala; Cf. *Chronicles*, 150-52.

<sup>111</sup> Bp. Pandari was another unauthorised prelate whose activities became controversial and he had to leave the area. He ordained nine candidates, Chavara notes. Cf., *Ibid.*, 147-50.

<sup>112</sup> He studied some years under Fr. Thomas Palackal. He protested against certain rules and restrictions in the monastery and some time later left. Later he went to the diocese of Palai and was ordained, Cf. *Chronicle*, 154-55.

<sup>113</sup> *The Chronicles*, 79.

<sup>114</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 69-70.

well narrated.<sup>115</sup> In addition, the priestly ordination,<sup>116</sup> clerical dress of Latin and Syrians, time table,<sup>117</sup> certain customs of Syrians<sup>118</sup> and the prevailing mode of abstinence among the Christian community are well described.<sup>119</sup>

Furthermore, we also find some historical notes concerning the Universal Church. Chavara gives an account of the important news of Vatican Council I convened by Pius IX. It describes a list of the participants<sup>120</sup> and the reactions to and impact of the agreement between the Vatican and Portugal. He notes also a miracle by Pope Pious IX.<sup>121</sup> As the Syro-Malabar Church was under Latin jurisdiction, his account also includes flashbacks to historical events related to Joseph Cariayattil and Thomas Paremmakkal, and Bp. Pandari which he came to know through Fr. Palackal.<sup>122</sup> Hence, his *Chronicle* is a great treasure for the historians of today.

*The Chronicle* of Chavara gives witness to some of the political, social and cultural history of his period and society. He gives an account of the administrative leaders who belonged to some traditional royal families which ruled society. We learn of India's relations with Baghdad, Babel and other Persian lands. His writings provide us with an account of then existing Malayalam Calendar, currencies and measurements of the time that are useful to today's historians, although very few people would be able to understand them today. The Malayalam calendar was a sidereal solar calendar used in the South Indian state since A.D. 825. It has also 12 months, closely matching the Roman calendar, and begins with *chingam* (September) as the first month.<sup>123</sup> The *Chronicle* helps us to

<sup>115</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 124-25.

<sup>116</sup> Cf. *Chronicle*, 55-56. Here Chavara presents the way of ordination used by the Latin prelates for the Syrian Christians. He also presents the way of the Chaldean rite as Bp. Thomas Roccas ordained some priests during his short time in the region. Cf. *The Chronicle*, 85-86.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>118</sup> For one instance, the Commemoration of the 7th day of Bp. Francis Xavier, Cf. *Ibid.*, 41-43.

<sup>119</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>120</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>121</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>122</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 146-147

<sup>123</sup> The other names of the months are *Kanni* (October), *Thulam* (November), *Vrischikam* (December), *Dhanu* (January), *Makaram* (February), *Kumbham*

understand the currencies, weights and measurements used at the time of Chavara. He often mentions them in his writings. The prevailing currencies were known as *chakram*<sup>124</sup> and *kalian*<sup>125</sup> and certain measures are often mentioned in his writings.<sup>126</sup> He used the old mathematical numbers in ancient Malayalam. There were mentioned also some other customs and traditions of society. This was the time of rule by kings who made frequent visits to people in the villages in a royal procession. During this time people offered them gifts to show their loyalty. Chavara's narrations of handing over a petition to Prince Ilyaraja of Travncore<sup>127</sup> and an offering of a decorated candle to the Maharaja (King) of Travancore<sup>128</sup> on behalf of the diocese of Varapoly are some instances..

The chief means of travel that he mentions are by boats and canoes. They were used for common purposes to escort officials as well as to transport materials. He mentions that the canoes and boats of the monastery at Mannanam were used on several occasions.<sup>129</sup> In this regard, Chavara narrates the arrangements made for the Episcopal ordination of the new Archbishop after the death of Bp. Bernadine. Chavara and his group had to make great efforts to arrange travel for the bishops who came from other parts of India to participate in the ordination.<sup>130</sup> Mentioning the names of several countries, Chavara shows the relation of India with other parts of the world. The coming of missionaries from Europe to India helped to spread foreign languages to a great extent.

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(March), *Meenam* (April), *Medam* (May), *Edavam* (June), *Midhunam* (July), *Karkidakam* (August).

<sup>124</sup> 28 *chakram* is equal to 1 rupee of Indian currency. Chavara notes the receipt of the amount Cf. *CSK.*, Vol.I, 4.

<sup>125</sup> Cf. *Nalagamangal.* 16, 51; One *Kalian* is equal to ten *chakram*, G. S. Padmanabhapillai, *Sabdatharavali* : Malayalam Dictionary, Kottayam: National Bookstall, 16.

<sup>126</sup> Cf. *Chronicles*, 119. *Pa<sup>a</sup>* was used to measure the paddy crops . We can deduce it as follows in Malayalam: 2 *ozhukku* = 1 *uri* (six ounces) , 2 *uri* = 1 *nazhi* similar to one bowl) 4 *nazhi* = 1 *edangazhi*, (480gr) 10 *edangazhi* = 1 *para*, See *CSK.*, Vol. I, *nalagamangal*, 4.; 80; *Edanghazhi* , 48, *Rathal* , 51.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>130</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 123.

***b. Highlights Christian Values for Missionaries***

The second feature of his Chronicle is that it underlines the elements for an authentic missionary of Christ. The language and style of the work enable the reader to see a number of qualities possessed by Chavara: deep humility, love for enemies, prudence in acts, love for the Church, openness, transparency, farsightedness, hard work and adherence to truth. Humility was the foundation and guiding virtue of Chavara's soul. He was filled with gratitude for God's graces and repented for his shortcomings. On one occasion he commented that his work consisted of "only the things that I have come to know and have been able to remember, I am putting forward."<sup>131</sup> This is an example showing his truthfulness or inner transparency. The word *kurayapettavan* (the least one)<sup>132</sup> used to denote himself is a profound expression of the meaning of the virtue of humility. This virtue enabled him to share his ignorance, defects or weakness in his religious life. The Chronicle of Chavara describes several of his personal experiences.<sup>133</sup>

Secondly, he speaks on the necessity of a generous heart for the other, whether a rival or friend. A generous heart is always in search of ways to please others in need. There were several occasions when Chavara showed his generosity and he won the hearts of his rivals. When Thomas Roccas decided to return to his country after he was excommunicated he was greatly in need of some money for his return journey. Chavara's generous heart reached out in this moment of helplessness and settled the issue of travel expenses. He treated him in a very friendly manner, without bearing any grudge towards him. We see this also in the manner in which he dealt with the cases of Fathers Antony Kudakkachira and Antony Thondanattu (Audiso). Chavara was very generous towards them, even relieving them from their punishments imposed by the bishop. He had high regard for the parishes, diocesan priests, and several lay people who helped even in simple ways.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> *The Chronicles*, 53.

<sup>132</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>133</sup> *Positio*, 35.

<sup>134</sup> The parishes and priests helped with the funeral of Fr. Palackal and later with the rites for the 41<sup>st</sup> day from his death - Pallippuram, Muttom, Vechur, Thathampally, paravur, Kaduthuruthy, Muttuchira, and Kudamaloor. Chavara

Thirdly, his remembrance of the benefactors is remarkable. He regarded them very highly and remembered them by name in his work; he notes the favor accorded by Nellipuzha Itty of Cherpunkal parish which is considered to be a miraculous help.<sup>135</sup> As a sign of his gratitude he offered presents and gifts, without any distinctions of religion or caste, a reflection of his generous and respectful heart for all people.

### ***c. Account of Mixed Experiences and Welfare Activities***

Chavara took keen interest in sharing his God-experiences with others. He acknowledges the help of Our Lady and other saints in certain events. By the providence of God he viewed Mannanam as a proper place to construct the first monastery instead of Pullarikunnu.<sup>136</sup> St. Teresa's Prayer bears fruits through the sons of the Carmelites.<sup>137</sup> By founding the Congregation for women, Chavara and Leopold experienced it as guidance from Mother Teresa of Avila. "Almighty God, I believe that you allowed me to live so long so that I may be able to see this and feel all the more obliged to you. Greater praise be to you and now and forever"<sup>138</sup> Chavara gives thanks and praise to God almighty for making him one of the instruments in this great event.

In his narration of the accident of Mr. Ittoop Kanichai, the benefactor of Ambazhakadu Monastery and his miraculous event, Chavara sees the help and grace of Our Lady.<sup>139</sup> He reflects how the providence of God worked in Mr. Kanichai to receive a 'happy death', receiving the last rites perfectly. Here also he remembers a similar incident in the life of St. Teresa.<sup>140</sup> The gift by a lady from

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made a special mention of enthusiastic co-operation of the priests Pazhayakadavil, John of Muttom, Kunjacko. The lay people were often the families of Perumalil, Thayil and Chennakkattu. Cf. *The Chronicle*, 36-40.

<sup>135</sup> Cf. *The Chronicles*, 39.

<sup>136</sup> It was decided to purchase land at Pullarikunnu, but this idea was abandoned when some non-Christians opposed the construction of any monasteries or churches.

<sup>137</sup> Cf. *The Chronicles*, 116.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>139</sup> He donated his land for the construction of a monastery. As a part of the legal formalities in handing over possession of the land, he had to travel far by canoe to Trivandrum to meet government officials. While returning, he was accidentally wounded by his own gun. Cf., *The Chronicle*, 119.

<sup>140</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 120.

Europe<sup>141</sup> and the conversion of the Konkan woman by the intercession of Our Lady, in 1868, are considered miraculous favors he witnessed in crucial moments.<sup>142</sup>

Chavara also narrated some events that hurt his feelings when he was humiliated by the authorities. When Monsgr. Francis Xavier succeeded Bp. Maurelius there were some difficult moments with the new bishop. The Bishop was not in favor of the activities of these three fathers in proceeding with the plan for a religious community as he was misled by some jealous priests. The Bishop assigned them with new responsibilities that really affected their future plans. In response to the unfavorable decision, Chavara requested that the Bishop relieve him so that he could continue his work at Mannanam. The scolding he received and the related events are described very beautifully by Chavara.<sup>143</sup> Under Chavara's leadership the Congregation was actively involved in an integral development of society without any distinction of religion, caste or group. The members were motivated towards people-oriented activities. A lot of pious practices and devotions of the Syro-Malabar Church that we can see today came into existence on account of the hard work of Chavara and his confreres. These include the forty hour adoration, the way of the cross and the Rosary, the social welfare activities like "a Handful of Rice" (*Pidiyari*), coconut trees being set apart (*Kettuthengu*) and the Five percentage (*Noottikanchu*)<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>143</sup> Cf. *Nalagamangal*, 28-30.

<sup>144</sup> These were different charitable activities to secure financial means pioneered by Chavara. 1. *Pidiyari*, a Malayalam word, literally means Handful of Rice-setting apart a "handful of rice." It is an old way of measurement of rice by housewife cooks.. The Catholic families were advised to take a handful of rice from the rice measured out and to store this in a special vessel to be collected every month by people assigned from the parish. This provided good income to the church. 2. *Kettuthengu*, a Malayalam word, means 'fixed number of Coconut tree set apart'. Coconuts being an important source of income in Kerala, the faithful were advised to set apart one tree for the parish. The same objectives were laid down as in the case of a handful rice. Cf. *Chronicle*, 131-32. *Nuttikanchu* or Five Percentage was also a source of income for the general Curia of the Vicariate started by Chavara. Every parish church was ordered to remit to the Curia every year 5% of the income of the parish church for the general expense of the Vicariate. Cf. B.T. Bernard, *Short History of the TOCD Congregation* (Mutholy: 1908), 154-55.

The chronicle of Chavara is a reminder to the people of today to foster the ability to share one's good thoughts so that they may be useful to future generations. Many of us who are interested in knowing our past history or sharing in historical events, are mostly disinterested in writing silly events of today. To them Chavara is an inspiration to preserve a record even of the simple incidents that occur in our day to day life. The eye of a historian, the tongue of a true person, the pen of a classical writer, the vision of a seer, the faith of a true son of the Church, and the heart of a loving father illuminate Chavara's entire Chronicle.

## 2. Letters (*Kathukal*)

Letters are a powerful means of sharing one's inner thoughts. St. Paul, a great missionary, communicated his Christian experiences to the different communities through the means of letters. These thoughts are a set of guidelines of Christian living today. One finds the heights of Chavara's missionary zeal in all his letters. As the Vicar General of the Syrian Church, the prior of a Congregation, and a pastor of many, Chavara had great contact with a large number of people. The preserved letters and circulars in the archives affirm his cordial relations with different kinds of people. The *Letters* of Chavara, present different categories of letters. There are 67 letters preserved today written by Chavara. There could have been more letters if they had been preserved properly. As Vicar General of the Syro-Malabar Church, Prior General of a religious community and co-founder and spiritual animator of the CMI and CMC Congregations, his letters are invaluable today. They reveal Chavara's commitment and dedication to the development of the Christian community in Kerala. Hence, their features shall be analyzed based on some of his official letters in the following categories.

### *a. To the Ecclesiastical and State Authorities*

The letters to the Pope, Cardinals, the Superior General of the Carmelites Order, Bishops and legal letters are included in this category. Chavara wrote some important letters to the ecclesiastical authorities in the wake of the schism in the Kerala Church. In this regard there are two important letters written to Pope Pius IX.<sup>145</sup>

<sup>145</sup> CWC, Vol. IV, *The Letters* I/1, 2.



There are seven letters written to the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of Faith. The first four letters show that Chavara was in constant touch with the heads of Congregations in Rome regarding the activities of schismatics.<sup>146</sup> He had a healthy relation with all the prelates of his time and the majority of them depended on Chavara in commissioning enquiries and settling diocesan issues. Most of his correspondence to the bishops concern such matters.

There are two important letters to the superiors of the Order of Discalced Carmelites of, as the Prior of the CMI community.<sup>147</sup> Other letters are mostly related to seeking instructions for the liturgical celebrations<sup>148</sup> and the request for a bishop of his own Rite.<sup>149</sup> All of these letters reflect Chavara's simplicity, loyalty to the Holy See, ardent zeal and love for the Church and eagerness to know the truth. Even during the bitter experiences he had had with the schismatic groups, Chavara never used any language that hurt his rivals, but strongly condemned their wrong activities so that the ecclesiastical authorities might recognize the dangers and intervene in time.

### ***b. Letters of a Great Prior***

He was known as *valiyapriyorchan* (Great Prior) to everyone. As Prior General there are seventeen letters available in this collected work. He conveyed all kinds of useful messages to the members of his community. By addressing the confreres frequently as *snehikkappetta/priyamulla koodapirapukale* (the beloved siblings) he showed a profound expression of his love for them.<sup>150</sup> He was respected also by the sisters of CMC Congregation who addressed him *Priyorchan* (Fr. Prior) and who considered him spiritual guide and instructor. There are ten letters written on different occasions in which Chavara also gave special instructions to them.<sup>151</sup>

### ***c. Pastoral Letters***

With the responsibility as Vicar General, Chavara had a healthy relationship with the diocesan priests and the Christian faithful. He

<sup>146</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, I/1, II/1, 2.

<sup>147</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, I, 2: Formerly, CMI Congregation was known as TOCD.

<sup>148</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, II/3, II/4, 22-25.

<sup>149</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, II/5, 23.

<sup>150</sup> *The Letters*, VI 1, 4.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, VII/1-10, 75-86.

was like a ‘bishop’ for them with his paternal care and love. On the other hand, there were many priests who disagreed with his ideologies but who could not withstand Chavara’s wisdom and experience. Through his letters he tried to direct such people to truth and to the right path. People experienced his love for the Church and respected his views. Hence, his letters received invaluable appreciation.

#### ***d. Commitment and Dedication to the Church***

He had a genuine love for the Church and was always at the disposal of the ministry of priesthood. It is visible on several occasions when he himself took the initiative to write important letters to the ecclesiastical authorities in Rome. In his letters to the Pope he presented himself and other faithful as true sons and servants of the Church.<sup>152</sup> He acted with sufficient prudence before every important decision he made. His loyalty and obedience to the See of Rome is very clear when he requested directly of Pope Pius IX: “Whom one should obey in the scrupulous situation of schism- Archbishop Bernardine or Thomas Roccas?”<sup>153</sup> At the time of the Ecumenical Council of Vatican I, Chavara sent a special letter which was dispatched to Fr. Kuriakose Eliseus, the superior at Mannanam monastery, instructing the members to pray for the Mother Church. In fact, he encouraged them to help the Church through their spiritual and material goods. Even when hard pressed with the upbringing of the new religious community still in its infancy, he set apart a good amount of money for the cause of the Ecumenical Council as a sign of his loyalty and love towards the mother Church.<sup>154</sup> There was no decrease in his commitment to pastoral activities even though he had the responsibility of a religious community.

### **3. Testaments (*Chavarul*) of Chavara**

Chavara’s *Letters* contain two testaments that he left for future generations of the religious community as well as the Christian faithful of his home parish, Kainakary. They are generally known

<sup>152</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, I/1, 2.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> Cf., *The Letters*, V/8, 45; He collected about 3000 rupees which may be equal to the value of lakhs of rupees today.

as the *Chavarul* (Testament) of Chavara.<sup>155</sup> The testament to the religious, which is in fact a Will for its members, consists of his personal instructions and his dreams for the religious community.

**a. Chavarul One: An Epistle of Chavara to the Christian Families**

The *Testament of a Loving Father* (*nalla appante chavarul*) popularly known as *Chavarul* is an epistle of Chavara in his efforts to renew Christian families. They were written in two parts, namely, a rule for Christian families and an instruction to begin a charitable association of the confraternity of St. Joseph for an happy death. This epistle is a living sign that made Chavara an apostle of Christian families. It is a set of spiritual commandments or *Kudumbachattangal* (family directives) in the language of ordinary people for the Christian faithful of Kerala, formulated originally for the faithful of his home parish, Kainakary.<sup>156</sup> The long discourse on forty instructions was written in two sections, the first dealing with rules for a family while the second section emphasizes the responsibilities of parents in bringing up their children. Thus, the title *nalla appante Chavarul* (the Testament of a Father) shows he was respected and loved as father to all.

*Chavarul* of Chavara covers all areas of life in the family from birth to death, and explains the possible dangers when affection, peace, justice, charity and order are not maintained in families. It covers all important topics of ideal Christian life such as: love of neighbor, humility, contact with others, industriousness, justice, fear of God, days of obligation, daily routine, upbringing of children, children's responsibility to parents and so on. The following is an extract but summarized rendering of the epistle of Chavara and contains the important messages of each number. In the first section (Ts I, a) he describes the rules for a family:

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<sup>155</sup> Cf. "Testament", *The Letters*, 6-74, 117-128,

<sup>156</sup> Chavara writes two letters to his parishioners at Kainakary: the first in February 1868 and the second in October 1869. The nature of these writings and an affirmation by Chavara himself prove that they are not merely ordinary letters, but specific instructions or a manual for ideal Christian life formulated by himself. Cf. *The Letters*, X/6, 102.

- A good family is like the heaven above, when we live in mutual love, obedience to parents and forgiving one another.
- Civil suits destroy families
- Sundays and other days of obligation are our Lord's days which must be followed with strict discipline.
- Do not borrow money unless for some particular essential needs. If you have borrowed it, pay it back as soon as possible.
- Do not make a show of your wealth. If one makes a show of his glories and achievements, he/she belittles himself/herself and will soon become a beggar.
- A small lamp that would render light steadily and long is better than a light coming from a heap of straw which will soon be extinguished. Dear brothers, had you not lit the lamp during daytime, you could have lit it during night.
- Do not wander into other people's houses, hunting after news and gossip.
- Do not seek relations with families that are not founded on fear of God.
- Do not admit all sorts of people to your home as friends. The proverb goes: "Tell me who your friend is and I will tell you who you are."
- Make it clear to others that your home is not a place for indulging in profane conversation ill-befitting a Christian family.
- Wealth of family consists not of the quantity of properties, but of their quality.
- To remain idle without doing any work is not the habit of honorable people. Idleness is the mother of all vices and would induce one to the habit of drinking.
- Trading is harmful as unjust merchants have never attained an honorable status in life. It should be carried out with great care and with a sense of justice.
- Do good (virtue of charity) to one another. The day in which you have not done good to your fellowmen will not be counted in your book of life.
- Stinginess and extravagance, both are equally sinful. The wealth of a stingy man will be eaten away by worms, and the wealth of an extravagant one will disappear like smoke.

- Do not choose many friends. Select one carefully from a thousand. He/she who doesn't love God will not love you.
- Do not allow a stolen article to be retained in your house even for a moment. Such a house will be burnt down.
- Don't deny just wages to labourers; do not delay the wages due to the labourer, because it is a sin before the Lord.
- Practice the virtue of modesty and chastity in your walking, sitting and lying down.
- Abandon yourself to the holy will of God in all sufferings, trials and your sickness. If one maintains patience only when he/she is happy he/she is a feeble person.
- Promote good spiritual and philosophical books to the children that strengthen devotion to God as well as nourish your thinking. To keep bad books in your house is like a fire that you hide beneath a heap of straw.
- Besides keeping Sundays holy, spend a large portion of the day by reading good books and serving the poor.
- The employees in your household must be God-fearing. Special care must be taken of their conduct in the family as well as their spiritual welfare.
- Be careful to go to bed at a fixed hour and to awake at a proper time. After waking up recite the angelus and related morning prayers before proceeding to other engagements. After these instructions we find his proposal on Parents' Responsibilities in Bringing Up their Children in the second section (Ts, I, b).
- Parents, understand the greater responsibility in bringing up your children. Your children are treasures that the good God entrusted to you. Offer your children to God; commit them to the care of Jesus, Mary and Joseph of the Holy Family.
- As soon as the children are old enough to understand things teach them to repeat the names of Jesus, Mary and Joseph along with other prayers.
- Young children should not be allowed to walk about naked, even inside the house. Don't utter vulgar words and terms of abuse in their presence.
- In order that children may respect the parents, they should not be allowed to sleep in their parents' bed room. Boys and

girls shouldn't be put in the same room to sleep. What they do not naturally know, the devil will teach them.

- Little children should not play with their companions out of the sight of their parents. Do not entrust them either to the servants. Usually it is such people who corrupt the children.

- As soon as the children come of the age of reason, they must be sent to school. Besides, parents should enquire about their studies, behaviour and their companions. Their studies should be tested every Sunday.

- Children should not be allowed to stay in the homes of relatives, because very often they leave the homes as angels and return home as devils.

- When they are eight years of age, they are to be taught all about confession and should be made to make their confession. They should be brought up especially devoted to our Mother.

- One should be neither too stern nor too lenient to one's children. Avoid too much of indulgence and severe punishments. Let the mother teach the children to respect and honour the father by her exemplary behaviour; in the same way, the father also.

- The children should be immediately corrected when they begin to tell lies and use cunning means. They must be induced with love, respect and justice.

- At dusk, when the bell for the Angelus is rung, make it a rule that the children should be at home. After the night prayers, teach them to say "Praise be to Jesus" to the parents and to kiss their hands.

- To let girls dress up in finery and to let them go about on the pretext of human respect, wealth, and family prestige and to make them wear clothes and ornaments beyond one's ability and status, will in a way promote vanity in them and kindle hellfire in many souls.

- Parents must take utmost care so that let there be no quarrels among children.

- When the children come of age, give them complete freedom to choose their state of life. For marriage the likes and dislikes of the individual must be considered. Rather than to rich and prestigious relations, let importance be given to character

and conduct. Or else both parents and the children will come to grief.

- Even when the children have attained their full growth, as far as possible don't exhibit your blind admiration of them or your weakness.

- Even before the parents die let the children live in separate establishments. Write out the Will or partition deed in time. Or else, after your death you will be responsible for the sins caused by their disputes and quarrels. At the end of this discourse he writes a word addressed to the Children: my dear children, by the law of God itself, you are obliged to obey your parents and avoid giving them any pain. Remember therefore, that those who violate the fourth divine commandment will be punished by the good God in this world itself.<sup>157</sup>

Through the long discourse for the faithful Chavara put forward the following core values as a code of conduct of Christian families. Love one another, respectful distance from pride and boasting, fear of God and discipline in the families, an aptitude for hard work, charity, justice, the real wealth of family which are devotion to and the fear of God, reading good books, integrity of prayer and life, celebration of the Sunday, timetable for the day, duties and responsibilities of the parents and discipline of the children in the family are some of the significant values Chavara underlines in the first part.

In the second part of *Chavarul*, he narrates the objectives of the charitable association of the Confraternity of St. Joseph.<sup>158</sup> It was mainly started to prepare people for the moment of death. He was convinced of the value of prayerful support of people at the moment of death as a supreme charity. It was also a means of converting the hearts of grave sinners,<sup>159</sup> as St. Therese of Lisieux who prayed for the conversion of Pranzini.<sup>160</sup> So Chavara says "However great a sinner may be, if he repents over his sins at the moment of death, like the good thief who was hanged on the right side of the Lord, the gates of heaven will be automatically open to

<sup>157</sup> Cf. *The Letters*, X/6, 103-17.

<sup>158</sup> Cf. *The Letters*, X/7, 117.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>160</sup> Cf. J. Clarke, *Story of a Soul*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Washington: 1996), 99.

him.”<sup>161</sup> In short, we could say that *Chavarul* is a well-meditated, practical theology for the family with spiritual, moral, psychological and sociological characteristics, very relevant even in our times.

***b. Chavarul Two: A Code of Conduct for the Religious Life***

Chavara prepared a *Will* in August 1870 and handed it over in October to a novice who was taking care of him when he was bedridden. It was sealed in one envelope and entrusted to the novice to be handed over to Fr. Leopold. According to the desire of Chavara, the novice kept it a secret until Chavara’s death and burial was over. Later Fr. Leopold read it and made several copies which he sent to all of the CMI monasteries. In fact, it is Chavara’s testament to his own community members expressing his vision about the future of the Congregation, the genuine values of the ideal religious to be followed, and the dignity of religious life as compared to ordinary Christian life. It does not contain any more numbers to denote that the testament was written for the laity. There are only five serial numbers and we shall analyse the important themes and highlights of the *Chavarul* in the following sections:

- Firstly, he lays down the vision of the founding fathers for the religious community they founded. It was by the special grace and plan of God that this community was named Carmelites. He defines the significant mark of a true religious as total negation of self-will and perfect obedience. He who practises perfect obedience in all spheres will enjoy heavenly peace in the monastery, which is a mini-heaven.
- Secondly, maintain the life of charity and love of one another as *koodapirappukal* (the children born of a same mother). The vicar (the superior) of each monastery has great responsibilities never to let this love and charity weakens. To strengthen this particular virtue, let them make a regular exchange of letters among themselves enquiring about the needs and rendering any help that might be required.
- Thirdly, this community is founded for the service of our Christian brethren and their salvation. To overcome the lack of sufficient members in this Congregation, a good number of formation houses are to be opened with the permission and accord

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<sup>161</sup> *The Letters*, 119.



of the Arch-bishop in other parts. In its second part Chavara gratefully remembers the service of Carmelite missionaries, and Archbishop Bernardine of Varapoly Vicariate, who stood by the efforts of Chavara and led this Church to the right path. This life of cordial relationship between the religious community and the vicariate (diocese) is to be maintained in the future.

· Fourthly, particular care should be taken to withdraw from interfering in the affairs of the convent (CMC community), or boarding house unless one is assigned to them.

· Fifthly, continue the prayers and render help as much as possible to the families who donated the land for the monasteries.<sup>162</sup>

This *Will* ends with a series of apologies by Chavara, namely for his shortcomings, and lapses in the performance of duty as a Prior of the Congregation, and for not being a goods model.<sup>163</sup>

Though his *Will* seems very small in structure it contains many important values that strengthen the dignity of religious and consecrated life. At the same time, he also brought out the obstacles that ruin our religious life. Apart from this testament Chavara expresses his view on the consecrated life through other letters too. The religious life meant for him an ascent through the spiritual stages to be united with Jesus the Lord.<sup>164</sup> He exhorted the sisters that he himself dwelt in the love of Jesus Christ; sat always before His eyes; walked by His side; conversed always with Him.<sup>165</sup> For him Jesus is the bridegroom of every consecrated person. Such thoughts repeatedly came when he addresses the sisters as the brides of Christ, the Divine Bridegroom.<sup>166</sup> Chavara writes that a consecrated person assiduously invites the Divine Bridegroom to come and live in his/her heart.<sup>167</sup> In this sense the religious state is

<sup>162</sup> There were many important families who helped the Congregation either by the donation of land for monasteries, or by giving money. Chavara takes the opportunity to thank them and insists to the members of his religious community the need of thanking the benefactors. The family of Mathan Kalapurackal, Thayil and Perumalil, Parayee, Tharakan and Kallookaran are to be remembered in our daily prayers. Cf. *The Letters*, 73.

<sup>163</sup> *The Letters*, 74.

<sup>164</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, VII/10

<sup>165</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, VII/6

<sup>166</sup> Cf. *The Letters* VII/2.

<sup>167</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, VII/4.

the most sublime and glorious calling. At the same time he stated that simple carelessness and negligence towards sacred duties of our state, or towards humility, charity, religious modesty and genuine devotion can destroy life.<sup>168</sup>

The lack of fear of God and a prick of conscience concerning the things we do contrary to our state of life will lead very rapidly to the fall of the monasteries.<sup>169</sup> Chavara insisted on the value and strength of the practice of virtues. The practices of virtues are the real guarantee for the continued and lengthy existence of religious life. He was convinced of this fact, as can be seen from his own words to his members that “the strength of monastery does not consist in the thickness of its walls, but in the virtue and the religious zeal of the monks who dwell in them.”<sup>170</sup> He wanted his brethren to possess certain self-discipline in conversations and meetings. One must be disciplined in such a way that one gives less importance to curiosity about the matters outside the monastery. Chavara reminds his brethren that our vocation to the renounced life is the greatest gift of God. We have, of our own will, renounced our parents, worldly pleasures and everything. In spite of all, if we neglect our religious obligations it will be a great foolishness or madness!<sup>171</sup>

## **B. Involvement of Chavara as a Missionary**

Chavara is regarded as a man who pioneered several developmental activities in the Syro-Malabar Church. A majority of its welfare activities run by its missionaries today are a legacy from Chavara. The good works initiated by him are monuments highlighting Chavara’s status as a reformer. We classify all his activities into two sections, namely, spiritual and social. From this perspective we analyze his missionary inspiration for the Syro-Malabar Church.

### **1. Spiritual Reformer**

From historical records we can see that the early leaders of the St. Thomas community were for a long time preoccupied with

<sup>168</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, VI/1, 61.

<sup>169</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, VI/1, 65.

<sup>171</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, VI/1, 66.

establishing its ecclesiastical stability and identity. Throughout this period we find that “a community is maintained” rather than “a community is being developed” toward its spiritual goals by the foreign administrators. The life of a Christian community could be compared to “the sheep gone astray” in search of “green pastures”. The atmosphere of the Church was not conducive to a spiritual revolution. There are no mentions of any specific agenda for spiritual renovation or Christian living formulated until Chavara appears on the scene as its spiritual reformer. His revolutionary program was not a gigantic master plan for an immediate revolution, but it was a process of simple activities with love and commitment. The important fields of reformation were, namely, the formation of ideal Christian families, of learned and holy priests for the future, renewal of the liturgy and fostering of popular Christian devotions for the benefit of the ordinary people.

***a. Formation of Ideal Christian Families***

The main initiative of Chavara was his strenuous effort to meet these varied spiritual needs in the Christian families of Kerala. He had a profound vision of building ideal Christian families and providing for their spiritual renewal. We have already seen the forty numbered testaments, each number carrying sufficient elaboration with good narratives and descriptions to explain his vision of authentic Christian families. We analyze his Christian formation based on his *Chavarul* (Testament). He encouraged the faithful to foster especially the devotion to the Holy Family so that every Christian family should become another Holy Family. Chavara defines a good Christian family as one that resembles the kingdom of heaven, where one finds love, peace, charity and order. In this testament he describes the nature of an ideal Christian family as follows:

the community of a few people joined together by a bond of love, where the members exhibit mutual respect and practice obedience to parents and walk in peace before the lord and the people, and each one, according to his proper state of life, seeks to attain eternal salvation and lives peacefully.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Cf. *The Letters*, 102

In Chavara's view the true joy and peace born from a family built of love will ensure the salvation of one another.

The commandment of our Lord, "that you love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 15: 12) is the fundamental principle for Christian living underlined by Chavara in the *Chavarul*. On the contrary, families where there is discord will soon perish (no.1). There are two key concepts Chavara recommends as the wealth of an ideal family, namely, fear of God (*daivapedi*) and devotion (*daivabhakti*).<sup>173</sup> The testament underlines the dignity of the social and economical life of each Christian family. By social life he stresses the importance of upholding the moral life principles of human beings to be followed in the society. Respect for the elders in our word and speech, unnecessary intervention in the affairs of others, social appearance, kindness to the poor and justice to domestic servants are some of the social values to be cared for well in Chavara's view. With regard to economic values, Chavara warns that idleness is the cause of all vices (Ts.Ia,12) and that wealth accumulated through unjust means and stealth will burn away (Ts Ia,13, 17), stinginess is evil, and money will be eaten up by worms and disappear like smoke (no.15). He also recommends people not to make a show of their wealth as sooner or later they will be compelled to go begging.

The second section of the epistle underlines the responsibilities of parents in caring for their children. Chavara's epistle covers the education of Christian life in each stage of the child's growth to maturity. He underlines the need for a special atmosphere and sufficient care for the spiritual formation of children. Chavara views children as treasures given by God (Ts, Ib, 1). They must be taught the necessary daily prayers at a very early stage, particularly reciting the holy names as *namajapa* (chanting the holy names).<sup>174</sup> Fear of God guarantees the blessing of God for a family while devotion strengthens the ever presence of God.

<sup>173</sup> Cf. CWC, Vol. IV, *Testament* no. 18, 109.

<sup>174</sup> *Namajapa* is one form of prayer of Hinduism. As the day gets dark it is common for a practicing religious Hindu devotee to light the lamp and begin to chant the name of Rama (Hindu God). Christians also perform *namajapa* reciting the holy names of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. In his biography, Chavara has already described the way he was brought up by his parents. Cf. *Compunction of the Soul*, 3, lines 67-68.

### ***b. Renewal of the Life of the Clergy***

The formation of future personnel was his important concern in his plan for spiritual renewal. The effort for renewal begins with the life of the clergy. According to Chavara, an uneducated priest is not only incapable of doing anything worthwhile in his pastoral work, but might even be detrimental to the salvation of souls. In Chavara's language, the uneducated (priests) are *jnanakurudanmar* (blinds of Wisdom).<sup>175</sup> He made a drastic change in the traditional form of priestly training- *Malapanate* - to a well arranged seminary system. From the historical background of the Syro-Malabar Church and from the priestly formation of Chavara himself we see that there was a lack of proper seminaries and staff for training its own priests.<sup>176</sup> His own personal experience could be the main reason why Chavara was especially interested in starting a well-organized seminary at Mannanam.

On priestly life, Vatican Council II points out that "by sacred ordination and by the mission which receive from their bishops, priests are promoted to the service of Christ, the teacher, the Priest and the King. They share the ministry of unceasingly building up the Church on earth into the people of God, the body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit."<sup>177</sup> To carry out this triple ministry in the Church, there must be good formation facilities and personnel with sufficient wisdom. Thus in 1833, two years after the foundation stone was laid for the monastery, a seminary was started at Mannanam.<sup>178</sup> It became the first organized seminary for the Syro-Malabar Church. The Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly, Monsignor Bernardine, was very impressed by the formation of the priests who came from the seminary at Mannanam. It inspired the Monsignor to order such seminaries to be started, attached to the CMI monasteries. According to Chavara's vision the seminary can transform society through a process of passing learning through priests to parents and from parents to children. His vision was that the whole community would be educated through the seminary, so

<sup>175</sup> Cf. *The Letters*, IX/2.

<sup>176</sup> Here it is pointed out in reference to the seminary at Pallipuram, the only seminary at that time with a limited number of staff, where Chavara completed his priestly formation under Frs. Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara.

<sup>177</sup> *Presbyterium Ordinis*. no.1

<sup>178</sup> *The Chronicles*, 28.

he requested all the Christians to contribute to the expense of building the seminary.

Chavara wanted all priests to take great care in fulfilling their spiritual exercises. He wanted to renew the canonical office as the Syrian community did not have a one of its own. On the other hand, many priests neglected the existing one due to its sheer length. To facilitate recitation of the office fruitfully and meaningfully, he prepared a Breviary. This was approved by Rome and made the official canonical prayer book for priests of the Syrian clergy. Chavara had already thought about this before his ordination. Even during his formation, with the permission of Fr. Palackal, his rector, he had collected books of the Divine Office from different places and compiled them with great effort.<sup>179</sup> As part of his actions for spiritual nourishment and discipline he organised annual retreats and other renewal programmes for the priests. We also find Chavara's strenuous efforts in guiding them to celebrate the mass with proper devotion and respect.

### ***c. Reforms in the Liturgical Life of the Ecclesial Community***

Chavara was a man of dynamism. The reformation of the Catholic community of Kerala and particularly of their liturgical life was one of his major objectives after his ordination. The Christian community of his time was confused by the presence of different liturgical traditions: Antiochean, Chaldean and Latin, and Catholic and Protestant missionaries from Europe and other Western countries with different missionary motives. The diversity of liturgical traditions greatly affected the spiritual growth and discipline of the faithful of Kerala's Catholic community.

Chavara is popularly known as an apostle of the Holy Eucharist and his life was an inspiration to many to live close to Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. He introduced the Forty Hours' adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. During his term as Vicar General he ordered the parishes to conduct one hour of adoration on the first Friday of the month and instructed the faithful to receive the sacrament of reconciliation and Holy Eucharist on those days. The Forty Hours

<sup>179</sup> Cf. K. Porukara, *Short Biography of Our Most Reverend Father Prior of Monasteries of the Third Order of Discalced Carmelites* (Mannanam: 1871), 3.

adoration denotes the forty days of prayer following the passion of our Lord by the Blessed Mother and the disciples of Jesus. As this devotion was very prevalent in Europe on those days, Chavara introduced it in Kerala. It was begun for the first time in Koonammavu and many devotees from near and far came to participate in it. Gradually, it took the form of a festival. He also pioneered a good number of other popular devotions. Besides these concerns, he took special interest in preaching retreats in parishes.<sup>180</sup> The codification of liturgical services, prayer books for priests in vernacular languages, the promotion of devotional practices like the forty hours adoration and May devotion and holy scapular are some of the important contributions Chavara made.

### *e. Formation of the Catechumenates*

Chavara's missionary zeal is visible in his thirst for the salvation of souls through the initiative for the formation of catechumens. There were so many catechumens right from the beginning of the foundation of the house at Mannanam that he started special schools of catechism for them.<sup>181</sup> We find his pastoral zeal was not limited to the Christians alone but also extended to the poor outcasts like *Pulayas*.<sup>182</sup> Many low caste people regularly attended the instructions given there. In those days the instructions for the catechumens were given only at the curia of the Vicariate at Verapoly for the whole of the Malabar region. Many had to travel from distant places to attend catechism. Naturally this also diminished the zeal even of the faithful and, therefore, a school for them was inaugurated on 9<sup>th</sup> October 1864 in the presence of seventy-five *Pulayas* (name of an outcast group) of various age groups.<sup>183</sup> There were occasions when up to 100 baptisms were administered in one day according to the chronicles of St. Joseph Monastery at Mannanam. All the monasteries of the CMI

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<sup>180</sup> Cf. K. Porukara, *Sthapakapitanmar*, 32.

<sup>181</sup> J. Kanjiramattathil, *The Pastoral Vision of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 44.

<sup>182</sup> *Pulayas* is an aboriginal tribe whose members are mostly found in Kerala. They belong to the Dalits of India. The origins of *Pulayar* or the word *Pulai* in Archaic Tamil contain the origins of the Caste or *Jāti* system itself in South India. <http://www.answers.com/Pulayas> (accessed on July 6, 2007).

<sup>183</sup> *Positio*, 277; J. Kanjiramattathil, *The Pastoral Vision of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 53.

Congregation that initially began had Catechumanates attached to them.<sup>184</sup>

## 2. Social Reformer

Kerala in the 19<sup>th</sup> century had caught the attention of the rest of the world through effecting revolutionary changes in the socio-economic as well as spiritual scenarios of the societal framework. Chavara is counted as a Christian social reformer together with other non-Christian reformers. Unfortunately, the historians seem to have left out Chavara as a social reformer of Kerala. He was a silent fighter against social problems, in which he adopted the simple method of welfare programs. His pioneering activities are monuments witnessing to the fame and importance of Chavara for the present generation. A Hindu historian hails the contribution of Chavara thus:

Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara was a social leader, a great genius, who was born ahead of time. A holy light that was farsighted and gifted by the nineteenth century. A social reformer to whom Kerala historians have not done justice.<sup>185</sup>

According to Swami Nikhilananda three conditions must be fulfilled before a man may aspire to become a social servant. First, he must feel the suffering of others. Second, he must find the right means to alleviate human suffering. Third, he must be totally unselfish. There should not be any motive of personal gain or power behind his social service. A person who sees the Divine Spirit in all can be the true servant of society.<sup>186</sup> The life and activities of Chavara prove that he deserves the title of a social reformer. His social activities were focused on the promotion of intellectual, corporal, social and religious values of the human person. The motive behind those activities was not only a Christian mission but also a transformation of the entire society which was then infected

<sup>184</sup> Chronicles of St. Joseph Monastery, vol. III, (1864-1871), 26; P. J. Podipara, *The Carmelites of Malabar (1831-1931)* (Trichinapoly: 1932), 57; Cf. *Positio*, 277-78.

<sup>185</sup> Cf. A. Sreedharamenon, "Renaissance Leader who Walked Ahead of His Time," *Journal of St. Thomas Christians* 16 (January-March 2005): 56.

<sup>186</sup> Quote from J. Chirayil, "Chavara the pioneer of Kerala Renaissance," *Herald of the East* 1, no.2 (October 1991): 47-55.

<sup>187</sup> Cf. CSK, Vol. IV, 95.



by the social system of rigid caste, colour, and creed. The important concerns of social reformation are discussed in the following sections.

### ***a. Educational Reforms***

Chavara was convinced of the fact that education is essential for the all-round progress and development of society. The bold steps taken by Chavara as Vicar General of the Syro-Malabar Church for the commencement of schools are praiseworthy. All his attempts at educating were motivated by the one desire that they should become people close to God. He himself was a man of learning and possessed such knowledge that he wanted to share it with the people. Quoting St. Ephrem, he writes in one of his circulars: "The second source of enlightenment is learning (knowledge)".<sup>187</sup> There were two objectives behind beginning private schools. First and foremost, he realized that education was necessary to understanding the faith and to live the faith. So it was as a religious oriented movement that he insisted that all parishes begin their own primary schools. Secondly, up until his time the Church in Malabar had not achieved much in the field of education. Many people of that time were deprived of primary education due to the social system which prevented them from mingling with each other in society.<sup>188</sup> The Dalits<sup>189</sup> were the most affected section of the society during Chavara's time. Hence, his educational vision was expanded to embrace social welfare, particularly, the uplifting of the Dalits. They were the most affected section with regard to their right to education. Chavara took special care to solve their social problems

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<sup>188</sup> It was a time when the social systems of different castes and classes prevailed. These were obstacles to the development of society until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The emergences of Chavara and later other famous social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Bhimmarao Ambedhkar paved the way for a renaissance in social life.

<sup>189</sup> *Dalit* is the name of the people belonging to those castes at the very bottom of India's caste hierarchy. They were among the poorest and most deprived sections of society and had the fewest social privileges. They were economically and socially ostracized, denied equal access to education and political life. Formerly, they were known as 'Untouchables' because their presence was considered to be so polluting that contact with them was to be avoided at all costs. The official label for them is 'Scheduled Castes'. For more details and their movement, Cf. U. Bhatt, *Dalits: From Marginalisation to Mainstream* (Delhi: 2005).

by starting schools and to give admission to all children without distinction of caste or creed. He made it obligatory for parish churches and monasteries to provide the people with learning facilities.<sup>190</sup> He was the pioneer of popular education in Kerala and the one who inspired the Catholics to start schools in every parish along with their churches. That is why in Kerala schools are popularly called *Pallikkoodam* - a place for education attached to each *Palli* (Church).<sup>191</sup> The poor children were helped with food, clothing and study materials. The Christian educational institutes in Kerala are monuments to the vision of Chavara who gave the momentum for the Church's greater role and involvement in this field. He realized that opportunities for education not only enable one to grow in human values and virtues, but also provide the means to eradicate social evils.

Participating in the bicentenary celebration of the birth of Chavara, Mr. Oommen Chandy, then Chief Minister of Kerala, hailed Chavara in the following words: "The upliftment of Dalits had been a major objective of Chavara Kuriakose Elias. The social reform initiated by Fr. Elias had no parallel in the history of Kerala."<sup>192</sup> Kerala is the first state to be declared 100% literate, and still has excellent educational facilities. The CMI Congregation is also proud of continuing the apostolate of education. Today social discrimination is less in the state of Kerala compared to other states of India. This could be the result of the farsighted vision and hard work of Chavara. These actions were the expressions of his contemplative life and an outflow of his intense love for Jesus. The spirit of Chavara consists in contemplation, the flame of love towards God, which was fostered by the practice of prayer, interior

<sup>190</sup> When Chavara was the Vicar General of the Syro-Malabar Church, he issued a circular through Bp. Bernardine to start schools attached to every church (parish). Cf. C.D. Valerian, *Vannya divya sree Chavara Kuriakose Elias achan*, 137.

<sup>191</sup> The schools attached to churches were known as *pallikoodangal*. As we have seen in the first chapter during Chavara's time, Kalari, the place where one initiates the alphabet, was popular for the education system in society. Today schools in Kerala are popularly known as *pallikoodangal* and more education facilities exist.

<sup>192</sup> "Chavara Elias' role in upliftment of Dalits," *The Hindu*, a National News Paper of India, Monday, January 3, 2005. Cf. <http://www.hindu.com/2005/01/03/stories/2005010306160300.htm>, [accessed on November 23, 2007].

recollection and continual awareness of the presence of God in action and zeal for the salvation of souls as a fruit of that love of God. He taught his followers that the strength of the monastery was not in its thick walls, but in the zeal and spiritual life of its members.

***b. Apostolate of Communication Media and Printing Press***

Chavara realized the need for a press media as a part of his vision on educational activities. It would be very effective not only for the spiritual uplift of the Catholic community, but also a powerful means of conveying wisdom to society. There were two main objectives in starting the printing activity. Primarily, Chavara foresaw the importance of publications for the renewal and progress of the Church. Till his time there were no books on spiritual subjects in the vernacular Malayalam.<sup>193</sup> The printing presses of the Protestant missionaries inspired Chavara to start the press.<sup>194</sup> Chavara ventured out to see Kottayam CMS Press as a model, but they did not permit him to enter. This painful situation forced him to take the challenging step of starting a press. Secondly, the printing media were essential to supply energy for educational activities initiated with the schools. His personal effort and hardship in working for its realization is seen in his narration of its establishment.<sup>195</sup> Chavara together with Fr. Paulos Parampil, who was talented in art, traveled to Trivandrum to see a model and designed a diagram on plantain pith. From this model a wooden print was made.<sup>196</sup> Hence, the first Catholic printing press by the name St. Joseph at Mannanam came into existence on 1846. A prayer book called *Jnanapiusham* (Spiritual nectar) was the first printed book from the press. The articles and spiritual exhortations of Chavara were printed from this press. Hence, there were no Christian homes in Malabar where some books printed at the St. Joseph press were not found.<sup>197</sup> It is

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<sup>193</sup> It is the mother tongue of the Syrian Catholic community in Kerala.

<sup>194</sup> At that time there were two printing presses in Malabar (Kerala), one owned by the Government of Travancore, which was not available for the propagation of Catholic literature, and the other by the CMS missionaries.

<sup>195</sup> Cf. *CSK*, Vol. I, 44; S. Paul, "The Forefather of Malayalam Media family," *Journal of St. Thomas Christians* 16, no.1 (2005):128-32.

<sup>196</sup> T. Bernard, *CMI Sabha: adhyadasakangalil* (Cochin: 1989), 27.

<sup>197</sup> Cf. K.C. Chacko, *Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara* (Mannanam: 1968), 102.

also important to note the role of Chavara in helping to print the first Catholic daily newspaper in India.<sup>198</sup> Besides, there are several Christian publications which were published for the welfare of all. Though he was inspired by the Protestant missionaries, Chavara received wider appreciation from all sectors of society. Compared to the missionaries, Chavara's approach to the people was very different. He gave prominence to the wider interests of the country and society so that the press was not used exclusively for religious propagation.

### ***c. Empowerment of Women in the Church and Society***

In the first chapter we have already mentioned a few aspects of the social status of women during Chavara's times,<sup>199</sup> when the degrading status of women was a matter of social concern like other social problems. They were an extremely unprivileged group which suffered a lot religiously, socially, and economically. They were largely deprived of the basic rights of education, property inheritance, and were not able to move freely in society. In the patriarchal system, they had no freedom either at home or in society or in the Church. Women were denied equality with men and they had no share in the family property. They were totally subject to men and no education was given to them as it is today. Their education used to end with the *Kalari*. The low caste women were forbidden to have even the *Kalari* education. In fact, they were married off at an early age.<sup>200</sup> A woman had no right to look for a job and earn money, instead she was supposed to perform her duties at home.

Chavara wanted a change in the attitude of people to the womenfolk. He had great appreciation and respect for the natural

<sup>198</sup> The first newspaper *Nazrani Deepika*, published by the press started by Chavara at Mannanam is a milestone in its history. Though the newspaper was at the initiative of Mani Nidhiyirickal, Chavara, half a century earlier, had dreamt of a daily newspaper that was capable of becoming the eye and ear of Kerala society. Later it was shifted to Kottayam and known from that time as the *Deepika* Daily. After Nidhiyirickal, the CMI Congregation continued its management.

<sup>199</sup> See chapter I, section CMC Congregation.

<sup>200</sup> Cf., K. Achuthanmenon, *Ancient Kerala, Studies in its History and Culture* (Trissur: 1961), 205; Cf. Jossy, ed., *CMC in the Shadow of the Most High*, 10-12.

qualities of women; their motherhood, their sufferings, their lives as a symbol of peace and as an inspiration for charity. Taking the model of the Blessed Mother, Chavara taught that all women share Mary's dignity, where her *fiat* to the angel became a profound sign of her cooperation in the plan of God's mission of liberating mankind. In *Mulieris Dignitatem*, John Paul II also speaks of this dignity which is shared by all women (no.11).

Chavara admired women especially for their capability for heroic acts and as instruments of peace. The story of St. Anastasia, who defended the Christian faith and allowed herself to be persecuted, was narrated through a poetic work.<sup>201</sup> In his vision on family, it is woman who acts as the instrument of peace. A woman, filled with love, cannot but give love and unite everyone in love (Ts I, a.1). For these reasons they must be greatly respected.

Chavara's initiative for the woman's Congregation came from his vision of upgrading the status of women in the Church and society. The objective of starting a Congregation for women is clearly stated in his own words. "Striving for their own spiritual realization, they (the members of the Congregation), have to teach other girls, and train them in some handicrafts."<sup>202</sup> For him this meant first, self-sanctification and empowering women for social action. The dual purpose clearly leads to the uplift, reform and welfare of women.

#### ***d. Welfare Activities for the Poor and the Downtrodden***

Chavara undertook numerous social and charitable activities to reach the people of all walks of life and he found no difficulty in drawing them to his fold. Until his time there were no recognized Catholic or non-Catholic welfare activities in Kerala society. All his pioneering activities were real challenges, especially as they were initiated with minimum financial support. The important activities were the uplifting of *dalits*, *Upavisala* (House of Destitute), association of confraternity and fundraising programs for charitable purposes.

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<sup>201</sup> "Anastasia's Martyrdom," CWC, Vol.II.

<sup>202</sup> *The Chronicles*, 195.

### ***i. Uplifting of Dalits***

The apostolate for *Dalits* had prior importance in this regard. As we have seen in the previous section Chavara had a special vision for their education so that their status could be improved. He initiated the special school for them in 1864 with 75 pupils. As they lived on daily wages, the school functioned as an evening school and on holidays. The lunch was served to them from the Monastery. During his time the poor and *dalits* were compelled to do hard work. At the same time they were not given the just wages due to them. Chavara objected to this and insisted on the need of providing just wages. So he said, “Do not deny just wages to labourers; do not delay the wages due to the labourer, because it is a sin before the Lord” (Ts I, a.18). According to his view, God is with the poor and Dalits are symbols of “God’s own children” and he strenuously worked for their upliftment. Chavara insisted on giving alms to them; God is to be seen in the poor. In later years these people were called *dharidranarayan* (poor of God) by Swami Vivekananda and *Harijans* (People of God) by Mahatma Gandhi.

### ***ii. The House of the Destitute***

He started houses to give shelter to the destitute which are known as *Upavisala* (House of Destitute of Mutual Love). It was a Christian as well as a people’s movement by which he wanted to inculcate the value of Christian charity in the minds of the faithful. It is a monument to Chavara’s love for the poor and marginalized people of society. Chavara was able to convince the faithful of Kainakary, where the first *Upavisala* was founded, that the running of the house was the responsibility of all. Even the social activities begun by him were always in need of financial support.

### ***iii. Confraternity of St. Joseph***

This was another memorable pious association started by Chavara to help others to prepare for a happy death. The members of the association prepared the sick for a good death and helped the poor.<sup>203</sup> By this initiative we find Chavara’s zeal for the salvation

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<sup>203</sup> Cf. CKS. Vol. IV, 127

of souls. It is a process of preparing souls for everlasting communion with God. Each family should take care of another poor family in their neighbourhood, giving its members special food and clothes on the feast of St. Joseph.<sup>204</sup> Chavara motivated the faithful to do different apostolate actions as Christian witnesses. Every baptized person has a different role to play in the Church. Each one is called to a particular state of life to fulfill his or her duty as a Christian. Hence, the faithful are not an exception. By the association of Confraternity, Chavara gave a new trend and meaning to the active role of laity in the Church in building up the Kingdom of God. The activities like Handful of Rice (*Pidiyari*), Coconut Tree Set Apart (*Kettuthengu*) and Five Percentage (*Noottikanchu*) were not only to increase the fund, but also to encourage people to grow in charity. "Do good to one another. The day in which you have not done good to your fellowmen will not be counted in your book of life."<sup>205</sup> Thus, it is a people's movement in the Church, rather than a clerical one.

In short, the instructions in the code of conduct given to the Christian families, and the Christian welfare activities were truly relevant for the entire society. So the views and activities of Chavara were greatly appreciated by all. In the life and activities of Chavara, the Church in India had a spiritual as well as a social reformer. His good works are a guiding light to the missionary life and missionary orientation of the Syro-Malabar Church.

## **Conclusion**

Chavara's life and activities were during a period of progress and new orientation in the missionary consciousness of the Syro-Malabar Church. All his welfare activities and views were oriented towards the realization of an integral goal. The entire development and apostolate of Chavara and his followers are well appreciated by Pope John Paul II:

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<sup>204</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 93-94.

<sup>205</sup> Cf. "Testament" CSK, Vol. IV, no. 14.

The lives of Fr. Chavara and his followers were committed for the cause of Syro-Malabar Church. See, the innumerable charisma and activities came upon from his dynamic leadership and spirituality. Schools, seminaries printing presses, public awareness centers, religious instruction centers etc., have all come up from that multifaceted charism. He has compiled and improved the Syro-Malabar Liturgy. He could popularize the devotions to the Holy Eucharist and the Holy Family throughout Kerala. Understanding the importance of the role of families in the Church and society, he exhorted and strengthened the Christian families through his writings sermons.<sup>206</sup>

The Holy Father covers every aspect of Chavara's activities in this short paragraph of his remarks. In short, Chavara conveys a great measure of missionary orientation to the future missionaries particularly through his testaments as a reformer of both the spiritual and social life. The ecclesial vision and prophetic role of his life were his foundations in witnessing Christ and inspired others in the Syro-Malabar Church. Chavara visualized the fulfillment of the messianic mission through integral developmental works carried out through the followers of Christ who are witnessing to the Gospel today.

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<sup>206</sup> John Paul II, "A Heroic Son and a Heroic Daughter of the Church in India," *Herald of East* 1. (January 1992): 82-83.



## **Chaper Four**

# **A THEOLOGICAL APPRAISAL OF CHAVARA'S SPIRITUALITY AND ITS PASTORAL APPLICATION IN THE CHURCH**

### **Introduction**

The term “spirituality” as we have already noted in our previous discussions, in its wider sense refers to any religious or ethical value that is concretized as an attitude or spirit from which one’s actions flow. It is a concept that applies to any person who has a belief in the divine or transcendent and fashions a life style according to one’s religious convictions. According to the Christian understanding spirituality is “the life in the Spirit or a life led by the Spirit.” (Rom 8:14). There are different spiritualities which are based on person’s religion. So we have in general spiritualities based on religions, namely, Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist and other world religions and within this context we can assess different spiritualities.

There are different striking questions at this juncture. Is it possible for different spiritualities to co-exist within a religion? Why there are different spiritualities within a religion? It is always possible to have numerous spiritualities even within a religion. There can still be spiritualities even without any reference to the revealed religions. The different God-experiences of certain people within a particular religion add beauty to the variety of religious experiences which could be termed as “multiple spiritualities” in each religion. In the Christian perspective itself we have different spiritualities including, for instance, traditional (Eastern and Western), according to different Orders (Carmelite, Dominican, Benedictine, Salesian and Ignatian

etc.), based on Sacred Mysteries (Trinitarian, Messianic, Liturgical, Sacramental and Ecclesial etc.).

The spirituality of Chavara is based on two aspects that represent its two pillars: the mystical and the missionary. These we have analyzed focusing on his main writings as well as his apostolate from which we could draw great insight at deeper level. In the first section we analyze his writings in their theological perspective. As we know, the literary works of Chavara were not merely the outcome of his intellectual skill, rather they are the result of his profound God-experience. There are double objectives behind these works, namely, intellectual and spiritual. There are two parts in this chapter. The first part is a theological appraisal on Chavara's spirituality while the second part deals with the significance and pastoral application of Chavara's vision in the Church.

### **I. Chavara's Mystical Teachings**

The Church today is gifted with great many saints whose specific charisms and inspirations have magnificently contributed to its spiritual life. A great many works like the Teresian and Johannine writings (St. John of the Cross) are classical works not only in the history of the Church but also of the secular world. The Writings of Chavara are enriched with similar sorts of contributions to improve people's spiritual and secular lives.

An effective praxis of these dual expressions could be derived only from a holistic spirituality. The people, who are accustomed to Indian tradition, are familiar with a kind of holistic spirituality understood well from the triple path -*jnana-bhakti-karma*, of *Bhagavad Gita*. According to this, one could find a perspective of a holistic spirituality which has three constituents: the contemplative perception of the divine presence in the universe (*jnana*), total surrender to the divine Lord in love (*Bhakti*) and participation in the work of the divine spirit (*Karma*). The trio of elements- *Jnana–bhakti–karma*- offers a theological paradigm for an integral Christian spirituality in India. Out of a contemplative experience of one's being in the life of the divine Father, one surrenders oneself in devotion to Christ and inserts oneself creatively in the transforming work of the divine Spirit. One realizes that one's

life evolves within the inner Trinitarian dynamics of the divine life. In this experience, action (*Karma*) is anchored in contemplation; study (*Jnana*) is integrated with devotion and solitude; (*Bhakti*) is oriented to solidarity. The life and teachings of Blessed Chavara impart a combination of such a holistic spirituality to the universal Church

Two important works of Chavara, both poetical and prose writings reveal Chavara's high spirituality and contemplation. We come to know the depth of Chavara's mystical teachings in three ways. Here in our assessment of Chavara's mysticism we call his poetic works his spiritual canticle (*atmageetangal*), the prose works his spiritual colloquies (*atmasallaangal*) and finally his teachings which culminate in his spiritual union (*atmavismruti*), in which we pass through five stages of Chavara's God experience. These works represent the focus of our assessment of Chavara's mystical thoughts.

### **A. The Spiritual Canticle (*atmageetangal*)**

*Compunction of the Soul* or *Atmanutapam* by Chavara imparts his life vision and mystical experiences. Only a poet with a profound experience of God can compose such verses which are integrated with his life. The mystical language used is beyond that of ordinary human minds. Only those who are gifted with mystical grace can appreciate the poetic narrations. Readers of such writings are led to deep and rich mystical experience of Chavara's poetic mind and, thus, we could call this work his spiritual canticle (*atmageetangal*). Card. Varkey Vithayathil, the Major Archbishop of Syro-Malabar Church in his pastoral letter to the Syro-Malabar Bishops, highlights the great God experience of Chavara.<sup>1</sup> By this great work Chavara was elevated to the state of a *mahakavi* (great poet) in the Indian literary tradition. But he is not only a *mahakavi* but a mystical *mahakavi* because we see God who is the see of mercy embracing the soul who is shedding tears of repentance. This poem throws light on the power and beauty of the Eternal Light and readers of it see it as the Divine Light that leads their souls along the dark and narrow paths of their lives. Hence<sup>2</sup>, from

<sup>1</sup> Cf. T.Panthaplackal, *A Pearl Truly Indian*, 71.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Z.M. Moozhoor, *Blessed Chavara: The Star of the East*, 96.

this work we trace the dual portraits of Chavara as a *jnana yogi* (person with divine knowledge) and a mystical poet.

### 1. Portrait of a Perfect *Jnani* [Divinely Wise]

*Jnani* means wise in Indian tradition and denotes a person of perfect knowledge or the most learned person. This perfection consists of his richness in human and divine knowledge. Ignorance is always a sign of bondage and imperfection. One has to liberate oneself from the bondage of ignorance to reach the castle of *jnana* (knowledge). *Jnani* is similar to a Gnostic of Greek tradition.<sup>3</sup> Chavara was privileged with a special grace of God, so that he was a perfect *jnani*; rich in divine and human knowledge. His divine knowledge was imparted to others through the word of God, interpreted in different forms. His literary works are nothing but a poetic expression of his *jnana* (inner knowledge) to the people who search for true knowledge. They impart wisdom to man in his spiritual, intellectual and secular growth. The narratives and experiences that we find in *Atmanutapam* provide a portrait of the *jnani* in Chavara.

#### a. *Longing for Jesus, the Lord!*

Chavara's usages of "I long to see" or *kanakenam*,<sup>4</sup> reflected several times in his writings. This profound expression of great desire for the longing for God has an Indian spiritual inspiration, i.e., a quest for the Divine vision (*darsan*). This is similar to the *darsan* Jesus speaks of through the gospel of St. John (cf. Jn 14:9). One who does not see Christ does not see God. Until he has this vision man is restless on his way to salvation. The Christian thinkers in the early centuries developed the mystical thoughts from the vision of God as the goal and end of human life.<sup>5</sup> The 'longing'

<sup>3</sup> The word *gnosis* (from the Greek word for knowledge, γνῶσις) refers to a Hellenic philosophical term for knowledge. However, *gnosis* itself refers to a very specialized form of knowledge. It is also used to mean a form of spiritual knowledge that is more commonly familiar to people as enlightenment in a religious context. Cf. "Gnosticism," G. S. Wakefield, *The SCM Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, 178.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Compunction of the Soul*, Cantos III, lines 1-2; 17-18, 23-24, 29-30, 33-34, 37-38, 41-42, 47-50.

<sup>5</sup> U. King, *Christian Mystics*, 37.

expressed by Chavara is a 'longing to see Christ'. It is Chavara's Christ experience that articulates all of the *Atmanutapam*. Taking different events related to the life of Christ, he enters into the life of Christ directly. Jesus Christ, the Word incarnate is the only God, who has become one with us-Emmanuel. Chavara longs to see this Emmanuel in all His dimensions and, this, imagines the different stages of the child Jesus' growth in the immaculate womb of the Blessed Mother and subsequent events related to Mary's journey to Bethlehem.<sup>6</sup> According to Chavara, this *darsan* is made possible only when one "stays constantly in His presence; walks along with Him and converses with Him constantly."<sup>7</sup>

### ***b. Experience with God***

Through his Christ experience Chavara established the foundation of Christian faith and life which finds its fullness in God through Jesus. It is through Jesus who is perfect man and perfect God, that the mysteries of truth are revealed to mankind because "no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Mt 11:27); "no one comes to the Father but by me (Jesus)" (Jn 14:6). "Those who love me, will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them" (Jn 14: 23). These scriptural verses inspired Chavara to reach God the Father, through the Son, Jesus Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is through Jesus and his Spirit that a Christian comes to the fullness of knowledge of God.

### ***c. Experience with the Holy Family***

Chavara had a special devotion to the Holy Family, and this special attachment can be seen in the picture of the Holy Family on his study table. Even when he professed in the religious Congregation, he received the name of Kuriakose Elias Chavara of the Holy Family. He allowed the Holy Family to reign in his heart. This fact he himself proclaimed at his death bed: "I have always visualized, remembered and venerated the Holy Family in my Heart."<sup>8</sup> Chavara sees the Holy Family as the earthly symbol

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Compunction of the Soul*, III, 17, lines 17-22.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *The Letters*, VII/6.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. C.D. Valerian, *Vannya divya sree Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan*, 315.

of the Holy Trinity and it is designated as the merging of Heaven and earth. Chavara merges with the life and experience of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph in his experiences narrated in *Atmanutapam*. One of the instances where he relates his life with the Holy Family is the event of Bethlehem journey. He feels that all the pains and troubles the parents had to bear were because of his sins. To see the Emmanuel-Jesus, he also waits and prays together with Joseph and Mary. Besides, we find several other expressions of this devotion in his life and activities. For example, the first religious house was named after St. Joseph and the religious Congregation he co-founded is dedicated to the name of the Blessed Mother.

#### ***d. Chavara's Marian Vision***

The great devotion to the Mother of God and the impact of her life is an outstanding feature that we find throughout Chavara's life. He had a special devotion to the Blessed Mother from infancy, as he was dedicated to the Virgin Mary of Vechoor.<sup>9</sup> His devotion and love for her increased as he grew up and began to discern good and evil. His mother too cares to teach the child to lisp the sacred names of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. Chavara recalls his childhood experience in his works:

And when my infant tongue began to lisp,  
Up to the sky, her finger pointing oft  
The holy names of Jesus, Mary and Joseph  
She, my noble Mother made me repeat<sup>10</sup>

Through *Atmanutapam*, Chavara presents his Marian vision as its major part is dedicated to her. He visualizes the double role of Mary as a Mother and disciple of Christ. As a mother she presented the "incarnated Word" to the world, fulfilling the will of heavenly Father. Her *fiat* to the message of the Lord is being fulfilled here. Chavara narrate the mind of child Jesus in the following words:

Beloved mother, watch over me ,  
Show yourself a mother to me  
And in gratitude, He sweetly smiled.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Compunction of the Soul*, 6.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 3, lines 67-70.

<sup>11</sup> *Compunction of the Soul*, 32, lines 76-80

Mary, in response to the will of God the Father, convinced of her vocation to look after the incarnated Word. She fulfilled her mission in best way possible as a mother. In her response to the mind of Child Jesus, Mary accepted the Word as her son, but could not deny herself as his disciple too.

Mary seeing her creator then  
In the miniature of her child  
reverently kissed His Blessed Feet  
And His hand as the King of Kings <sup>12</sup>

Mary, being the mother of God, was in fact, a closer follower of Christ. This does not diminish his devotion to the other members of the Holy Family, but shows how important the role of the Mother of God was in his life. For instance, if we ask a small child that whom you love most among his parents, he or she may answer 'the mother'. Similarly, the writings and life of Chavara infuse in readers the greater love he had to the Mother of God.

## **2. Portrait of a Contrite Mystical Poet**

Secondly, his spiritual canticle portrays Chavara as a contrite mystical soul. The poems present the mystic heights of his soul's union with the Lord. It values the mystics like Saint John of the Cross. Chavara's spiritual canticle provides true Christian meaning of repentance in the Christian life which transcends mystical experiences. Repentance also has great importance in eastern spirituality, and the impact of eastern tradition is clearly visible in the spirituality of Chavara. In our presentation of Chavara's writings we have already seen that the concept of repentance has a great importance in his mystical spirituality; repentance with subsequent change of life in the soul is more important. Chavara's portrait of the contrite mystical soul expresses two aspects: acknowledgement as a 'sinner' and 'act of contrition'.

### ***a. Chavara's Acknowledgement as Sinner***

In the Christian perspective, sin is described as disobedience of the divine command; any violation of God's will, either in purpose or conduct; moral deficiency in character or iniquity, such as sins

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid. lines 83-86.

of omission and sins of commission. The Catechism of the Catholic Church clearly states, that “Sin is an offense against reason, truth, and right conscience; it is failure in genuine love for God and neighbor caused by a perverse attachment to certain goods” (CCC. #1849). Many accuse themselves of sinning when they have only been tempted to sin—but have not yielded to the temptation. Of course, if one is tempted and yields to the temptation enough to entertain the will to do it, when he knows it is evil, he is then sinning in thought. Jesus says, that “everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (cf. Mt 5:28). ‘Jesus loved the sinner but hated the sin’

It should be remembered that temptation is not sin but only an opportunity to do either right or wrong, to choose either virtue or evil, to serve either God or Satan. Temptations are natural and not sinful, but in yielding to temptation one commits sin. The Catechism of the Catholic Church describes the nature of sin as follows:

Sins can be distinguished according to their objects, as can every human act; or according to the virtues they oppose, by excess or defect; or according to the commandments they violate. They can also be classed according to whether they concern God, neighbour, or oneself; they can be divided into spiritual and carnal sins, or again as sins in thought, word, deed, or omission. The root of sin is in the heart of man, in his free will, according to the teaching of the Lord: “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a man. But in the heart also resides charity, the source of the good and pure works, which sin wounds (CCC. #1853)

When we deal with the concept of Chavara as a ‘sinner’ here we do not mean in the literary sense meaning explained above. Chavara’s acknowledgment of himself as a ‘sinner’ is an act of humiliating himself before God because of his unworthiness, like the tax collector, (cf. Lk 18). It is an act of acknowledging his defects and shortcomings as worthy son of God, but he also relies fully on God’s mercy and love. For forty days and forty nights Jesus was constantly tempted by Satan in the wilderness. Jesus never sinned, because He never yielded to temptation. So the writer



of the letter to the Hebrews could truthfully say. “He was in all points tempted like as we are yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). Chavara’s sense of sin derived also from his apparent feeling of not sufficiently responding to the manifold graces he received from God.

As we have already seen in the section on mysticism, the sense of sin is a mark of one’s entry into the purifying stage of Christian perfection. An authentic mystic feels a deep need of penance and purification.<sup>13</sup> We often hear the ‘sinner’ in Chavara through his own acknowledgement as described in the *Compunction of the Soul*. The following are the terms Chavara uses in this work to acknowledge his status as a sinner: My wretchedness of being a sinner (CS I: 129), Sinner I am (CS III: 55) the sinner servant (the last petition CS III, V: 142), *alpan* (the foolish one, CS III, appendix, 40), I, a sinner (CS V: 144; VII: 69), a great wicked man (CS VII:240), one who is devoid of gratitude (CS VII: 162), *Mandan* (the slothful, CS X:120).

### ***b. Contrite Soul of Chavara***

In the theological perspective repentance, the lament and cry can be seen as related concepts. Generally, we understand the cry as a natural instinct in all created things of nature. Humans, animals and other living beings cry out. A cry occurs due to pain in one way or another and one cries out due to some fear or danger. The spiritual instinct in man differs from other living beings in his emotional expressions. The cry is understood in the human way as an emotional expression, although man also cries out in fear or pain, as do animals.

But there is a specific feature to the cry of man, due to his human nature. As a rational being he foresees danger in his future and his spiritual instinct shows him how to free himself from these difficulties. By his spiritual instinct, man identifies God the Almighty and is aware that dependence on Him liberates him from all kinds of dangers and pains. Hence, from the theological point of view the human cry is very important in the sense of repentance.

Many biblical stories and events explicitly express the nature of the human cry, namely in the lives of King David, Mary Magdalene,

<sup>13</sup> Cf. H. D. Egan, *An Anthology of Christian Mysticism*, xvii

the prayer of tax collector. The act of contrition represented by the cry is a form of man's prayer to God. For instance, the events in the book of Jonah and the cries of the psalmist are expressions of a genuine cry for God's help. In these events we find God's intervention and only God is the ultimate help for man. The cry is expressed through praising God's glory, praying to God's mercy, petitioning for God's help and repenting for one's shortcoming before God.

Let us discuss some of the expressions of the cry in Chavara's *Compunction of the Soul*, where it takes the form of repentance or an act of contrition.

- “Firm to commit sin . . . failing to repair with repentance (II: 31-35),
- “Alas what a grief! I have torn into pieces the purity, the innocence of heart of those days” ( II: 115-116),
- “O Master God-man, source of mercy, Lord, look with eyes of pity on me, a great sinner” (II: 241-242),
- “Master, Lord, Saviour of mankind, Lord, look with pity on me a sinner” (V: 141-142), “
- “Grant me, o source of mercy, forgiveness of sins through your blood.” (VI: 351-352),
- “This sinner, in ingratitude steeped, sin upon sin I heaped, my grief, great grief. Master, look on me, forgive my great sin; in sheer justice I am worthy to be indeed condemned (VII: 61-64),
- “My great sins are the sure cause! Of it when I remember it, how great grief is mine” (VII: 145-146),
- “My great sins filthy, sand like! (VII: 192),
- Woe, bitter woe, all for my sake! Had my sins been fewer, your cross may have been less severe (VIII: 51-53).

Therefore, repentance could be considered a pillar of Chavara spirituality and he himself is a psalmist of contrition.

### **c. Transformed Soul of Chavara**

Repentance alone does not make human being fully united to God, but results in a subsequent transformation of his inner life, *metanoia*, which is absolutely necessary “to enter in the Kingdom of God” (Mk.1:4). The concept of conversion is actualized by a specific

turning to God, which in Chavara's view implies two ways of turning, namely, turning to God as an act of contrition to God for our sinful life and praising God's merciful love and gracious gifts. Chavara narrates his thoughts in the shadow of NT instances. Jesus links his call to repentance, issued at the beginning of his ministry, to his announcement that the longing of the ages "is fulfilled", that God's, long promised and long anticipated kingdom, has, in his own person, finally drawn near (Mk.1:5). "And God showed his love for us by sending his only Son into the world, so that we might have life through him. This is what love is: it is not that we have loved God, but that he loved us (1Jn1:9-10). Christ died for us "while we were sinners" (Rom 5:7, 10); God's love is "prevenient", out ahead of us, calling us: "we love because he first loved us" (1Jn.4:19). Thus remembering God's fidelity and God's liberating acts in history, is the first step in our "turning to God".

Our turning to God is rooted in the reality of God's antecedent act: we turn- we can turn- because God has first turned to us. This means our turning to God is founded upon God's unshakable fidelity. Not our own faithfulness, but God's faithfulness is the bedrock of our hope and the source of our life. Indeed God remains faithful, even if we are unfaithful. Chavara narrates the acts of God in our life.<sup>14</sup> A chain of remembering God's love and gifts are often visible in Chavara's poems, as we have already seen in the section of highlights of this work in the first part. It is not only centred on a life of praising God, but an authentic turning from the sinful life. The work of Chavara is filled with his praising of God and his subsequent contrition over his shortcomings that we see at the end of almost all cantos. The response of Chavara's soul which is transformed by the merciful love of God is reflected in his hymns to the Lord, as we can see in *Compunction of the Soul*:

- "O, God, it is because of your grace that you have made me in the likeness of this greatness."(I: 11-12)
- "O, Fount of Mercy, because of your kindness you cleansed the sin by baptism, wiped out perdition, gave at that time the brightness of kindness and germs of virtue"( I: 33-36)

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. *Compunction of the Soul*, 1-3.

- “God of unbounded, that time you did look on me with compassion, tended, remembered and saved me” (I: 29-32)
- “As you looked upon me with the eyes of mercy I got the blessing to receive the sacrament which cleansed all dirt” (II: 105-06)
- “O, wonder of wonders! He has pardoned all the meanness of this sinner” (I: 129-130)
- “O, God Almighty, you have shed your ocean of mercy upon me without limit, o luck, o luck” (II: 57-58)
- “The Lord of mercy considered me, to the lofty Mother, He did enslave me” (II: 1-2)
- “Fully worthy to be punished justly, with full kindness you saved me O, God” (II: 45-46)

These responses from Chavara prove that he experienced the fruit of his act of contrition to God because only such a soul can identify the grace of God and reciprocate to it. Hence, a mystical poet is a person who is filled with profound spiritual experiences like those of Chavara.

### **B. Spiritual Colloquies (*atmasallapangal*)**

Chavara was a man of God and a man with higher God experiences, and his spiritual colloquies with God unveil his own mystical face. Consequently we can speak of the Spiritual Colloquies (*atmasallapangal*). Like his spiritual canticle, the *Colloquies* also illustrate the story of his contrite soul. He calls us to enter into the cave of God, to see God and become one with Him. The work highlights the deeper God-experience of Chavara. He presents the experience of Moses after the vision of Yahweh and compares the meditation room to Mount Sinai.

Here Chavara gives his own modified experience of St. Teresa of Avila's *Interior Castle* with a deep experience of an abiding sense of sorrow for his sins and a personal encounter with the merciful Lord. The Blessed Sacrament was the center and source of his God experience; that made him its ardent *bhakta* (devotee). Here follow the mystical experiences and mystical expressions:

## **1. Mystical Path**

Every destination requires proper ways and means for arriving at it. Here when we speak of a mystical path we mean Chavara's mystical experience which overflows from his profound devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and his portrayal of himself as a 'returning son' like the 'Prodigal son' of the Gospel. His constant being with the Eucharistic Lord (*vasam*) is best source of his excellent mysticism.

### ***a. Devotion to the Blessed Sacrament***

The portrait of a mystic in Chavara is drawn from his Eucharistic centered life. He received the energy from the Holy Eucharist and was an apostle of the Blessed Sacrament. In the school of Carmel the mystical contemplative life is the fruit of the Eucharistic life. For the Blessed Sacrament of the altar, the fountain of our life of prayer, the life of Elias provides us with a most striking example. The miraculous bread ministered to him is a perfect image of that Eucharistic food, in the strength of which one walks in life's journey. The special cult of the Holy Sacrament has not been confined to Carmel, but we can say that it has always been a constant and important part of the Carmelite and other traditions.

St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi, whom Chavara mentions often in his writings, was attracted to the Carmel of Florence by the fact that the Sisters received Holy Communion every day, a custom not usual in those days. To St. Teresa there was no greater joy than the opening of a new church or chapel as a dwelling for the Lord. It is prescribed by the rules that all members of a Carmelite Community attend the Holy Sacrifice daily and that the chapel be in the centre of the cloister, easy of access at all times, and that the Canonical Hours be recited in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament.

This life centered on the Eucharist was a great inspiration to Chavara. In his writings Kuriakose Porukara describes Chavara's Eucharistic devotion.

The devotion to the Eucharist was shining in him throughout his life. In offering the Eucharistic sacrifice he showed great devotion, care and faith. Besides, the visit to the Blessed Sacrament

according to the rule, he spent a long time daily, praying on his knee before the Eucharist.<sup>15</sup>

This great devotion to the Eucharist inspired Chavara to utilize it as a means for the renewal of the St. Thomas Christian community. The forty hours adoration introduced by Chavara in several churches of Kerala is a monument to his devotion to the Eucharist. For all these reasons he is known as an “Apostle of the Eucharist”.

### ***b. Life in the Milieu of Penitence***

We have seen that the portrait of a contrite soul and the concept of repentance fill his poems. Here also we find that Chavara acknowledges his ‘sins’ and thirsts for the mercy of the Lord. The theme of his meditation is centered on the parable of the prodigal son (Lk 15:11-24). Chavara presents himself in the image of a repentant son returning to the home of his loving father; a soul entering the milieu of turning. Expressions similar to those used in his poems are also found in the *Colloquies*, where he gives different names to his status as a sinner.

“A great sinner” (pp. 13, 25, 38, 46, 67), “I, who am filled with sins” (p. 25), “The wicked” (p.37), “the ungrateful” (p.27), “An ungrateful one” (pp.46, 47), the wretched one (p. 39), *agathi* (least one, 15 times), the poor one (pp. 41, 43), “one whose soul is unclean and one without luminosity” ( p.13), “the blind”( pp. 44, 65). The expressions of penitence are as follows:

- “Behold I come before the holy presence of my Father by repenting on my sins and with the desire to receive complete forgiveness and peace.” (p. 16),
- The heavy cross is the burden of my sins which I have put on the shoulder of my Father.” (p.23)
- As I remember the offences which I have committed , I am ashamed and repent” (p. 65)
- “My good Jesus, pardon me my unaccountable debts which I have committed” (p. 72)

The hero of the parable fully turned to his loving home and made a firm decision not to go astray in the future, but to give himself up

<sup>15</sup> Cf. K. Porukara, *Sthapakapitakkanmar*, 36.

fully to the will of his father. A mystical person also gives himself fully to God. His holistic 'beingness' becomes one with the Lord. We do not see this fullness in ordinary life, but in the lives of mystics. It was the stunning answer to a teacher of the Law who wanted to discredit Jesus' teachings. (cf. Mk 12: 28-34). The conditions that Jesus laid before him were beyond the understanding of people who lead ordinary lives. Chavara accepts his unworthiness often in his writings and fully trusted in the Lord that God would surely turn to him, once he had turned to the Lord. In this perspective he repeatedly emphasized these dual aspects in our life too. Jesus uses several parables and images to convert human minds, but Chavara found this particular parable most attractive. The elements of strong conviction, personal choice, and the virtue of humility we find in the prodigal son when he decides to return home. These factors are guidelines for an authentic person of God and could explain why Chavara was attracted to this parable.

## 2. Mystical Experiences

According to Chavara, "Meditation is a free and friendly colloquy with God. . . . . For, if it is a conversation with God, it presupposes a friendship with God. When friends sit close to each other, they find enough topics to talk about without cessation. If there is love, conversation goes unlimited."<sup>16</sup> Chavara's definition highlights three important elements: friendship, conversation, and love between God and the devotee. He uses different words *chernnu* (joined), *onnichu* (together), *onnichirunnu* (seated together), to express intimacy or unity. This unity comes from deeper friendship, conversation and love. By this usage, he emphasizes the genuine and stable relationship of God and man. The life of the Holy Trinity, in which Father, Son and Holy Spirit are united as one, is the unique model for us to follow.

There are three important procedures to be drawn from his entire work of Colloquies: seeing (*darsan*), abiding or staying (*vasikkal*), and speaking or conversation (*sallapam*) in the life of Chavara. This moment of experience can be compared to the transfiguration event described in the Gospel: Abide and enjoy with the Lord.

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<sup>16</sup> *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 2.

### a. Seeing: *Darsanam*

The 'seeing' is a powerful word when he describes the presence of God, the Father. There are several moments when Chavara describes the importance of 'seeing' in varied forms, such as gazing or looking. He describes the appearance of God, the Father and the gaze of a soul picturing the image of 'the prodigal son' (Lk 15: 1ff). "Behold! my bounteous Father seated on His throne before the tabernacle in the chapel."<sup>17</sup> He laments his shortcomings in the following way: "Oh, it is long time since I saw the beautiful face of my Father". Oh my soul! See the numerous hired servants in Your Father's place.... Seeing them why should you be troubled in heart? .... 'Have a look at Father's palace' and the mansions therein with their graceful high walls.' 'Don't you see a movement at the door'!<sup>18</sup> In the following pages 'Seeing the face of the crucified Christ – each wound, he felt, tells stories of love and sacrifice.

### b. Staying: *Vasam*

Abiding is another concept for expressing staying (*vasam*). The Transfiguration event inspired St. Peter to say "it is nice to be here. Let us make three tents (cf. Mt 17:4; Mk. 9: 5; Lk 9:33)." It symbolizes the image of a true *Bhaktayogi*. To the question posed by the Psalmist 'who shall enter into the house and stay' Chavara's response is significant: "God will not stay in the heart of a sinner because God is holy. One who comes to stay must be ready to sit. If you want to stay in love you must sit in love. You must sit facing the other."<sup>19</sup> This is similar to the figure of Mary at the feet of our Lord, listening to the word of Jesus (Lk 10:39). She was immersed in the presence of Jesus and so forgot everything else. She is the beloved devotee of Christ who sits at His feet listening to His divine word. There is concentration for the devotee who sits at the feet of her Master and picks up whatever words her master says and copies them down in her heart- one find there silence and concentration. The Indian term of *stitapranja* (steady minded person)<sup>20</sup> is a fitting attribute for Chavara who "does not withdraw

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>20</sup> Cf., *Bhagavad Gita*, Chapter II, 65-68 speaks of *Sthitaprajna* (steady minded person). It designates the deep devotion of an ardent devotee always keeping the



from the feet of the Lord until a word is spoken'<sup>21</sup> Chavara reiterates this way to all the *Bhaktas* (devotees) of Jesus. Chavara's definition of meditation has already mentioned are containing three elements, the most important of which is love. One who meditates should be filled with genuine love for Jesus. In his view, the relationship with Jesus has two factors: He is a loving friend and a divine spouse. Our Lord in his last discourse to the disciples, called them friends rather than servants (Jn 15: 14-15) and our relationship with Jesus should be the same.

### c. Speaking: *Sallapam*

*Sallapam* (speaking, talking) is a concept that refers to the genuine talk between friends. The *Colloquies* of Chavara is a collection of his *sallapam* with his friend Jesus. He bases his reflections taking different examples from the Gospel, namely, the good thief who was crucified at the right of Jesus, man at the banquet, prodigal son etc. Seeing Jesus on the Cross good thief made a genuine acknowledgement of his mistakes in the following words; "for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong" (Lk 23: 41b). With greater humility Chavara takes himself in the place of the thief. "Speak, O Lord, to my soul also that I shall be with you in the paradise of Your Grace. Sustain me in your Grace and forgive me my sins."<sup>22</sup> Chavara reaffirmed several times on the necessity of great virtue of humility in our prayers. For instance, he pointed out that the lack of this humility to ask for a garment, denied the man participating at banquet hall (cf. Mt 22: 11-12). Through the parable of prodigal son, God is presented as our loving Father and as children we shall be free to ask Him what we need. Chavara regarded Jesus also as *appan* (father)<sup>23</sup> as *abba* for St Paul (Rom 8:15).

We may wonder why Chavara calls Jesus Father! He may be more influenced by the eastern tradition which regards all three persons of the Holy Trinity in a similar way. This is true on the basis of Jesus' words, "One who sees me sees the Father. I and mind fixed on the Lord alike in praise and blame, health, and illness, success and failure, life and death.

<sup>21</sup> *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 5.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>23</sup> *Appan* is a vernacular word similar to the word 'abba'.

the Father are one” (Jn 10:30; Jn 14:9). Jesus as beloved Father is Chavara’s original contribution which rarely results from the intimate and affectionate experience of a mystic. It expresses Chavara’s profound relationship with God the loving father. In this his shortest work, Chavara used the term God as *appan* thirty-one times. Another Carmelite, St. Therese of Child Jesus loved God as her own loving daddy. The prayer to God is ‘one’s loving conversation with ‘Father’. The basis of Christian spirituality is the relation of God and man as a father and son relationship because Jesus also has taught us ‘God is the loving father’. This ‘sonship’ principle is greatly emphasized in the preaching and message of St. Paul. Chavara’s teachings are a continuation of this biblical tradition. For Chavara Jesus is also ‘*appan*’. One cannot experience God without Christ as we know God through Jesus.

### 3. Mystical Expressions

*Colloquies with the Heavenly Father* includes various mystical expressions of Chavara which are attributed to Jesus. Mostly, these expressions burst out in different ways, on account of his intimate relationship with Jesus as his ‘groom’ (*manavalan*). The unique contribution of Chavara to the theology of the mystical espousal is found in his contemplation of the Calvary episode.<sup>24</sup> Chavara describes the solemn royal procession of the Divine bridegroom towards Calvary, which is the *kalyanapantal* (marriage tent).<sup>25</sup> Another mystical expression is seen in his addressing Jesus as Father *appan*; the father and son relationship. Though there is frequent usage of the same word, particular adjectives are often used to further define his Father: My beloved Father (*ente priyamulla appa ... six times*), my compassionate Father (*ente manoguna appa... four times*) my gracious Father (*anugrahamulla appa ...one time*) and my good Father (*ente nalla appa.. once*)

*Pitav* is a synonym for *appan*, so we find that he sometimes calls Jesus dear father *priyamulla pitavu* (*Colloquies*, 62), *Manogunamulla pitavu* ( my compassionate Father) (*Coll.* 27,

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 21-23.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *Compunction of the Soul*, 70-105, lines 13-24; *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 8.

62 ), *Krunayulla pitavu* – merciful father (*Coll.26*), *Anugraham niranja pitâvu* ( my grace filled Father, *Coll. 25, 62*), *Ente pattangayaya pitavu* ( my true Father, *Coll.46, 52*). Another feature of his work reveals the most intimate relationship with Jesus. Jesus was completely a part of his life and we look at Chavara’s possessive nature in the way he always calls Jesus ‘my Father’ (*ente appa*). Chavara was deeply immersed in the passion of Christ and this is reflected in his profound flow of mystical experiences through intense and emotional language.

### C. Five Stages of Chavara’s Spiritual Union (*atmavismruti*)

At the close of our assessment of Chavara’s mystical spirituality, we can trace five phases of his God-experience through which he reached the pinnacle of ecstatic divine encounter. There are also certain spiritual sources that nourished him in his ascent to the mysterious dimensions of divinity. We come to know Chavara’s God-experience, “a mystical experience”, through his works. Chavara’s divine encounter and union with the Lord emerged from the episodes of Mary and Martha, and the parable of prodigal son of the Gospel. The entire works of Chavara depict the image of a repentant and returning soul as the prodigal son rejoins his home. This process consisted of several stages.

#### 1. Lamentation and Contrition

The characteristic note throughout the *Compunction of the Soul* and *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father* is the continuous remembrance of the innumerable gifts received from God and the mercy of God. In the first two chapters he enumerates these gifts he received from God and he laments over the mistakes of his childhood.<sup>26</sup> Yet, Chavara declared that he had never tarnished the grace that he received from baptism.<sup>27</sup> Then the question arises as to why he laments and repents? Only a man with the specific grace of God like Chavara could understand this. According to him even the slightest sin disturbs saintly souls. The thought of one’s own imperfections and lack of virtues caused in him a great compunction of heart. He writes to the members of the Congregation:

<sup>26</sup> Cf. CSK. vol. II, *Atmanutapam*, 1-2, lines 18-24.

<sup>27</sup> C.D. Valerian, *Vannya divya sree Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan*, 315.

If you continue to live, there won't be any of these monasteries here 20 years hence. The strength of monastery does not consist in the thickness of its walls, but in the virtue and religious zeal of the monks who dwell in them.<sup>28</sup>

According to Chavara, mourning over one's trespasses is a prerequisite for spiritual treasures. Remembrance of the sinful stage, lamentation of the soul's faults, contrition and humility will aid in attaining high contemplation and thereby become a means of union with the Lord. "A sinful heart is incompatible to union with God. Therefore... I must come to my Saviour Jesus Christ my beloved Bridegroom, to beg pardon for my sins".<sup>29</sup> In another meditation he expresses his shyness in presenting himself before the Lord:

Here I come before You, Oh my Father... O, merciful Father... looking at Your holy head I feel frightened to think how it came to be pierced with thorns.... I am ashamed of myself by reason of the part played in disfiguring Your face.<sup>30</sup>

Here we find Chavara as a person conscious of sin, rather than one with a guilt complex. In the guilt complex the point of reference is law whereas in sin consciousness the point of reference is the love of God. Guilt creates despair as in Judas, whereas consciousness of sin generates hope and confidence as in Peter. With such profound confidence and love Chavara prays to God, the Almighty:

Stretch forth your arm, bless me Lord  
From my sins, absolve me, I pray  
Look upon me, free me from misery  
Guard me to your grace draw me <sup>31</sup>

The elements of contrition, humility and self-surrender in Chavara take root from his firm conviction that he is a trifle in God's Hand.

## 2. Exodus to Father's Home

"Here I come before you, oh, my heavenly Father, with a heart full of repentance and firm purpose of amendment to feel your peace

<sup>28</sup> Cf. CSK. vol. IV, 65.

<sup>29</sup> *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 3.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. *Compunction of the Soul*, 35, lines 177-180.

in my heart.”<sup>32</sup> Here we find the beginning of his exodus to meet the Lord. But he is afraid to go alone to face the Lord as he feels himself to be a great sinner. So in the next step we see the soul seeking the intercession of all the saints. Here, the strong faith dawns on Chavara that God would even compensate for one’s shortcomings, since he is ever kind and merciful. In this spiritual pursuit, he pleads for the intercession of St. Teresa of Avila and the fullness of her spiritual wisdom. He is certain that she would earn for him all spiritual gifts. He loved her more than his own mother. Chavara imagined himself as a mere worm in the presence of God. This testifies to his yearning for the Ultimate. This phase closes with visualizing St. Teresa entering the abode of Jesus, the Lord and master of the universe, seated with Joseph and Mary, and praying for his access into the higher realms of spiritual awakening. The image of the prodigal son again strikes us with Chavara’s depiction of his appearance. He uses the typical appearance of his own people who wear a country cap (*thoppipala*) and carry a walking stick (*kattuvadi*).<sup>33</sup> These two things symbolize protection on the journey as in the “the helmet of salvation” (Eph 6:17) and “thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me” (Ps. 23:4b).” Chavara relates these local concepts to the biblical expressions. His exodus to encounter episode is full of mixed feelings of doubts and hopes. The beautiful home of the Father, the privileges, the wealth lost through the simple carelessness of sin etc. are all expressed here.

### 3. At the Door of Divine Encounter

The distinctive mark of Chavara’s spirituality is this intense desire to see God. It is a great longing for a *darśan* (divine vision). Chavara earnestly desired for the vision of the Divine Face with his small eyes and as a poet he declaims:

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;

<sup>32</sup> *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 3.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. CSK, vol. III, 16.

Born in her womb, to Bethlehem he came  
 To obey mighty Caesar, I long to see

.....  
 The Lord of goodness, proclaiming Himself  
 As our loving friend, I long to see,<sup>34</sup>

Zacchaeus ardently desired for a *darśan* (divine vision) of Jesus (Lk 19: 3a). Courageous Nicodemus passed through the darkness of night to meet Jesus as he greatly desired to know about him and this desire was realized.

The Samaritan woman's wish is fulfilled as she desired for the water that gives her ever-lasting life (Jn 4: 1-25). Here we can compare the soul of Chavara on the shores of immortality, seeking heavenly waters in this stage of divine encounter. He was convinced that those who desire the living water would have it abundantly. Here we see Chavara's inner soul praying as in the ancient sages' prayer. "Lord, lead me from mortality to immortality."<sup>35</sup> The picture of the loving father in the parable of the prodigal son encourages and gives hope of such a divine encounter. He is a little perplexed as to why the door would open to him too, who is shabby both in attire and character. Full of hope in the Lord he patiently waits for His appearance and embrace.

#### 4. Contemplative at the Feet of the Lord

The episode of Martha and Mary in the gospel is a particular instance where Mary's role was accepted as the better one by the Lord. Meister Eckhart states that three things caused Mary to sit at the feet of Christ. The first was that God's goodness had embraced her. The second was ineffable longing: she longed for she knew not what, and she wanted she knew not what. The third was the sweet consolation and delight she drew from the eternal words which flow from the mouth of Christ<sup>36</sup>. Here our Lord does not say Martha's role is unimportant, but distinguishes that the grade of vocation to religious life is higher than that of family life. Mary who was at the feet of our Lord is model for Chavara.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. CSK. vol. II, Ch. 3: 4, 12-100, 17.

<sup>35</sup> *Brahadaranyaka Upanishad*, I, iii, 28

<sup>36</sup> Cf. S. Rakoczy, *Great Mystics and Social Justice: Walking on the Two Feet of Love*, (New York: 2006), 81.

Chavara learned a similar way of experiencing God from *rishi* or sages of ancient India. The life of a *rishi* (sage) symbolizes a spiritual man seated contemplatively at the feet of his Lord, clad in white and covered in ashes. Chavara was a *rishi* (sage) in the true sense of the term as he was seated at the feet of our Lord in deep contemplation. By contemplation or prayerfulness here we mean to live uninterruptedly in the awareness of the presence of God in all situations. In the Indian way of thought contemplation is *dhyanam*, a powerful spiritual concept, defined as “a stream of thought of God, uninterrupted like a flow of oil.”<sup>37</sup> The stream of thought or awareness of God must keep always flowing, no matter where one is or what one does. Unless the branches of the vine belong to the stem it can no longer have life or produce the fruit. At this stage, we perceive that the key to Chavara’s divine experience was his intense thirst to be with God by all means. It was an experience like that of the apostles who witnessed the transfiguration of our Lord. “Lord how beautiful to be here” was their joyful response of the event. Chavara was a person who longed for God’s *darsan* (vision). This, indeed, was the great achievement of Chavara and because of this he can be rightly called *dhyana-yogi*, a contemplative.

### 5. State of Ecstasy and Divine Vision

The elements that constitute the God experience of Chavara are his close dwelling in the Lord and engagement in a hearty dialogue with Him, oblivious of his surroundings and fully absorbed in an ecstatic union. His mystical experience reached its zenith when the human elements dissolved and were transformed into the divine. This union excluded all distinctions and limits of time and space. In the flood of ecstasy we find many mystical expressions flowing from the soul of Chavara. These are expressed in three ways: repentance, long desire to see and eschatological hope. Chavara enjoyed the experience of the fatherhood of God and also

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<sup>37</sup> *Dhyanam* is a Sanskrit word, defined as *Taila-dharavad-avichina-smrti santanarupam dhyanam* in *Sribhasya*. 1.1.1. (a Hindu scriptural text). The term is generally used to describe practices that lead to *samadhi* or union with the eternal life principle. Cf. “*dhyana*,” R. Greaves, *Continuum Glossary of Religious Terms* (London: 2002), 100.

saw Jesus as the Father because through Jesus, God, the Father is revealed and known to the world.

Behold the doors are wide open! There my Father himself comes out! Oh, to be in this wretched attire! My Father is out to embrace me! Oh, no, be off. I am not worthy to be touched by Him. So let me fall prostrate at His feet.<sup>38</sup>

These words denote the boundless joy of a soul that has reached the preliminary stage of God experience. Now, God embraces the soul with tremendous love as His ‘dear son’ making him his own. And he expresses his thoughts with a mind full of gratitude.

Father, let me raise my eyes, may I lift my ungrateful eyes to your face, which tenderly calls me to him. Let my eyelids open and the tear drops that brim therein fall unto the earth.<sup>39</sup>

Such a union marks the culmination of the mystical experience of Chavara. These themes of the meditations are the genuine expression of his inner mystical union with God. Referring to St. Teresa’s stages of mystical experience Chavara exhorts the members of the religious community to take up the challenge at least to reach the fourth stage.<sup>40</sup>

## II. Chavara’s Missionary Spirituality

As we have seen in the beginning, missionary spirituality connects two Christian realities: spirituality and mission. Christian spirituality is fundamentally based on one’s life in the Spirit and it generates the attitudes of charity, generosity and availability towards the other. It is an imitation of Christ’s own mission as he himself set the example “by doing good and healing all” (Acts 10: 38). The mandate of Christ’s mission received from Thomas, the apostle, is being continued through his zealous sons and daughters of Kerala. Chavara is such a sort of a symbol, who gave a thrust to the missionary consciousness in the Syro-Malabar Church. We make an assessment of Chavara who is regarded as the second apostle of the Church in Kerala, and see how he lived the missionary charism

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 4-5.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. CSK., vol. III, 6.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. CWC, vol. IV, *Letters*, VII/8, 84.



by integrating contemplation and action within his life of prayer and his spirituality of ministry.

### **A. Two Ways of Chavara's Witnessing Mission**

The key factor of his mission was centered on a mission of authentic witnessing through 'an integral liberative vision'. The assessment of Chavara's missionary spirituality is viewed in his ways of witnessing: his prophetic life, ecclesial life, and the activities aimed at an integral liberation of human society. These elements treat the essential aspect of every Christian as a missionary of Christ and in dedication to the body of Christ. His *Chavarul* (Testaments) also play vital role in this regard and must be studied.

#### **1. Ecclesial life of Chavara**

The ecclesial life of the Church changed a lot with the Council of Vatican II. We find several shifts in its life and witness, primarily in its structure and outlooks. Firstly, the former idea of 'Church as institution' has changed to 'Church as a sacrament' of God, guided by the Spirit.<sup>41</sup> Secondly, the former nature of a hierarchical view of the Church shifted towards understanding it as the people of God.<sup>42</sup> Thirdly, the change in outlook on the importance and role of laity in the Church also is a vital shift.<sup>43</sup> Fourthly, the primary importance of the local Churches instead of universal Church has a greater importance. The ecclesial life of Chavara depicts an image of a missionary with a vision of the Church. "A visionary is a far-sighted optimist who, by seeing in and around, can identify the end result of what is happening and will be able to suggest what is good for the future."<sup>44</sup>

The ecclesial personality of Chavara had a great impact on the life and development of the Syro-Malabar Church. The whole reformation and active works related to the *ecclesia* of Syro-Malabar are considered in this section. Chavara's ecclesial vision is often reflected in his words to his own confreres of the religious

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, ch. 1.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, ch. 2.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, ch.4; John Paul II, *Christifidelis Laici*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, December 30, 1988.

<sup>44</sup> T. Panthaplackal, "Ecclesial Dimension in Blessed Chavara's Endeavors," *Journal of St. Thomas Christians* 16, (January-March, 2005): 136.

community. The following words could be similarly applied to the life of the Church when he makes the remark that “the strength of the monastery does not consist in the thickness of its walls, but in the virtue and the religious zeal of the monks who dwell in it.”<sup>45</sup> Therefore, the life and witnessing are vital elements rather than the structure in which one lives. In this perspective, the ecclesial life of a person has an important witnessing value in the Church. His devotion to the Holy Catholic Church and to her visible head the Holy Father was amazing in the words of Fr. Leopold, his spiritual father:

Among his virtues the most outstanding was his ardent faith and devotion to the Holy Catholic Church and to the Holy Father. He had an ardent desire to spread the light of the Holy Catholic Church to all directions; he was grieved to the point of shedding tears when he heard of the trials and persecution of the Church and eagerly longed to see the days of her triumph.<sup>46</sup>

Apart from the above features, we shall also examine two important elements that highlight the value of Chavara’s ecclesial life to his personal witnessing as a missionary.

### ***a. Loyalty and obedience to the Universal Church***

The pure ecclesial personality we find in his outstanding qualities of “burning love and faith in the Holy Mother Church and sincere loyalty to the Holy Father.”<sup>47</sup> Chavara respected the legitimate authorities. He believed that obedience is essential in attaining sanctity and halfhearted submission will not take us anywhere near genuine holiness. And it is not easy to obey an authority or leadership whole-heartedly if it doesn’t understand the people and recognize their needs. This had been the experience of the people from the early centuries of the history of the Church in India. His extraordinary spirit of obedience was manifested when he and Fr. Thomas Porukara were transferred to distant churches in spite of their request to be allowed to continue the work of the monastery at Mannanam.<sup>48</sup> But Chavara gracefully accepted the order of the

<sup>45</sup> *The Letters*, VI/1, 65.

<sup>46</sup> L. Beccaro, *A Short Biography of the Venerable Person* (Koonammavu: 1871), vi.

<sup>47</sup> C.D. Valerian, *Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 235.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. *The Chronicles*, 24-25.

Prelate in the spirit of obedience. The episode of his fight against the Roccas Schism reveals his impeccable adherence to the true Catholic communion under the Roman Pontiff. An offer for Chavara to become a Bishop was a 'temptation' he faced from his opponents. He recognized their intention and wisely rejected their offer.<sup>49</sup>

With this prudent decision, Chavara proved his loyalty to the Church and the Holy See. By elevating Chavara to the altar of the Church, Pope John Paul II, recalled with love and gratitude all the services of Chavara for the Church. "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 St. Peter and the Universal Church. As Jesus prayed for the disciples 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 be in us" (Jn 17:21).<sup>50</sup>

#### ***b. Role in the Administrative Setting-up of the Syro-Malabar Church***

The Syrian Church was craving for a stable administration. In fact, the diverse administration structure badly affected its spiritual growth. Chavara views the greatest reason for this as a lack of spiritual leadership, namely, that of native bishops of Syro-Malabar rite.<sup>51</sup> With the existence of different rites, lack of Christian charity among the missionaries, and misunderstanding of the missionaries by natives, it was not an easy task to maintain unity. Chavara himself grieves over the disunity among his own people. "As the magnetic needle always points towards the north, the brethren of my own flesh and blood, called the *Nazranis* of Malankara had their hearts set, from the earliest times, on getting Syrian bishops. This had often endangered their spiritual life and led them to split away from the communion of the Holy Church. And as any close observer can perceive, the holy way of life and exemplary conduct has not yet taken root in Malabar"<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>50</sup> *Herald of the East* 1 (January: 1992), 83.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. T. Panthaplackal, "The Ecclesial Vision of Bl. Chavara," *Herald of the East* I (January 1992): 89.

<sup>52</sup> *The Chronicles*, 146.

Realizing the above facts and the importance of getting autonomy for the Syro-Malabar Church, Chavara suggested a division of the Vicariate of Varapoly between Syro-Malabarians and Latin Christians as a solution. The letter he wrote to Cardinal Alexander Bernabo, the Prefect of the Congregation of the Propaganda Fide in 1869 illustrates this truth:

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 recent times have a bishop of their own.....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 bishop of their own will cease. Then gradually their relationship with Babylon will end.<sup>53</sup>

This particular letter had great significance in the history of the Syro-Malabar Church when the appointment of their own bishops came into effect with the first two Vicariates namely, Kottayam and Thrichur, in 1887. Therefore, his role in fighting for the identity of the Syro-Malabar Church and its having its own bishops are remarkable aspects of his service to the Church in India.

### **c. Sharing of the Gospel Message in Letters**

Chavara's letters often resemble biblical quotes, to the extent that we could say they were based on the scripture. Some of the following examples testify to the truth of this. To the Holy Father he writes : "to the Eminent and exalted throne of His Holiness Pope Pius IX, who holds the keys of St. Peter who was assured that the gates of hell shall not prevail and wield" (Mt. 16: 17-20).<sup>54</sup> His concern for the growth of the religious community in Mannanam is expressed in the following words: "...the harvest is plentiful but laborers are few. Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers in to His harvest" (Mt 9: 37-38). Chavara regarded education as most important in the life of everyone. As eyes are to see the things in the world, so wisdom is to know God, the creator

<sup>53</sup> *The Letters*, 13-14; See more details, *Herald of the East* 1 (July 1991): 30-36

<sup>54</sup> Cf. *The Letters*, I/1, 1.

of all. In this regard he views a non-educated person in the following word of our Lord who says that “ they are blind leaders of the blind; and when one blind man leads another, both fall into a ditch” (Mt 15: 14).<sup>55</sup>

In reference to Thomas Roccas, Chavara writes another scriptural note. “He who is not with me is against me, he who doesn’t stand with me scatters” (Lk 11:23). Jesus distinguished the life of an ideal Christian by proposing a way as “love your friends and pray for the enemies” (Mt. 5: 44). It is also not proper and genuine for a Christian who loves only the people those who love. In a similar way, Chavara recalled the proper life of a religious. For every religious, it is important to fulfill the will of God that is expressed through his superiors. Hence, he puts the question “if we, having been called by God, had joined the monastery to live according to our own wills obeying only the superiors whom we like, then our behavior is no better than that of the ordinary people! If it were our wish to live as we like, why did we choose this vocation?”<sup>56</sup> “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” (Matthew 26:41). Chavara employed the words of our Lord in the context of renewal of our religious zeal from time to time.

#### ***d. Efforts of Reunion of the Separated Brethren***

The Reunion of Jacobites<sup>57</sup> was a challenging mission for Chavara and his colleagues. For this reason Chavara himself referred this matter to the Holy See and suggested a possible solution when he wrote a letter to the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation of Propaganda Fide.<sup>58</sup> Fr. Mathai Mariam Palakunnel, a student of Chavara, refers to a letter and the efforts they together made in regard to the reunion of Jacobites.<sup>59</sup> As a positive step on the part of Holy See we find Pope Pius IX invited all the bishops of the Churches who were not in communion with Rome to participate in

<sup>55</sup> Cf. *The Letters*., IX/2, 95

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, VI/1, 64.

<sup>57</sup> P. J. Podipara, *The Efforts for Reuion in Malankara, South India*, (Roma: 1953).

<sup>58</sup> Cf. *Letters*, II/5.

<sup>59</sup> *Positio*, 314-15, Cf. J. Sebastian, *Palakunnel vallyachante nalagamam* (Changanacherry: 1972), 114-15.

Vatican Council I. To this positive step Chavara took the initiative through Vicar Apostolic to invite the Bishops of the Jacobite Church to take part in the Vatican Council.<sup>60</sup> Chavara's desire and subsequent efforts in uniting the separated Churches clearly shows his sincere love for the Church and its growth.

## 2. Prophetic Life of Chavara and Mission of Witnessing

Generally, a prophet is understood as a messenger of God, a reader of the signs of the time, a religious leader and the envoy of God; he is the bearer of God's revelation to His people. According to some the term 'prophet' originates from the Near Eastern Phenomenon<sup>61</sup> whereas others claim that it derives from Greek cults, in which prophets' interpreted answers to questions put to oracular mediums.<sup>62</sup> The prophets emitted messages from the divine through inspired speech, interpreted omens and dreams and cast lots and divination. The concept of a divine interpreter is common in religion, yet the function varies according to culture and, thus, the term can be defined only with respect to a particular religion.

### a. Prophet in Scriptural Sense

In the biblical background of analysis we see the concept 'prophet' in different senses and terms. The concept of prophet in Israel went by a variety of names; *nabi*, *hozeh*, *ro'eh*, and *is-aholohim*; the most common of which was '*nabi*', meaning, "to call". The Greek word *prophetes* is the translation of the Hebrew *nabi* and, most probably, this word is derived from the Akkadian *nabu*, which has the basic meaning of 'call'. Hence *nabi* would mean a person who calls forth. Combining these two meanings, one could say that a prophet is one who is aware of his being called by God in order to speak forth and act in the name of God. The former meaning refers to the specific personality of the prophet as one who is personally called by God for a specific task. Prophecy was in the strictest sense of the word a "calling" "or vocation."<sup>63</sup> Moses was

<sup>60</sup> *Positio*, 278; footnote 11.

<sup>61</sup> "Prophet," J. Bowker, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions* (London: 2003), 770.

<sup>62</sup> "Prophet," *The Columbia Encyclopaedia*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition (New York: 2004).

<sup>63</sup> Cf. J. Pathrapankal, "Chavara, A Prophet of our times," *The Lord of Heaven and Earth* by P. Kalluveetil and P. Kochappilly, ed., (Bangalore: 2004), 129.

in this sense the first *nabi*; others included Jeremiah and Isaiah. Other terms such as *ro'eh* and *hozeh* were translated as 'seer' to speak in general terms of prophets, but these could be applied to false prophets, as in the narratives of 'Elijah and the prophets of Baal or in the case of the raving 400 prophets who gave King Ahab the prognostication he wanted to hear' (1Kgs 22).<sup>64</sup> The seer is a visionary. The term *hozeh* tended to be used only of court seers (1Chr 25, 5). The third term is *isa-elohim*, meaning the man of God. As an *ish ha elohim*, Elisha anointed Saul as King of Israel. As a result there were different kinds of prophets divided into cultic and classical groups. The cultic prophets had the visions of God in connection with the altar and were possessed with the visible signs of God (for instance, Amos, Micah, and Isaiah).

## **b. Chavara's Prophetic Role**

The prophetic attributes of *isa elohim* may be well suited to the life of Chavara. As in the life of Moses, who was the first one to be called by Yahweh, prophets are God's men. He experienced Yahweh as a greatest friend and conversed with him 'face to face' (cf. Ex 33:11) and communicated the message of Yahweh to the Israel. The prophetic figure of Moses implicitly conveys that prophets are not mere foretellers, but leaders who show the right direction.<sup>65</sup> The life of Chavara reveals these three qualities, namely, a close intimacy with God, sense of history and a total involvement in the destiny of the people.<sup>66</sup> In this perspective let us discuss Chavara's prophetic role.

### ***i. Relationship with God***

As prophets are envoys of God, the relationship between God and prophets is a vital element. In the biblical perspective the name received by every prophet is very significant. Thus we have Prophets Elijah, which denotes 'Yahweh is El', Hosea, 'Yahweh is salvation'. Their names carry a sense of a closer relation with God. Unless

<sup>64</sup> 'Prophet,' D. L. Jeffrey, ed., *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: 1992), 645.

<sup>65</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (New York: 2007), 4.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. J. Pathrapankal, "Chavara, A Prophet of Our Times," P. Kalluveetil and P. Kochappilly, eds., *Lord of Heaven and Earth*, 127-34.

the life and deeds correspond to their relationship with God, we cannot consider them as prophets of God. The baptismal name of Chavara was 'Kuriakose' which means in Greek 'one who belongs to the Lord'. The "Lord is my portion" is a motto that Chavara received and practiced from a very tender age. While he was a student in the seminary the loss of Chavara's parents and brother brought him to a critical juncture. It was a moment of crisis to his priestly vocation and the future. As he was the only male child to continue the lineage of Chavara family, the relatives insisted that Kuriakose be brought home to continue the family line.<sup>74</sup> Even Fr. Thomas Palackal, who was his rector, had to send him home and Chavara had to yield to the circumstances. But within a short time he managed to settle the problems and persuaded his sister to occupy the Chavara home and take care of the property, in contradiction to traditional customs of their society.<sup>67</sup> Chavara gave all his inheritance to her and returned to his priestly formation. Thus Chavara remained firm and asserted his commitment to the Lord as his portion through his determined action.<sup>68</sup> This conviction of belongingness to God becomes still more explicit through the mystical experiences we have already discussed in his colloquy with the heavenly Father. All genuine prophets are men who experience profound intimacy with God. Pope Benedict XVI also points out that the important characteristic of prophet is that he converses with God face to face as a friend does with a friend.<sup>69</sup> This life of intimacy with God prompted Chavara to work so hard for Christ and for his Church.

## *ii. Chavara's Sense of History*

The Syro-Malabar Church had to undergo a lot of historical vicissitudes from the first to the eighteenth century. From the above discussions on the St. Thomas Christian community, we see that the community in those periods was striving for its autonomy, more

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<sup>67</sup> According to the traditional custom prevailing in Kerala, the family properties are inherited by the male children. The younger son generally owns the house and properties related to it. As Chavara was the youngest among them and the only surviving male, no one else could claim the right. In an exceptional way he give away all his rights.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. G. Kaniarakath, "The Lord is My Portion: A Key to the Spirituality of Bl. Chavara," *Lord of Heaven and Earth*, 250.

<sup>69</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 5.



than being attentive to its missionary duties. In fact, Chavara dedicated most of his active life for the reformation and dignity of Christian life of the community. This sense of history inspired him to work for the welfare of the Syro-Malabar Church. He knew that the Church in India had an authentic apostolic tradition and a genuine spiritual wealth, which had been blurred and confused through the historical events of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries following the arrival of the Portuguese. The Kerala Church was in need of renewal and renaissance. A good formation for the future clergy and the building up of Christian families were essential in order to restore the rich traditions of the St. Thomas Community. We find Chavara's truly prophetic role revealed when he fought against the Thomas Rocco schism, which was similar to the fight of Prophet Elijah against the followers of Baal in the OT. He saw it as the greatest threat to the unity and harmony of the future of his Church. The prophetic vision of Chavara enabled him to relate to all the various aspects of the life of the Christian community. His pastoral vision was so comprehensive that no aspect of Christian life was left out in his all embracing commitment to transform society. When we look at the present Syro-Malabar Church, we find the dreams of Chavara are being fulfilled. Today we see a lot of Christian institutions for education and charity and other centers for social welfare.

### *iii. Involvement in the Destiny of the People*

The Prophets, as men and envoys of God, were people living with the people, which mean that they were involved in every aspect of people's lives during the OT period. Their call might demand a radical social or religious change. Prophet Isaiah raised his voice against injustice and oppression (Is 1:16-18). He also warned against a foreign allegiance. "Trust in Yahweh; be quiet and keep calm" (Is 7:4) "if you do not stand firm in faith, you shall not stand at all" (Is 7:9). His language is clear and bold in declaiming that the greatest resource in time of trouble is faith, absolute trust in and dependence upon God. In the Book of Amos we see a prophet who fought against social injustice in Bethel

You have oppressed the poor and robbed them out of their grain...  
I know how terrible your sins are and how many crimes you have

committed. You persecute good men, take bribes, and prevent the poor from getting justice in the courts. And so , keeping quiet in such evil times is the clever thing to do.<sup>70</sup>

Prophet Nahum directed his attack against Nineveh, Israel's ancient enemy. The social context out of which the prophets spoke, shaped their basic message. Chavara was a stumbling block for those who were supporting the activities of Thomas Roccas and the seekers of petty interests. He was a messiah for the poor and dejected class of the society and was actively involved in eradicating other social evils. Therefore, Chavara was very concerned about the people of his time and all his social and spiritual activities express his total involvement with the people as a missionary.

### **B. Chavara's Concept of Human Integrated Life expressed in Testaments**

To live fully as a human being we need to adopt an integrated approach and make adjustments in areas where we have not been fully liberated. There are some important aspects to be considered, namely, our individual inner experiences, physical body and behaviors, cultural connections and relationships, and our society and environment. Holistic life is another concept similar to an integrated human life. The term 'holistic' points to the oneness of several factors, not merely a particular aspect. For instance, when we speak of a holistic health of a perfect human being generally our immediate thought is of a physical health. But one is not fully healthy and perfect with his or her perfection in physical dimension. According to certain studies, there are three important features which together make man's holistic health, namely, the physical (body), intellectual (mind) and spiritual (spirit) aspects. Finding and bringing together these aspects into one focal point, leads to holistic human life. At this stage we say an integrated human person is perfect in a human way.

In religious point of view it is a process for one to reach in perfection. Perfection is the final joy for a human person. From Christian perspective we know that Jesus himself has set a model for a dynamic process of evangelization aiming at the integral

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<sup>70</sup> Am 5: 10- 13

liberation of humanity from all forms of evils. It is fundamentally based on the holistic messianic mission of Jesus, foretold by Isaiah (cf. 61:1-3) and narrated by the evangelist Luke (cf. Lk 4:17-21). In the messianic mission, narrated by Luke, the cry of the poor and the exploited was of prime importance to Jesus. How was Jesus a challenging Messiah and a liberator? How did he realize that the “Kingdom of God” can be actualized by liberating people from all kinds of oppression?

These questions have to be seriously considered with reference to the life of Chavara. The same method was adapted by Chavara. The dignity of man, who is endowed with body and soul, was the basis for all his social activities and humanitarian services. As the main objectives in his project of integral liberation plan, Chavara underlined the intellectual, moral, social and religious values of the human person beyond the limits of caste, colour or creed. Values provide the solid foundations for ideal human life from which one makes his or her personal and professional judgments and choices. Cardinal Varkey Vithayathil, the Major Archbishop of Syro-Malabar Church, praising Chavara’s approach to the value based education, added that “religious and moral values should be inculcated in young minds. When Chavara said that there should be an educational institution attached to every Church, he meant that religious education and academic training should complement each other.”<sup>71</sup> Chavara underlines these values through his *Chavarul* (Testament), that we will see in the following sections.

### **1. Moral and Social Values**

Chavara lays down a lot of moral values for building an ideal family and society. Moral values are things held to be right or wrong or desirable or undesirable. Some of the moral values are care and responsibility, fairness and equality, freedom and courage, fulfillment in life, cooperation and trust, honesty and openness. In this aspect Chavara advised the people, “Do not wander into other people’s houses hunting after news” (Ts I: 7), “Do manual work according to one’s social status. A man of honor does not sit idle. Idleness is the mother of all vices” (Ts Ia: 12), “Do not teach the children to

<sup>71</sup> “Chavara Elias’ role in upliftment of Dalits”, <http://www.hindu.com/2005/01/03/stories/2005010306160300.htm>, (accessed November 23, 2007).

tell lies and to use cunning means. When such faults are found in them immediately correct them and induce them to love and respect truth and justice.”(Ts Ib: 10). These are just a few instances of things that must form one’s moral behavior.

While morality is sometimes described as ‘innate’ in humans, the scientific view is that a capacity for morality is genetically determined in us. Morality consists of principles concerning right and wrong or good and bad conduct and means living within a code of conduct based on spiritual values and positive moral qualities; the character in speech, verb, and appearances. Immorality on the other hand is when one’s thoughts, words and actions are mixed with the acquired vices of anger, greed, arrogance, lust and attachment. Morality is ultimately the practice of purity in thoughts, words and actions. Chavara insists on this aspect in his testament:

Practice the virtue of modesty and chastity in your walking, sitting, and lying down and also while bathing with the utmost care. Lack of modesty is highly shameful before God and men. You shall know on the last judgement day how many boys and girls are cast into hell, because they went about naked and enjoyed touching one another.<sup>72</sup>

Again in the second part of his testament on bringing up children, Chavara specifically emphasizes this aspect. These values also we find when he speaks about the life atmosphere where he was brought out.<sup>73</sup> “Younger children should not be allowed to walk about naked, even inside the house. Don’t utter vulgar words and terms of abuse in their presence” (Ts II: 3).

In the social values the code of conduct emphasizes charity and justice as social virtues. Both these aspects are drawn from the perspective of earning and the proper use of wealth. In a specific manner he reminds the rich to distance themselves from a show of their richness and stinginess, and to be instead charitable. In addition, Chavara stresses the matter of just wages for the laborers and to avoid any undue delay in paying them (Ts. no.18), concern for the poor, right property, the proper use of wealth, and the proper way

<sup>72</sup> *Testament I*: 19.

<sup>73</sup> *Compunction of the Soul*

of earning. Trading is harmful to one's soul and even to one's own wealth. Chavara reminds people with utmost care to nourish a sense of justice (Ts. no. 13). In the testament of Chavara, charity stands as both a social and religious value which elevates one to the status of gentleman.

## **2. Intellectual Values**

As an educationist Chavara was convinced of the importance of education and intellectual growth. He speaks out on this matter mainly in the second part of *Chavarul*, where he deals with the responsibility of parents in bringing up their children. He states, that "as soon as children come to the age of reason, they should be sent to school. Besides, the parents should enquire about their studies and their friendship. Their studies must be tested every Sunday." (Ts Ib, 6.) As a part of intellectual growth, Chavara warned that "one should be neither too stern nor too lenient with one's children. Too much of indulgence will make them proud and too much of severity and punishment will make them desperate, shameless, and weak of intellect." (Ts Ib, 9). Chavara had strong reservations about reading the scientific books of pagans which, according to him, serve only to teach ignorance. He warned the people that keeping such books is like keeping a fire in a hay-stack. (Ts Ia, 22). In the subsequent parts of same section, Chavara gives a common instruction, insisting on the reading of good books that not only enlighten our intellectual minds but also inspire us to live virtuous lives. He illustrates a beautiful instance of an illiterate beggar turned to the life of wisdom by spending his money to buy good books.<sup>74</sup>

## **3. Religious Values**

Most of the instructions given in *Chavarul* convey different human values. All those values are ultimately destined fundamentally to religious values. In the world of fanatics, Chavara's guidelines teach us of how to become religious persons living in a secular society. The elements in the testament, meant for Christian families, bear witness to this and are filled with Christian teachings and values. He strongly argues for the celebration of the Lord's Day in a fruitful manner and fulfilling one's spiritual responsibilities as a Christian (Ts Ia, 3, 22).

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<sup>74</sup> *The Letters*, 111.

Also from a secular point of view his writings serve to people of all walks of life who desire to have a good and peaceful family and life. As the family is the basic unit of a society in its integral development, he initiated his activities from the grass roots level. The children who emerge from a well disciplined family background provide future leaders for society. This aspect is more vital even than having good vocations in the Church. Chavara was born, trained and well disciplined in an ideal Christian family which enriched his future life.

Let us see how Chavara transforms secular values towards the values into religious. On quarrels or problems in the family, Chavara instructed us to seek a solution in the family itself rather than going to court. He visualised an everlasting relationship of the families once the solution is found in family itself. Instead, the court which is a legal place, providing justice to all, may not be able to re-establish the former relationship but could, instead, destroy families (Ts I, 2). So here Chavara means that applying intelligence and prudence in one's decision enriches one's religious life.

### **C. Three Dimensions in the Missionary Spirituality of Chavara**

As we have five stages of Chavara's mystical life, here also we find some new findings when we analyze his missionary spirituality. St. Paul states that, "Faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1Cor 13:12). The missionary spirituality of Chavara derives from three dimensions, namely, spirituality of love, spirituality of hope and trust and a spirituality of authenticity by which he could carry out the welfare apostolate that rendered service to the society. Chavara and other founding fathers founded a Congregation as a spiritual movement for the transformation of society. So it reflected this aim in various forms such as education, social uplift of the lower castes and the poor, ministry of the word to the faithful, media of communication, and socio-cultural activities etc. Paul insists that unless one lives in a life rooted in selfless love, everything else is a meaningless sham. So we begin with the virtue of love in Chavara.

## 1. Spirituality of Love

Christian life, which is founded on Christian love, is perfect only with its two ways of love, namely, love of God and love of neighbor. Jesus himself clearly affirms this when he replies to a lawyer's question. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mt 22: 35-40). These words of our Lord show clearly the way in which one must live as a Christian. The life of Chavara reveals that he followed this law faithfully on this precept of dual love. The pillars of Chavara's spirituality, both mystical and missionary, reflect his love for God and love for neighbor. So we cannot view them as separate features of his spirituality, but must consider them as integral constituents. The pillars are built on a base.

Firstly, we discuss the love of God understood by Chavara in the following lines. Chavara was convinced of God's love as true Love, which only comes through a relationship with Him. God's love can be summed up in this passage of scripture where St. John narrates:

Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.<sup>75</sup>

The narrations and Chavara's poetic works clearly express God's love. God is the Creator of all things and, by His very nature, He is love. The human being itself is incapable of becoming what it would like to be. God says love is unconditional and sacrificial, and it is not based on feelings; therefore, love is not an "intense affection... based on familial or personal ties". To understand what true love is and to be able to truly love others, we must know God, and we can do this through a close personal relationship with Him. We can

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<sup>75</sup> 1 Jn 4:7-11

have that close relationship with God by putting our faith in Jesus Christ, who was God's sacrifice of love for us.

We find a transition of Chavara's love for God to love of neighbour, identified in four specific stages. We will present them in four succinct expressions as given below.

- Remembrance and burning in love (*Smarikalum jvalikalum*)  
He remembers the numerous blessings given by God and as a grateful response he burns in love of God.
- Remembering and repenting (*Smarikalum thapikalum*)  
He remembers his sins and shortcomings and repents having wounded the loving heart of God.
- Remembrance and ever burning in love (*Smarikalum ujjvalikalum*)  
He remembers that though he was unfaithful God granted him several special gifts instead of curses and as a response to this he ever burns in love of God.
- Daring venture and Leaping surrender (*Thuniyalum erangalum*)

As a response to the numerous blessings and special gifts received from God he ventures into the practice of heroic virtues and surrenders himself for the service of the people of God and the people around him.<sup>76</sup>

In Christian spirituality, the love of neighbour is not merely an affection towards the other, but a determination to be part of the other in many respects as Jesus says: "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Jn 15: 13). The principle Jesus laid down here is one's sincere readiness to sacrifice himself unconditionally for the other. The expressions in the testament of Chavara, the code of integrated life, mostly derive from his expression of the love for neighbour.

## 2. Spirituality of Hope

Hope is theological virtue and is an essential virtue in a missionary spirituality. To hope is to be nurtured and sustained by a great faith,

<sup>76</sup> <http://www.blessedchavara.org/spiritual.asp>, (accessed February 27, 2008).



based upon a promise made by a power beyond one's own, that of God. Hope, thus, is believing in the promise of God and that God has the power to fulfill that promise. It is not uncommon for a person to lose hope when things are not going well in their life. When faced with difficulties and problems we feel fearful and helpless, we become overwhelmed, and it does not take long for a sense of hopelessness to set in. Focusing on our own real or perceived limitations and inability to change the condition of our life results in feeling stuck and paralyzed. Fear makes us lose hope, which then leads to a loss of confidence.

We speak here of the hope and trust in the background of Chavara's welfare activities and apostolate. Several events and instances in Chavara's *Chronicle* and *The Letters* show how he developed the spirituality from these three aspects. A glance at Chavara's pioneering activities proves how hopeful and profound was the trust he had in God. Today the mission activities and apostolate of modern missionaries are costly affairs requiring extensive monetary investments. The spiritual wealth of hope and trust in God are replaced with material wealth. From this perspective and in the time of Chavara, one could not think of starting of a school, a printing press or other activities. Blind faith and rich hope moved him forward to carry out his plans.

*The Chronicle* narrates the troubles and situations he had to face in establishing the press.<sup>77</sup> Chavara narrates these, naming numerous benefactors through whom God helped him to create the press. He narrates a scrupulous situation and the miraculous help through the intercession of St. Joseph regarding a payment for the press materials. Chavara states in the following words:

Soon we managed to pay this amount but we had no money left to pay the wages of the workman etc. We all began to praying to St. Joseph and the Guardian Angel. One day while I was inside the church gloomily, but hopefully praying, I was called out to meet a visitor. He turned out to be Nellipuzha Itty from Cherpunkal Parish, who had earlier given us 1000 *Chakrams*. When, in the course of our talk, I mentioned to him our need he

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<sup>77</sup> Cf. *The Chronicles*, 38-39.

at once handed over to me 500 *Chakrams* and promised to send more *Chakrams* later.<sup>78</sup>

To found a convent for women, Chavara began with eighteen rupees.<sup>79</sup> Chavara firmly believed in the divine words, “Unless the LORD builds the house,

those who build it labor in vain” (Ps 127:1). These words reflected his trust in God’s help. The instances described above are inspirations for the future generations to imbibe. Chavara teaches that surrendering oneself in faith and hope into the hands of the one who calls becomes the foundation stone of a spirituality of hope and trust. To hope is to believe that there is something holy and something hidden in the most ordinary situations. A spirituality of hope and trust, when lived to the full, is a witness that the gospel is above all Good News

### 3. Spirituality of Authenticity

The concept of authenticity has received a significant amount of attention recently as people search for meaning and happiness, particularly in their professional lives. Authenticity refers to the truthfulness of origins, commitments, sincerity, devotion, and intentions.<sup>80</sup> Like many other popular concepts, different people have different views about authenticity and many people feel very strong about their own views. But it depends on how one chooses to live their precept of authenticity. Some people might assert that an individual is being authentic if he is being completely honest and participating in the here-and-now. There are others who assert that authenticity involves many other features, including, e.g., always being centered with themselves and others, living a completely integrated life with their own values and principles, always with the feeling of complete meaning or sense of purpose in their lives, etc.

However, the major philosophical movement called existentialism has studied authenticity for years and helps us to understand more about what is authenticity, along with its relationship to the concept

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 39; *Chakrams* : the currency prevalent during Chavara’s time which we have already discussed in the previous chapter. Fn.136.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>80</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Authenticity>, (accessed March 5, 2008).

of meaning. Existentialists assert that if an individual is not living authentically in his life, then he loses meaning and can fall into chronic anxiety, boredom and despair. People might pursue “quick fixes” to avoid the responsibility of living authentically.<sup>81</sup>

The spirituality of authenticity that Chavara imparts to his followers does not differ from what we have stated above. His truthfulness, transparency, determination and commitment form his authentic spirituality. We find several instances of this in Chavara’s *Chronicle* and *The Letters*. Chavara reaffirms the essential elements for an integrated life to be adopted by every missionary of Christ. He lived the principles that he preached to others: if one wishes to preach the gospel to others with compassion and conviction one must open one’s heart to experience the unlimited compassion of the Lord. It is essential that our zeal for evangelization should have its source in a true sanctity of life. This world is looking for preachers of the gospel to speak to it of God whom they know as being close to them, as if they could see him who is invisible.

### **III. Significance and Pastoral Application of Chavara Spirituality in the Global Church**

Through Jesus we, all Christians, are invited to become “perfect as the heavenly Father” (Mt. 5: 42). The greatest principle and the way are founded on LOVE, in which we find two dimensions: vertical and horizontal. They are better expressed in the life of saints. Chavara’s Spirituality is well founded in these two Gospel principles, love of God and the love of neighbor. Two forms of love in Chavara are expressed in his life of mystical and missionary spirituality. Chavara’s discernment of the pathways is most helpful in leading people in our times towards a theo-centric self-transcendence. When we look into his life we see that he saw everything as sacred and everything led him to union with the Lord. The very life of Chavara shows that he was very human in his words and deeds, but was filled with the love of God. His union with God rendered him exquisitely human. Everything was seen as related to God and so everything gave him a sense of sacredness. His experience as well as his entire teaching can be summarized in

<sup>81</sup> Cf. “Authenticity,” [http://www.managementhelorg/prsn\\_wll/authentic.htm](http://www.managementhelorg/prsn_wll/authentic.htm), (accessed March 5, 2008).

his personal encounter with the living God who came to meet him in every moment of his life.

### **A. Chavara as an Inspirer to Religious Missionaries**

The life of Chavara proves that the religious rules and life are no barriers to missionary activities and vice versa. The religious status is no more a barrier when we use the term 'Church is missionary by nature.' The primary concern of religious life consists in the measure of Christ experience received day after day through an intense life of prayer and meditation. The different apostolates undertaken by religious are means for every religious to share their God-experience by which he join with the missionary endeavours of the Church. *Ad Gentes* envisaged the 'planting of Church as the primary duty of missionaries' to describe the word evangelization (AG no. 6).

The founding of a religious community and starting of a seminary for the Syro-Malabar Church were the first signs of spiritual awakening initiated by Chavara, through which he founded a structure for the religious missionary priestly life. We have seen Chavara's role as a co-founder and the great role he played in the Congregation after the death of other two co-founders. Each had his own image of the religious community. Thus we could say it could have been very different without Chavara. Regarding the new community, Chavara visualized it differently. An early biographer of Chavara writes:

The community under Fr. Chavara blended the contemplative with active life, without a formally approved rule of life or religious vows. The founders, however, had in mind the institution of some kind of a preaching Congregation after the model of the Dominican Order.... The nature of the active life the founders had in view was more or less similar to that of modern active religious institutions.<sup>82</sup>

Chavara was profoundly inspired by the Bishop's idea as he also wanted to be a person dedicated for the service of the people. The pioneering activities of Chavara were well rooted in the

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<sup>82</sup> V. Plathottam, *The Carmelite Congregation of Malabar (1831-1931)*, 30-1.

missionary spirituality, based on the Nazareth Manifesto of Christ presented by Luke. ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, To set free those who are downtrodden, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord’ (Lk 4:18). Among the evangelists, Luke presents one of the most profound and pivotal passages in the New Testament on Jesus’ missionary life and it clearly and distinctly define the objective of his ministry. The aim of evangelization is to effect a transformation on both the interior and exterior level.

St. Therese of Child Jesus was a model for a religious missionary. Her innermost desire to become a missionary, expressed in her letters and spiritual writings, had a great impact in declaring her the Patroness of missionaries. She says ‘I’d like to plant your cross on heathen soil...., preaching the Gospel on all five continents.’<sup>83</sup> One could be a good missionary living successfully within the sphere of religious life. Her life presents a model for an authentic Christian missionary, not in extraordinary activities, but an ordinary life in extraordinary way elevated her to the patroness of all missionaries. Her mission emerged from the greatest commandment of our Lord, Love. She places love as the centre of the mission, thus giving mission movement direction and meaning.<sup>84</sup>

Turning to the life of Chavara, our Lord’s commandment of love energized him to move forward. The successes and responses experienced by his followers (CMI Congregation), and which they still receive today, are certainly valuable for the religious missionaries. The CMI plenary assembly made an important observation on the evangelization programmes in accordance with the vision of Chavara, noting that the changing society, forces the present missionaries to respond to the challenges of today. The assembly proposed that our pastoral service must have a twin thrust in India in the coming years: focusing on the underdeveloped areas through evangelization work and through educational endeavours, particularly schools and establishing our institutions in the cities for the pastoral care of the

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<sup>83</sup> Manuscripts, B, 3r.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. J. Giallanza, “Saint Therese of Lisieux: Missionary Doctor,” *Spiritual Life*, Vol. 42, (April: 1996): 237.

Syro-Malabar migrants.<sup>85</sup> Taking relevant aspects from the life of Chavara let us discuss how he is an inspirer for present missionaries of the Indian Church which faces various challenges in its mission.

### 1. Religious Life as Call to Holiness

Vatican Council II reaffirmed the religious life as a responsible, powerful and visible sign that strongly inspires the members of the Church to heroically fulfill the duties of their Christian call. Chavara's vision of religious life evolved from his ecclesial vision. Religious are called to holiness and are models in the Church. They are those destined to remove the spiritual blindness from the people and implant in them the seeds of holiness and make them sprout and grow.<sup>86</sup> These are the objectives and goals clearly expressed in founding religious Congregations both for men and for women. This is explained against the background of the Kerala Church, which lacked declared saints even after many centuries. Chavara visualized the presence of religious communities can make greater impact to the Kerala Church which lacked the religious Orders of its own during his time. The presence of religious communities can do a great deal in making the life of the faithful spirit filled and fruitful.<sup>87</sup> Chavara envisaged the religious life as "an imitation of virtues". His own life was an exemplary model in this regard, as can be seen when we go through his exhortation and letters to priests and nuns. The religious, as spouse of Christ, must learn the art of loving him and attain union with him.<sup>88</sup>

Chavara put forward simple guidelines on how to lead a temperate life by a religious. Through holiness, the life of every Christian can become a fruitful part of the Church's mission (RM 77). "Holiness must be called a fundamental presupposition and an irreplaceable condition for everyone in fulfilling the mission of salvation in the Church. The Church's missionary spirituality is a journey towards holiness. The renewed impulse to the mission *Ad Gentes* demands holy missionaries."<sup>89</sup> Chavara valued time as so precious in one's

<sup>85</sup> Cf. A. Kariyil, *General Plenary Assembly (GPA) April 11-15, 2007*, Circular letter of CMI General, PG/621/2007.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Jossey, *CMC in the Shadow of the Most High*, 41.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. *Ibid*

<sup>88</sup> Cf. *The Letters*, VII/6, 82.

<sup>89</sup> J. Esquerda Bifet, "New Evangelization and Missionary Spirituality at the beginning of the Third Millennium", *Mission Today* 3 (March : 2001): 415

life. Every moment is an occasion to move towards holiness. A missionary is really such only if he commits himself to holiness. In this regard, Chavara categorizes people into two groups. He describes in his own words: "Some like to read light materials, such as news and stories; others may like reading about the holy passion and sufferings of particular saints. The first group cares more for knowledge and enjoyment, the second group for knowledge and devotion. The latter is the sure way to acquire virtue and preserve the same."<sup>90</sup> By this view Chavara teaches the religious the way of reaching out to the union with the Lord. So he describes further:

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. At first you will not understand the language. Then it is that the Lord will lead you to the wine-cellar and pour out some wine for you—a little first. In course of time you will begin to understand the language. When your spouse sees that you understand His speech, he will speak more and more distinctly, show you the magnitude of his love. Then the bride will love more and the bridegroom will rejoice over it and adorn her with ornaments. Thus commences the divine union.<sup>91</sup>

This image of Chavara is beautiful, and similar to the teachings of St. Teresa of Avila who presented different grades of prayer. Moreover, Chavara suggests in his teachings that silence is a vital element in our continuous relation in our union with the Lord. Therefore, Chavara often discourages unnecessary conversations of religious and seeking into the affairs of others.<sup>92</sup> Conversing unnecessarily is apt to give rise to numberless thoughts, fancies, and desires alien to the duties and purpose of contemplative life, assailing the soul at the hour of prayer and distracting it from God.

## **2. Life Rooted in Profound God- experience**

In the Catholic tradition, it is impossible to talk of prayer without considering the Holy Eucharist the supreme act of prayer. It is the

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<sup>90</sup> Cf. *The Letters*, VII/7, 85.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> Similar thoughts are reflected on different occasions when Chavara writes to the members of his own community and to the nuns. Cf. *The Letters*, VI/1, 62; VII/7, 85.

Eucharist that strengthens the spiritual life. Chavara, who is known as an apostle of the Holy Eucharist, sustained his holiness through the Eucharist. Here one cannot forget Chavara's *abba* experience. The *abba* experience derives from Jesus' *abba* experience. This experience becomes 'Jesus experience' for the followers of Jesus. "He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him" (Jn 14:21) Here John speaks of the essence of *abba* experience, which consists in keeping God's commandments. They exist in the Word of God. One realises them in love. Faithfulness to the Word of God and the Commandments of love must be the basis of true God-experience. St. Paul confirms that the realization of *Abba* experience to every man comes through Jesus activated by the Holy Spirit. "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (Rom 5:5). The experience of love and communion is the means to learn to love God as God loves us. St. Teresa says that God's love in the Eucharist is a very intimate friendship; "God begins to communicate with the soul in so intimate a friendship that He not only gives it back its own will but gives it His. For in so great a friendship the Lord takes joy in putting the soul in command and he does what it asks since it does His will."<sup>93</sup> Communion is a chance to be purified from imperfection, delivered from misery, comforted in affliction and supported in weakness. "The high point of Christian prayer is the Eucharist, which in its turn is to be seen as the 'summit and source' of the sacraments and the Liturgy of the Hours. Communion with God, which is the hinge on which the whole of the spiritual life turns, is the gift and fruit of the sacraments."<sup>94</sup> The Eucharist is the means for reaching intimacy with Jesus. "Contemplating the face of the Lord" is a specific practice that Chavara followed in his long conversation before the tabernacle.

### 3. Love for the Holy Church

Our relationship with the Holy Eucharist is grounded in our relationship with the Church as the ecclesial Body of Christ. The

<sup>93</sup> *Way of Perfection* 32:12

<sup>94</sup> *PDV*, no. 48.



love of the Church, as mystery of communion through mission, is learnt from the love of Christ himself, “who loved the Church and was offered in sacrifice for her” (Eph 5:15). Chavara through his ecclesial life imparted to his followers a profound message of sincere love and commitment to the Church’s life. He loved and experienced the mystical body of Christ. The apostolate and life of Chavara prove how he loved and served her. As a strong defender of unity, faith and pioneer of pious activities, he made strenuous efforts for its growth. This attitude of commitment and sincerity for the growth of the Church must be the mind of a religious missionary who is also part of the Church. He is an inspiration to the modern teachings of religious life that it is the heart of the Church. If the heart does not work, it will be lifeless.<sup>95</sup> Pope Benedict XVI commenting on the life of priests, says that obedience to Christ, which corrects the disobedience of Adam, is found in ecclesial obedience, which for the priest is in his daily work, above all in obedience to his Bishop.<sup>96</sup> The consecrated are people who are supposed to engage themselves in the activities that will illumine the body of Christ. Our own “ecclesial communion” is born from the love of Christ and his Church. And such love can be learnt only in intimacy with the same Christ, present in the Holy Eucharist and hidden in the preached word by the Apostles. Therefore, “communion” is listening or loving obedience, an effective and affective life.

#### **4. Influence of Blessed Mother**

We have already a section pointing out Chavara’s Marian vision by which we find how Our Lady influenced him in his religious life. The Church recognises that Mary is the model and protector of all religious. She is the guiding star of evangelization (EN 82; RM 92). She is unique model and mediatrix in the mission of the Church. There are three aspects we find in her as a model: listening to the Word, responding and self-donation. Her openness, fidelity to the word of God and to the activity of the Holy Spirit (cf. Lk 1: 35, 11: 27-28) paved the way for her to become the queen of all

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<sup>95</sup> Cf. Sergius, “Kuriakose Elias Chavara-A gift of God for the Kerala Church,” *Herald of the East* 2 (July: 2007): 32.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. “Discourse to the Parish Priests of Rome, 13 May 2005,” [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches/2005/may/documents/hf\\_ben-](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2005/may/documents/hf_ben-)

religious. She has been a model of motherly love to all those all who join in the Church's apostolic mission for all generations of mankind (LG 65; RM 92). The attitude of Mary becomes a school for missionaries.<sup>97</sup>

Chavara shared his own experience through his letters: "whenever they toiled keeping in mind our Blessed Mother they always reaped a good harvest because till now, I have never cast a net in the name of our Mother which has been in vain."<sup>98</sup> On another occasion he wrote down an example which inspires the sisters to seek the intercession of the Blessed Mother:

Today 1st March 1867. God has granted many blessings. When I and my spiritual director very Reverend Father Delegate Apostolic were faced with a great sorrow, our sisters were made to pray three times, 'The Hail Holy Queen..... and the 'Remember.....'. Immediately this thing that came like a mountain was made like a flower by our Mother.<sup>99</sup>

The Blessed Virgin Mary became the greatest human model and intercessor for him. Marian devotion was an incident in his spiritual make up. Fr. Leopold writes, "his (Chavara's) devotion to Bl. Mother was characterised by a genuine filial love" Pope Benedict XVI reaffirmed the role of Our Lady in the life of a priest in his discourse to the parish priests of Rome:

This Eucharistic, priestly and missionary life in communion with the Church is learnt by living in the "cenacle" with Mary the Mother of Jesus (Acts 1:14). Now we can imitate her oneness with the priestly heart of Christ, because she is our mother, because of the fact that she is the "Mother of the unique High Priest. Truly in our union to Christ and to the Virgin we are nourished by that serenity and that faith of which we all have need, either for our apostolic work or for our personal existence.<sup>100</sup>

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*xvi\_spe\_20050513\_roman-clergy\_en.html*, (accessed February 14, 2008).

<sup>97</sup> Cf. Giovanni Palo II, "Maria e la missione della Chiesa nel'anno del rosario," *L'Osservatore Romano*, 22 Febraio, 2003, 7.

<sup>98</sup> *The Letters*, V/15.

<sup>99</sup> *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, 24.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, "Discourse to the Parish Priests of Rome, 13 May 2005."

Chavara spoke eloquently of her glories to others and frequently tried to inculcate in them her devotion when thoughts of death came to his mind.

## **B. Spiritual Vision of Chavara Reflected in the Teachings of the Church**

There are three modern apostolic teachings of the Popes that, centered on the Holy Eucharist, which invite us to deepen our devotion to it. John Paul II in the Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* and the apostolic Letter *Mane Nobiscum Domine* lays out for us certain guidelines of “Eucharistic spirituality” for all vocations. While re-reading these texts we feel profoundly touched, especially if we have had this experience before the Tabernacle. Christ continues to speak today from heart to heart.<sup>101</sup>

In the active dimension of the Eucharist we see the life of missionary in praxis which is stated by Jesus during its Holy institution: This is my blood poured out for many, do this in memory of me: Jesus offered himself for the entire universe to his redemptive mission. And strengthened by the Eucharist the disciples are sent to the world to bear witness to God’s love in the person of Jesus Christ.<sup>102</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas speaks of apostolic activity as “a communication of what is found in contemplation and prayer as the soul of every apostolate.”<sup>103</sup> The Vatican II made this point more explicitly and declared that “the love of God and man is the soul of the apostolate” (LG, no.33). Pope John Paul II, as a person who based his spirituality on the Eucharist, was inspired to write consecutive encyclicals in the third millennium in the forms of *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* and *Mane Nobiscum Domine*.

In the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* document, the Pope suggested an ever greater pastoral engagement based on the contemplation of the face of Christ, as part of an ecclesial pedagogy aimed at “the high standard” of holiness and carried out especially

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<sup>101</sup> Cf. <http://www.zenit.org/article-13171?l=english> (accessed October 8, 2007) Here is the document published by the Congregation for Clergy, for the World Day of Prayer for Sanctification of Priests.

<sup>102</sup> John Paul II, “Eucharist is the Sacrament of Mission” (Eucharistic Congress , Lima 15 May), *Omnis Terra*, 191 (1988), 413

<sup>103</sup> Cf. *Summa Theologica*, II-IIq.188, a. 6

through the art of prayer (*RVM* no.5) The Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, returned to the theme of contemplating the face of Christ, now from a Marian perspective. In the midst of the Year of the Rosary, he issued the Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, with the intention of shedding light on the mystery of the Eucharist in its inseparable and vital relation to the Church. The substance of the Holy Eucharist is again stronger with *Deus Caritas Est* (God is Love) written by Pope Benedict XVI. So here we shall briefly analyze the teachings of the encyclicals related to the great mystery of Christian faith, the Eucharist.

### **1. *Ecclesia de Eucharistia***

This Encyclical of Pope John Paul II on the Eucharist is one of the most remarkable of modern times. The Second Vatican Council rightly proclaimed that the Eucharistic sacrifice is “the source and summit of the Christian life” (*LG*, 11).<sup>1</sup> “For the most holy Eucharist contains the Church’s entire spiritual wealth: Christ Himself, our Passover and living bread. Through His own flesh, now made living and life-giving by the Holy Spirit, He offers life to men”. (*PO*, 5). Consequently the gaze of the Church is constantly turned to her Lord, present in the Sacrament of the Altar, in which she discovers the full manifestation of His boundless love. The Eucharist sustains and nourishes each Christian’s commitment to the Church’s mission. In the Eucharist where Christ shares his very person with us, we learn to share the gospel, prayer, our resources, our very selves. We thus imitate the ideal of Christian sharing which Acts 2:42-47 attributes to the early Christian community in Jerusalem.

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ instruction and the communal life, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. A reverent fear overtook them all, for many wonders and signs were performed by the apostles. Those who believed shared all things in common; they would sell their property and goods, dividing everything on the basis of each one’s need. They went to the temple area together every day, while in their homes they broke bread. With exultant and sincere hearts they took their meals in common, praising God and winning the approval of all

the people. Day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.<sup>104</sup>

The Holy Father brings out every aspect related to the life of Church centred on the greatest mystery of Christian faith. He reaffirms a special devotion to the Eucharist outside its celebration:

The worship of the Eucharist outside of the Mass is of inestimable value for the life of the Church. This worship is strictly linked to the celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice. The presence of Christ under the sacred species reserved after Mass - a presence which lasts as long as the species of bread and of wine remain - derives from the celebration of the sacrifice and is directed towards communion, both sacramental and spiritual. It is the responsibility of Pastors to encourage, also by their personal witness, the practice of Eucharistic adoration, and exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in particular, as well as prayer of adoration before Christ present under the Eucharistic species.<sup>105</sup>

The Eucharist is the mystery of light which is unveiled with Jesus, described himself as the “light of the world” (Jn 8:12), and this quality clearly appears at those moments in his life, like the Transfiguration and the Resurrection, in which his divine glory shines forth brightly.

## **2. *Mane Nobiscum Domine***

The Apostolic Letter *MND* opens up the experience of Christ’s living presence with the missionaries. It symbolises the fulfillment of promise of the risen Lord to his disciples in his Great commission. The image of the disciples on the way to Emmaus can serve as a fitting guide for the religious missionaries, particularly engaged in living out the mystery of the Holy Eucharist. The mystery of faith in the Eucharistic presence of Christ continued at the moment Jesus broke the bread to the disciples of Emmaus. The act of breaking the bread opened their eyes and they saw the ray of hope. The Wayfarer is no longer a stranger, but part of their life. Amid our questions and difficulties, and even our bitter disappointments, the divine Wayfarer continues to walk at our side, opening to us the

<sup>104</sup> Acts 2:42-47

<sup>105</sup> *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 25.

Scriptures and leading us to a deeper understanding of the mysteries of God (cf. *MND*, 2).

Moreover, in its last chapter, the encyclical provides an orientation to missionary spirituality. The two disciples of Emmaus, upon recognizing the Lord, “set out immediately” (cf. *Lk* 24:33), in order to report what they had seen and heard. The encounter with Christ, constantly intensified and deepened in the Eucharist, issues in the Church and in every Christian “an urgent summons to testimony and evangelization” (*MND* no.24). The encounter of Christ transformed the life of the Samaritan woman and her way of life. She also “set out immediately” to share her experience with her people in the village. In his Letter, the Holy Father reconfirms the Eucharist as source and strength, with which every missionary has to be enriched:

The Eucharist not only provides the interior strength needed for this mission, but is also -in some sense-*its plan*. For the Eucharist is a mode of being, which passes from Jesus into each Christian, through whose testimony it is meant to spread throughout society and culture. For this to happen, each member of the faithful must assimilate, through personal and communal meditation, the values which the Eucharist expresses, the attitudes it inspires, the resolutions to which it gives rise (*MND* no.25).

The Emmaus episode is the model for the life of missionaries. Jesus entered into the confused hearts of the disciples and transformed them into the powerful evangelists. Missionaries are called to be transformed by the power of the Eucharist to become messengers of Jesus’ compassion and love. Therefore, by this Letter the Holy Father reiterates that, rooted in Him, renewed and strengthened by Him, broken for Him and given for the world, they (missionaries) are challenged to become like Christ. “If the Lord does not build the house, in vain do the builders labour” (Ps 127: 1).

### **3. *Deus Caritas Est***

In his first encyclical Pope Benedict XVI, following his predecessor, continues to invoke the importance of the Holy Eucharist in the life of missionaries. It is the greatest mystery and symbol of God’s Love for man. Christians are identified in witnessing

to true love, i.e. charity. Christian charity flows out from the love of God. God is love; God says love is unconditional and sacrificial, and it is not based on feelings; therefore, love is not an “intense affection... based on familial or personal ties”. To understand what true love is and to be able to truly love others, we must know God, and we can do this through a close personal relationship with Him. We can have this close relationship with God by putting our faith in Jesus Christ, who was God’s sacrifice of love for us.

The exhortations of John Paul II and Benedict XVI stand as a prolongation of the invitation of Christ himself: “stay in my love ... you are my friends” (John 15:9-14). This invitation has a relational sense to live in harmony with the mind of Christ, heart to heart, as St. Paul said: “have the same mind of Christ” (Philippians 2:5). In this perspective Pope Benedict XVI called upon the priests and missionaries to live the Year of the Eucharist (2005) rediscovering the friendship of Christ and making it the key of our priestly existence.<sup>106</sup>

The life of Chavara is a witness to such a vision. Through long hours spent in Christ’s presence, Chavara realised the depth and length of God’s merciful love. It is sole food for the human soul in his every activity and we must remain constantly in the presence of the Lord.<sup>107</sup> In his writings, Fr. Kuriakose Porukara describes Chavara’s Eucharistic devotion thus:

The devotion to the Eucharist was shining in him throughout his life. In offering the Eucharistic sacrifice he showed great devotion, care and faith. Besides, the visit to the Blessed Sacrament according to the rule, he spent a long time daily, praying on his knees before the Eucharist.<sup>108</sup> Cf. K. Porukara, *Sthapakapitakkanmar*, 36.

The devotion to the Eucharist was a means for the renewal of the St. Thomas Christian community. The forty hours adoration introduced by Chavara in several churches of Kerala is a monument to his deep devotion to the Eucharist. For all these reasons he is

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<sup>106</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, “Discourse to the Parish Priests of Rome, 13 May 2005.”

<sup>107</sup> Cf. *The Letters*, VII/6, 82.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. K. Porukara, *Sthapakapitakkanmar*, 36.

known as an “Apostle of the Eucharist”. Chavara did work for inculturation, education, social uplift etc. Whatever we do with the authentic spirit of proclaiming the word of God becomes relevant for the reign of God in the light of the fact that the “Church is missionary by nature.” Taking into consideration the pluralism of India in terms of religious, social cultural, linguistic and social configurations as well as political and ideological differences, it is essential to highlight the catholicity of the Church in its true oneness. The burning lamp of a living faith always illuminated Chavara’s spiritual journey. This spirit of faith was characteristic of his spirituality.

### **C. Pastoral Application of Chavara’s Spirituality through the CMI Congregation**

In this section we try to deepen our understanding of Chavara’s missionary spirituality on praxis aspect. The life and apostolate of Chavara gave sufficient impact to the global recognition of the St. Thomas Christians for their evangelizing work throughout India. In this perspective first of all, Chavara plays a great role since he stands above all as an inspirer to the religious missionary priests in the Church. His valuable contributions elevate him to a prominent status in the universal Church.

By imbibing his spirit of hard work and commitment, the CMI Congregation is actively involved in the missionary endeavours of the Syro-Malabar Church. It is an important community in the mission endeavours of the universal Church. The CMI Congregation is trying to realize the ideals of Chavara. It feels a legitimate pride of the remarkable achievements that he brought in the Syro-Malabar Church. Its founding fathers, particularly Chavara, have bequeathed to it a missionary spirituality with three dimensions- love, hope, authenticity- that all lead to the one single goal: the transformation of the whole man. (cf. Lk 4: 18). In this respect, we shall discuss the pastoral application of Chavara spirituality in the universal Church through the CMI Congregation.

#### **1. In the Syro-Malabar Church**

The history of the Syro-Malabar Church has well recorded the leading role played by the Congregation since its very foundation.



The Church in Kerala, under the leadership of Chavara and together with the cooperation of the faithful, strenuously worked to retain the original identity of the St. Thomas Christians, which had suffered under ‘an ecclesial colonialism’ and from several internal fights. As we see, the Congregation from its very beginning under the leadership of Chavara, helped the Church in Kerala in its urgent needs, namely, evangelization, education, formation of priests, parish ministry together with retreats, social welfare, apostolate and activities oriented to the conversion of non-Christians and re-union of separated brethren.<sup>109</sup> The following sections examine the developmental phases and new missionary orientations in the Syro-Malabar Church through the members of the CMI Congregation. Therefore, the following achievements are real fruits that Chavara dreamed for the Church in Kerala. In the following section we shall discuss the active involvement of CMIs in continuing the mission initiated by Chavara and the first fathers of the religious community from its initial mission fields to the present day.

#### ***a. First Organized Missionary Endeavour in Kerala***

As the historical record shows, the initial apostolate of the CMI Congregation was limited to the central-southern Kerala until the time of Chavara. Its members were particularly active in the High Ranges in Kerala and Malabar.<sup>110</sup> From the early 20s it began to flourish in other areas of the state, in which we consider the reunion of the Malankara Church as well as the Malabar (Calicut) mission.<sup>111</sup>

Firstly, let us discuss the apostolate among the Malankara community. According to the historical records, organized mission work started formally in 1930 in connection with the reunion

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<sup>109</sup> Cf. Z.M. Moozhoor, *Blessed Chavara: The Star of the East*, vii-xiv.

<sup>110</sup> Cf. V. Nedumpuram, “The emergence of Chanda Mission: A Historic Perspective,” T. Aykara, ed. *A Missiology for Third Millennium* (Bangalore: 1997): 8.

<sup>111</sup> Malabar is a zone located in the north of Kerala, at present ecclesiastically located in the dioceses of Balthagady, Manandavady, Thalassery, and Thamarassery. Formerly, the Malabar was a forest zone and as the soil was well suited for agricultural cultivation, many people including Syrian Christians from the south began to migrate to this area in search of agricultural lands. As the majority of the migrants were Christians, they were in need of priests for their spiritual care. Cf. M. Kazhupil, *CMI Sabhaude Malabar kudiyettam*, (Thevara: 2001), 319; F. Thonippara, “*Sabhayum Kudiyettakkarum*,” *Kudiyettathinte Ithihasam* (Thalassery: 2005), 35-41.

movement in Trivandrum and Thiruvalla.<sup>112</sup> Immediately after the reunion of the Malankara Church with the Catholic Church, Bishop Ivanios, its head, requested the assistance of the Syrian Carmelite Priests to guide the Bethany community and assist in their few mission centres. The CMI monastery of Chethipuzha was a place of reflection and meditation for the Catholic Bethany Religious. There was an order of the Apostolic Delegate to the Prior General to accept the request.<sup>113</sup> In November 1930, Fr. Protase Menampampil was sent to Vennikulam to live with the Bethany Fathers (1930-31) and help them in their spiritual needs. Fr. Bartholomew Perumalil, Marceline Alackappillil and Placid Podipara helped the reunited Syro-Malankara Church to enrich its Catholic doctrine and practices. For a long time Fr. Placid Podipara CMI was the formal adviser to both the Archdiocese of Trivandrum and Thiruvalla. Many other Carmelites served the diocese in different ways in its infancy. Fr. Pius Kalathil was Vicar to Mar Ivanios in 1936 and temporary Superior General to the OIC Congregation [Order of Imitation of Christ], a Syro-Malankara religious Congregation.

Fr. Romeo Thomas CMI, a former principal of St. Berchmans College Changanacherry, helped Mar Ivanios by giving admission and free tuition to his students in the College. Fr. Hadrian was the consultant to Mar Ivanios for college construction.<sup>114</sup> There was a mission house at Pathanamthitta to foster evangelization among the non-Catholics. The first two missionaries in the Archdiocese were Frs. Ambrose Palakunnel, and Pius Kalathil. They nurtured the surrounding mission stations of Kalaikavila, Kudayal, Kulathoor, and Amplikonam. It was Fr. Silverius Karimattam who led the work for the establishment of a DM convent and a school at Venniyoor on 24 November 1948 and a station at Kanamkodu. Fr. Claudius Alappatt did successful work at Eruthavoor. The zealous mission

<sup>112</sup> Cf. N. Edattukaran, *CMI Mission annum innum* (Cochin: 1984), 33; J. Poovathoilil, *Chanda Mission: Orientations and Confrontations in Evangelization*, Bangalore: 1998), 211.

<sup>113</sup> K. Ralph, *The Apostolate of the CMI Congregation among the Jacobites*, Mannanam, 1983, 13. As we have already seen, the CMIs were known as TOCD in those times. So TOCD refers to CMI.

<sup>114</sup> Letter of Mar Ivanios to Hadrian on 8 April 1947, Archives of the Archdiocese of Trivandrum, IM 5.

activity of Fr. Henry Vadakkedam is still remembered by the people of Nellikakuzhy. We have seen already that the 'Reunion of Jacobites' mission was already active from the time of Chavara. Following the life and example of Chavara, his followers the zealous CMI members continued this mission. In this regard one cannot forget the valuable contribution rendered by its members who helped greatly in realizing the reunion and the formation of Syro-Malankara Church.<sup>115</sup>

Secondly, the apostolate rendered among the migrants of Malabar or the Malabar Mission. At that time the diocese of Calicut was the only one to care for the entire Christian community in the area. The first CMI mission centre was opened in Cheruvannur on July 31, 1935.<sup>116</sup> The Malabar area was extremely undeveloped in those times. Mostly, the land was forestry and agricultural. As many people migrated to these areas, they were in need of social life. Apart from the migrants, the majority of the people were poor and belonged to lower castes. Following Chavara's way of holistic reformation, the CMI missionaries opened different mission centers one after another and initiated several welfare apostolates, both spiritual and social.

As there were lot of Syrian Christians, the missionaries made great efforts to protect the tradition and rights of Syrians in their liturgical life. As they originally belonged to the Syro-Malabar Church they demanded liturgical celebrations in their own rite as well as a separate diocese. The contribution of CMI missionaries, in particular, Fr. Romeo Thomas and Fr. Placid Podipara must be remembered as they played a vital role in this regard, regularly maintaining a series of correspondences on these matters with the Church authorities.

Their dreams were realized with the creation of the diocese of Thalassery in 1953 for the care of Syrian Christians. As they were short of priests for the new diocese, twenty more CMI priests joined

<sup>115</sup> Pope Pius XI created the Syro-Malankara Hierarchy in 1932, by the Apostolic Constitution *Christo Pastorum Principi*, when one section of Syrian Orthodox Jacobite Church decided to accept the Catholicity and Apostolicity of the See of Rome under the leadership of Mar Ivanios 1930. Cf. G. Menachery, ed., *The St. Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia of India* (Trichur: 1982), 268.

<sup>116</sup> F. Thonippara, "*Sabhayam Kudiyettakkarum*," 35.

their apostolic service from 1954 following a request by Mar Sebastian Valloppilly, the first Bishop of Thalassery.<sup>117</sup> The presence of the CMI in Malabar was a great and invaluable inspiration to future missionaries of the Syro-Malabar Church. The exemplary life of these earlier missionaries enriched the ecclesial presence of the Syro-Malabar Church in the Malabar zone. They were profound signs and witnesses by which the Church flourished magnificently in this area. One of the veteran missionary priests, with twenty five years of experience and who also played an invaluable role in this marvelous development, indicated following qualities as most important in order to be successful missionaries: people who bear the qualities of love for the Church, hard work, cooperation, humility, prudence and respect for each other become more successful whereas missionary life without these qualities would only have met with failure and disaster.<sup>118</sup>

The hard work of the early missionaries in Malabar opened up a new era for northern Kerala, and the results began to be felt.<sup>119</sup> Today we find the diocese of Thalassery, one of the dioceses in the Malabar area, has grown and become self-sufficient to the point that it provides numerous missionaries and dedicated people for the service of the universal Church. The Mysore mission was also a related missionary activity of the CMI as it is geographically close to Malabar, but located in the State of Karnataka. The ecclesiastical jurisdiction is, however, a stumbling block and limits its progress beyond its expectations of missionary endeavours. In spite of all difficulties, the CMI missionaries continue their activities even today. A good number of them are actively involved as missionaries and serve in the Latin territory of Mysore.

### **b. North Indian CMI Mission**

The mission work of the CMI Congregation gathered a new dimension and momentum as mission territories were entrusted to it beyond the boundaries of Kerala. When CMIs officially took up

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<sup>117</sup> Cf. M. Kazhupil, *CMI Sabhaude Malabar kudiyyettam*.

<sup>118</sup> N. Edattukaran, *CMI Mission annum innum*, 47-48.

<sup>119</sup> Articles by several authors in the Review on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of the diocese of Thalassery, bear witness to the contribution of CMI missionaries in the diocese and are valuable sources. Cf. *Kudiyettathinte Ithihasam*.

the task of missionary apostolate in the Latin Diocese of Raigargh-Ambikapur in North India outside Kerala, in 1955, it was a historical event for both the Syro-Malabar Church and the Congregation. For the first time the Syro-Malabar Church sent four CMI priests as missionaries outside its ecclesial territory.<sup>120</sup> In 1962 Chanda took shape as the first missionary Ordinate of the Syro-Malabar Church and was entrusted to the Congregation. Since then New Mission Dioceses and Regions have been erected in central and northern India, namely, Sagar (1968), Bijnor, Jagdalpur (1972), Rajkot (1977) and Adilabad (1999) which were entrusted to the CMI Congregation. This is indeed a milestone in the progress of the CMI Missions and remarkable evidence of recognition by the Apostolic See. Apart from these independent mission dioceses, the zealous missionaries of its members have also reached many other parts of India. Except for the north-eastern states, their presence and missionary activities are prevalent in almost all the states of India.

### **c. Shift in Priestly Formation**

A symbol of Chavara's vision is the correct formation of future priests for the Church with sufficient knowledge and holiness. The life of Chavara is, *par excellence*, an indication that priests need to know the pulse of society and to be involved in its activities. Formation is a life long process and it is never static, nor does it concentrate on particular topics. As the world is moving, transforming and entering upon a new path, formation is important which must be given serious consideration. The CMI Congregation has taken up this great challenge and initiated missionary-oriented formation of its students in north India. In the following sections we shall discuss some important centres where such formation is already launched.

*Dharmaram* College is the first and the major seminary of CMI Congregation founded outside the territory of Kerala. It was transferred from Kerala to Bangalore on 1st June, 1957. *Dharmaram*, which means the Garden of Virtues, is dedicated to

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<sup>120</sup> Rev. Frs. Diego, Chrisian Plakkattu, Casius, Romuald and Vianni Kadankavil were those four CMI priests.

the Sacred Heart of Jesus and its motto is *Isabhakti Paramjnanam* (Devotion to God is the Supreme Wisdom). The major study house is a symbol of Chavara's vision of formation of well-trained priests for the Church. It is not for CMI's alone but is now also open to the students of other religious Congregations and dioceses also. So it aims at educating people who are prepared to commit themselves to the service of the Church and the world, which is accomplished through a holistic, spiritual, intellectual and cultural formation. It is a matter of pride for the Congregation that *Dharmaram* is today a vast educational campus together with *Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram* [DVK].<sup>121</sup> It is ever vibrant with more than 1,000 students in the Pontifical Athenaeum of Philosophy, Theology, Canon Law and Spirituality and Counseling, with over 13,000 students in Christ College, Christ Junior College, Christ PU Residential College, Christ School and Christavidyalaya and around 4,000 Syro-Malabar families in seven parishes and centers. Hence, it is not only a campus of ecclesiastical studies but also a place where Chavara's holistic vision of integral development is being implemented well. The dream of bygone forefathers of the CMI has found concrete expression in the course of time through the establishment, growth, and the significant contributions of *Dharmaram* to the Church, the nation and the world at large.

As CMI members began to work in the mission areas of North India, they began to feel the need for some specific missionary formation. The character and nature of *Dharmaram* was not fully sufficient to focus to a missionary formation. Therefore, in view of special missionary orientation demanded in mission regions, the new mission centres like *Poornodaya*, *Darsana* and *Samanvaya* institutes were opened in North India. The institutes of *Darsana* and *Samanvaya* are living signs of mission contextualization. The inter-ecclesial relationship is an important field that merits great consideration, especially in the Indian context. The spirit of unity and collaboration among the Rites are vital element and a major

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<sup>121</sup> *Dharmaram* College and *Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram* are different today. *Dharmaram* College is a residence for the CMI students. And *Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram* is the Pontifical Athenaeum of Philosophy, Theology and Canon Law established at *Dharmaram* campus and entrusted to the CMI by Rome. *Darsana* and *Samanvaya* are extension centres of *Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram*.

issue of discussion even today in jointly facing the challenges of evangelization in the Indian context.<sup>122</sup> These institutes stand as signs of contextual missionary formation. We shall briefly discuss the missionary orientation programmes of each institute.

*Poornodaya* at Bhopal is primarily an ecclesiastical mission institute established in 1977 for spiritual renewal. Apart from this, it has a programme of specialized training for seminary students and catechists who have opted to work in the missions as well as for priests and sisters active in the missions. It is a training and research centre for the northern and central Indian missions. In the last 28 years the Centre has been actively involved in the training of priests, religious and lay people involved in active apostolic and missionary activities in different dioceses and Congregations in the mission area. This centre is well known for conducting refresher courses as well as spiritual renewal programs.

*Darsana* Institute at Wardha, which was initiated in *Poornodaya* in 1983 for the students of philosophy, was the second step taken to meet the need for missionary formation. It was mainly for students who belong to the North Indian CMI missions. The main objective of this institute is to provide mission orientation for their future missionary life. The curriculum is different from that of *Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram*. It is modelled in accordance with the culture and life situation of mission areas and provides ample opportunities for the students to gain adequate mission experience in the field. The very name *Darsana* testifies to Chavara's intense longing for *Darsan* (Divine vision) expressed in the pages of *Atmanutapam*. The motto *Pavitrataya Deva Darsanam* (Vision of God through the purity of heart) is coined emphasizing the great richness of Chavara's spirituality. The people residing in *Darsana* are oriented towards a real experience of God and see the presence of God. *Darsana* is also a place of contextual formation for students to interact with other religions and the present location of the institute at Wardha is well-suited to this, adorned with Ashram life and Gandhian spirituality modelled by Vinoba Bhave.<sup>123</sup> The inmates

<sup>122</sup> Cf., F. Wilfred, "Some Basic Reflections in inter-Ecclesial Relations in the Missionary Context of India," 269.

<sup>123</sup> Vinayak Narahari Bhave, known as Vinoba Bhave, was an *Acharya* (teacher), and is considered a spiritual successor of Mahatma Gandhi in India. He was

of Darsana have, since its very beginning, had good relations with the Hindu organizations through several interaction activities. Even today they all come together for several common activities, both spiritual and social. These kinds of interactions surely reduce the rifts and gaps of intolerance that exist between different religions.

*Samanvaya*, established in 1993, is the Mission institute of Theology of the CMI Congregation in North India, and its objectives are similar to those of the Darsana institute. Considering the mission context of India and the diversity of the country, those in charge of the institute structured its curriculum so as to offer different experiences in the four academic years of the course. The students do not stay in one place for this period, but move at varying times to different places in North India, the main objective being for the students to gain experiential, theoretical and practical knowledge.

Literally *Samanvaya* means “Integration.” This institute aims at a holistic or integrated approach. It envisages a training programme focusing on the Church’s evangelizing mission in the northern parts of our country. The signs of the times challenge us to delineate a new vision and approach in the formation of today’s missionaries. This task naturally presupposes sufficient understanding. The contextualized theological training of *Samanvaya* is imparted in four years at different local contexts. The first year theological formation programme is offered in the rural and tribal culture of Jagdalpur at Kolchoor in the State of Chhattisgarh, India. The first semester of the second year theological studies is focused on the inter-religious contexts at Rishikesh in the State of Uttaranchal, India and the second semester is conducted in *Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram* at Bangalore in the State of Karnataka, focusing on the benefits of wider athenaeum community and the urban context. Third and fourth year studies are done in the coordinating centre of *Samanvaya Theological College* which is situated at Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh. The students are trained here for the pastoral ministries and the social sensitization programmes. The theological training imparted to the students must necessarily correspond to the complex reality of Indian life in all its dimensions - social, economic, political, religious, cultural etc. Hence, it aims at integrated (*samanvayic*) theological formation.



Theology must be a critical and creative response to the Indian situation given from the standpoint of Jesus. People's lives are challenged by the liberating call of the Divine. In the theologizing task greater identification with the people and participation in their movements for total liberation are required, so that the challenge of the divine call may be answered fully and integrally. Though *Samanvaya* originally intended to provide a theological training programme only for CMI missionary students, it is now open to other dioceses and religious Congregations too.

The creation of seminary in Namibia is a sign of international recognition for the outstanding contribution of CMIs to the clergy formation. The Namibian Catholic Bishops Conference (NCBC), through MISSIO Aachen, made a request to the Congregation in May 1997 for qualified CMI priests to train young men for the priesthood. Being faithful to the original spirit of the Founders, the Congregation positively responded to the request of the NCBC. The institute, which concentrates on the formation of local young men, was started at St. Charles Lwanga Major Seminary in Windhoek, Namibia on 21 April 1998.

## **2. In the Universal Church**

The global mission is a challenging vision and a new step for the CMI missionaries in the universal Church. Formerly the word 'globalization' was used to specify developments in the field of economy and business, but today it has become a common concept and ongoing phenomenon that we find in every field. Here we use it as a term of integral development. The global mission, which is a new shift in the Church's ongoing mission, is a worthy concept to replace the term "foreign mission" in the missionary activity of the Church.

By his contribution to the individual Church, Blessed Chavara also enriched the universal Church. His life is synthesized through his God-experience and subsequent sharing through his active involvement in *ecclesia*. Charism are gifts by the Spirit for the benefit of the Church. Each charism received, lived out and transmitted, is given to the Church and humanity at a specific moment in history. This intuition has neither boundaries nor precise direction

and is limited by neither time nor space. Yet, this new and pressing experience of the Holy Spirit energizes every bearer of gifts to transform one's life. Chavara spirituality inspires people of all ages. It imparts the principles of integrated life. Chavara is presented as an inspirer of religious missionaries, his values and vision being accepted at large by the Church. They are being implemented by the CMI members in the Syro-Malabar Church and the Universal Church. The first ever invitation to CMIs to conduct the apostolate outside India came from Iraq in 1960. The zealous activities of its members, which helped the Syro-Malabar Church and its outstanding flourishing in Kerala, inspired the Patriarch of the Chaldean Church and Archbishop of Tehran to invite them to their pastoral service in Iraq. The first missionaries were mostly engaged in the formation of Clergy under the leadership of Frs. Marceline and Fabian.<sup>124</sup> Their mission was also extended to Iran in 1966. Unfortunately, for a number of reasons, the Congregation had to withdraw from both of these missions.

After a gap of some years the Congregation spread to other continents. Today CMI members are to be found in Europe, U.S.A., Latin America, and Africa. African and South American missions are said to be the most challenging mission abroad. In the light of *Ad Gentes* and *Lumen Gentium* of Vatican II, the missionary nature of the Church is more visible and the role of religious missionaries has gained vital momentum. The global mission is more and more seen as collaboration in missions. It is, therefore, a symbol of unity and cooperation between Churches. The CMI plenary assembly reaffirmed that the religious, who are 'intimately consecrated to divine service,' have a bounden duty to be ambassadors of the Kingdom of Christ to every human person and to extend that kingdom to every land.<sup>125</sup>

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highly inspired after reading the *Bhagavad Gita*, one of the holiest Hindu scriptures, at a very early age. He was associated with Mahatma Gandhi in the Indian independence movement. In 1932 he was sent to jail by the British colonial government because of his fight against British rule. Vinoba spent the later part of his life at his ashram in Paunar, Wardha in the state of Maharashtra. Cf. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vinoba\\_Bhave](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vinoba_Bhave) (accessed December 5, 2007).

<sup>124</sup> Cf. N. Edattukaran, *CMI Mission annum innum*, 137.

<sup>125</sup> Cf. A. Kariyil, *General Plenary Assembly (GPA) April 11-15, 2007*

As per the CMI constitution and tradition, evangelization is one of the most important tasks and its missionary task is to evangelize cultures by inspiring them with gospel values and building up Christian communities. In the the following sections, we shall discuss the ongoing mission of the Congregation. Here we make an attempt to highlight how the spirituality and vision of Chavara are being shared with the mission of the universal Church.

### ***a. Mission in Africa***

Every mission of evangelization is a challenge to the missionaries to present Christ in the culture of a particular land. No one prefers to be weaned away from the culture they are born to. In Africa, the missionaries are not there to impose a culture through evangelization, but to help incarnate the Christian values in African culture. Christ must be revealed in the signs and symbols of African culture. Accepting it as challenge, today a total of 40 missionaries of the CMI from eight provinces are engaged in missionary activities in six countries on the African continent: Ghana, Kenya, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania and Madagascar. The Congregation commenced their services in the Machakos Diocese, in Kenya in 1981.<sup>126</sup> Their apostolic services in Africa include pastoral ministry, educational activities, press apostolate, teaching in seminaries etc. This recognition is regarded as a major event in the history of the Syro-Malabar Church's missionary expedition. The vocations received by the Congregation today from African countries show the positive response to its missionary endeavours. Fr. Davy Kavunkal, one of the missionaries in Africa, shares his view on African Mission.<sup>127</sup> It is a valuable account of the apostolate of CMIs in Africa. On evaluating the mission in Africa, the author outlines the way of apostolate, important developments and the profound outcome of the mission. The article ends up with proposals and useful recommendations and suggestions for facing the new challenges for future missionaries in Africa.

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<sup>126</sup> Cf. <http://www.rcchurch.na/cmi.htm> (accessed July 11, 2007).

<sup>127</sup> Cf. D. Kavunkal, "Prospects and Challenges in our Foreign Mission," *CMI Charism on the Path of Growth*, Vol.II, Kochi: General Synaxis Secretariat, 2006, p 410-15. Fr. Davy is one of the CMI missionaries in Africa. He presents the beginning, the context and role of mission by CMIs in Africa.

## **b. Mission in America**

We evaluate the CMI presence and mission in America in a different way to those in other continents, taking into consideration the differences between North and South America. The apostolates in both places are different on account of the life style and culture of people in both zones. The demand for pastoral activities and mission in the North differs from that in the South, the latter being a poor zone.

The pastoral needs in the North, namely in the USA and Canada, are different from those in the south in terms of the different life style of people and the Church. There are about 100 CMI priests performing pastoral ministry in several dioceses of North America, some as pastors and others as associate pastors. Despite the modern scenario of changes in society, the American mind is well described in the testimony of Fr. Mathew Cheeramkuzhy CMI, who represented the USA Mission of the CMI.<sup>128</sup> From his short description, the exhortation of Sean P. O'Malley, the Archbishop of Boston, is clearly explained. The Archbishop exhorts the priests as follows:

The United States as a 'hostile, alien, environment' for Catholics is a society of a culture of death, consumerism, hedonism, individualism.' He continued, ' we have, however, only to look at the New Age book shelves and psychic hotlines and television stations to see that there is hunger for God and spirituality among our people, but today's audience is not so easy. As our task today, our challenge is simple: to resist the temptation to conform to the culture of death, to consumerism, hedonism, individualism because the Gospel values find fertile soil in the secular world.'<sup>129</sup>

From the above statement we have a clear idea of the vision and mission for American society. The primary task of the missionaries is to impart sufficient God experience, which really satisfies the spiritual hunger and thirst of the people. In this regard the sharing of Fr. Jose Panthaplamthottiyil CMI, the former CMI

<sup>128</sup> M. Cheeramkuzhy, "The Prospects and Challenges of CMI Presence in North America," *CMI Charism on the Path of Growth*, Vol.II, 424.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

coordinator of USA represents an important source. According to his report, in North America people are generally accepted and respected not because of their titles, but because of their competence and performance. As a rich zone in many ways, it demands more qualitative, competitive and zealous missionaries.<sup>130</sup>

The CMI's have also extended their apostolate in Peru, in South America from 1970s. The zone is very different from North in terms of the life of people. According to certain surveys and the major opinions there are only 2% of the Catholics who practice their faith, i.e., participate in the Sunday Mass. According to the division of population, one priest has 20,000 souls in his care.<sup>131</sup> In Latin American countries, there are a lot of similarities of life style with that of Indian situation. As CMI missionaries, who are Indians, found it very easy to accustom with their culture. They encounter various local, ethnic economic and socio- religious realities. Unemployment, drug addiction, poverty, corruption, terrorism and delinquency are some of the grave problems of Peru. More or less, the same situation is found in the case of other Latin American countries as well. From the sharing of mission experiences by the veteran missionaries of this mission zone we understand that the people have to be improved a lot, especially in their attitude towards their Christian life and faith. Representing the South American missionaries, Fr. Joseph Areeplackal CMI gives his testimony on the Christian life in this zone:

This is what we are doing in Peru. People have faith, but not a faith properly centred on the paschal mystery (the Eucharist). Unwedded mother brings her child to the priest so that he may sprinkle holy water on it; however, she has no idea as to when it shall be baptized! After the Easter, families and various groups celebrate feasts of the Cross, but they do not believe much in the Sunday Mass and the Risen Lord. Many celebrate the first communion of their children; yet most of the parents do not receive communion as they lead an unmarried life.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> J. Panthaplamthottiyil, "The Future of our Ministry in North America," *Carmalasangadesham* (September 2007), 63-66.

<sup>131</sup> Cf. J. Areeplackal, "Prospects and Challenges of Our presence in South America," *CMI Charism on the Path of Growth*, vol. II, 416.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 417.

The above stated testimony unveils the concern and major challenge the missionaries continue to experience in South American society in their spiritual matters. Moreover, every society with socio-economic problems is major threats to the life of faith.

### ***c. Mission in Europe***

For more than 25 years CMIs have been involved in the pastoral activities of different dioceses in Germany. Germany was and is a *Katholisches Abendland*- Christian occident (a Christian country), having its own centuries old Christian tradition and practices and well-organized structures. The following observations on recent developments that have taken place in the Church and society in Germany indicate new challenges for those who serve the Church.

Today there is an increasing influence of secularism, materialism, individualism and all the trends of a consumerist culture. God and religion fail to occupy any more a significant role in the lives of people, especially of the present generation. Consequently people drift away from the main stream of the Church, its traditions, practices and structures. The relevance of many of the existing structures and traditions are questioned. Most of the children born to Christian parents are of course baptised and they go to the first communion, which has become a social event. But the number of youths receiving confirmation and getting married in the Church has decreased considerably. Only 15-20% of the Catholics are regular Churchgoers (This percentage can vary from place to place); they are over 60 and the great majority of them are women. The absence of young parents, youth and children in the liturgical services, especially in the Sunday Mass is alarming. There is a similar deterioration in the field of vocation to priestly and religious life. Many of the women's Congregations are closing down their houses due to the absence of vocation. Dioceses which once had an average of 30-40 priestly ordinations an year have now only 5-6 new priests per year.

### **3. Ecumenical and Inter-religious Apostolate**

Apart from all the above-mentioned activities, the ecumenical and inter-religious CMI apostolate is also globally appreciated at large. Assimilating the spirit of Chavara and accepting the invitation

of Vatican Council II (NA. no 2) they have prepared a forum of meeting religions in national and international centres. Centres like CSWR, in Bangalore, CEVA in New Delhi and Ernakulam, *Upasana* in Thodupuzha, *Snehavani* in Kottayam, *Sangam* in Jagdalpur are on the national level, while CICIIS in Sacramento in California and the CIIS in Rome are on the international level.

The Congregation provides leadership in several social welfare activities, namely, *Vikas Yojana*, Voluntary Organization for Social Action and Rural Development (VOSARD), *Samagra Vikas Trust* (SVT) etc. The animation and counselling centres for youth, boarding houses and hostels for better education of the poor and tribal children, centres for mentally disabled, training centres for skills and the prison ministry are some of the ongoing social programmes. *Ayalkoottam* (the neighbourhood communities or self-help groups) is also a popular apostolate, similar to the Christian confraternity started by Chavara. The group at present also includes non-Christians.

## **Conclusion**

We were having an overall evaluation of Chavara spirituality, in which we find in him an authentic Christian personality. He learned that God does all things for the good of those who love him. In contemplation Chavara learnt to love, forgive, serve, follow and let him be moulded by the hands that created him, in an act of total self surrender. Prayer was the path for seeking the face of God, his brothers and sisters, and above all in his own soul and deep inspirations. Prayer enlarged his vision of reality and helped him to enter the inner room of his heart, and to serve Church marvelously. So prayer becomes a way to meet God the Father through His Son in the power of the Holy Spirit.

As a conclusion to this chapter we recall Chavara's profound mystical teachings and subsequent living as a missionary in three dimensions. First of all, he was a man of profound God-experience, a man of God vibrant with his radiating humanity charged with the inner energy deriving from his becoming one with the Word through his daily deep prayer experience. Secondly, Chavara had a deep ecclesial love, in which a greater love and commitment for the

*ecclesia* is visible in his apostolate. Religious consecration is not an independent factor in itself, but essentially ecclesial and missiological. The 'Word' was his sole spiritual food and drink and his deep experience of the same Word with its divine and human layers made him a truly powerful herald of the Word. Our religious and missionary life becomes profound through contemplation of God's Word constantly incarnated in our day to day context.

Thirdly, the dimension of people oriented apostolate. Chavara and other founding fathers founded the Congregation as a spiritual movement for the transformation of society. The ascetical and mystical phases of the journey enable one to prepare himself/herself for divine intimacy with God. Chavara's discernment of the pathways is most helpful in leading people in our times towards theo-centric self-transcendence. When we look into his life we see that he saw everything as sacred and everything led him to union with the Lord. The very life of Chavara shows that he was very human in his words and deeds, but was filled with the love of God. His union with God rendered him exquisitely human. Everything was seen as related to God and so everything gave him a sense of sacredness. His experience as well as his entire teaching can be summarized in his personal encounter with the living God who came to meet him in every moment of his life.

In the final section, we discussed on the significance and pastoral application of Chavara spirituality in praxis level. Chavara moved freely among people in witnessing Christ and had a clear vision for the future mission of Indian society. The people accepted him and his views, and perceived the goodness in him. In fact, Chavara was not 'enforcing the Gospel' but revealing the gospel values that attracted them to the gospel values. The CMI Congregation was founded as a spiritual movement aimed at an integral renaissance in the Syro-Malabar Church and it continues to work for the universal Church. In this situation, a proper Christian living and witnessing of Christ as modelled by Chavara is a guide par excellence for the present religious missionaries of the whole Church. He proved that our ecclesial life derives strength and energy from our strong commitment and dedication.



## GENERAL CONCLUSION

By going through the life and personality Blessed Chavara, we find uniqueness in the way he guided the people of his time in their spiritual, liturgical, cultural and educational point of view. Not all great men need be holy, but all holy persons are great. Great men, like Chavara, never die, instead survive history through their message. Within a short span of life Chavara was able to contribute greatly to the universal Church in different ways. His greatness we see in his wisdom and knowledge, through his writings, through outstanding leadership and his role in renewals<sup>1</sup> in Kerala society, his greatness in the founding of the two first indigenous Congregations (CMI and CMC), his ventures in the media of communication and educational enterprises. However, the objective of this study was to find the specific contribution of Chavara in the field of spirituality. Hence, we draw the following distinct features found as the outcome of this study.

### **I. The Main Result of Our Study in Chavara Spirituality**

We have been dealing with two main concepts mysticism and missionary spirituality of Chavara throughout this work. We shall call Chavara's spirituality a combination of both these core aspects which evolved from his high degree contemplation and action. Hence, Chavara's spirituality reconfirms these concepts as Christian symbols of one's personal relationship towards God and human beings. In fact, the uniqueness of Chavara spirituality is that both mysticism and spirituality prevailed in the greatest degree. Based on these two core aspects we shall draw the main thrusts in Chavara spirituality.

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<sup>1</sup> See "Active Life of Chavara: Time of Leadership," in Ch. 1, section I, B, C. (hereafter all chapter references refer back to chapters in this thesis)

### A. *Synthesis of a True Christian Love*

In Bl. Chavara we find the mystical and missionary spirituality as a synthesis of his dual dimensional Christian love: the love of God and neighbour. First, Chavara's greatness consists in his mystical union with God, the Supreme Love and his profound sharing of that Love. It is the same commandment of Our Lord to the apostles to live out the commandment of love, which consists of the love of God and neighbour. The Spiritual Cantic 'Atmanutapam' of Chavara is a symbol of his divine hymns of Love, his great love towards God. He was never a pseudo-mystic lost in the hazy clouds of daydreams, but he always had his feet firmly on the ground. When we look into his life we see that he saw everything as sacred and everything led him to union with the Lord. His very life shows that he was extremely human in his words and deeds but was filled with the love of God. Everything was seen as related to God and so everything gave him a sense of sacredness. His experiences as well as his entire teaching can be summarized as an *Emmanuel experience* in his personal encounter with the living God. As a man of profound God-experience and a man of God, the life of Chavara was charged with the inner energy through his daily devotion to the Blessed Sacrament exposed.<sup>2</sup> The two works *Compunction of the Soul* and *Colloquies* absolutely prove the 'Word' was his sole spiritual food and drink. The deep experience of the same Word with its divine and human layers made him a truly powerful herald of Christian love. These factors guided him to grow to the level of a Christian mystic poet. We have already seen in him a mystic who reached the highest level of union with the Lord by passing through five stages.

While all his life was a hymn of Love and union with God, he never forgot to sing about the common man who toils day and night for his needs. Here is the turning point to understand Chavara's love of neighbour. The Testament (*Chavarul*) of Chavara is the best instrument to know his Christian love of neighbour. Most of its sayings are great contributions to build ideal Christian communities. In Chavara's words, "The strength of a monastery does not consist in the thickness of its walls, but in the virtue and the religious zeal

<sup>2</sup> See "Life Rooted in Profound God-experience," in Ch. 4, III, A. 2.

of the monks who dwell in them.”<sup>3</sup> He points out the importance of the value of love between the members living in the monastery. The same principle is applied to Christians living where the love between the faithful adds power in an authentic Christian community. There was nothing vague about his love for neighbour; it was as clear as his love towards God.

### ***B. Discipline of a Rich Contemplative Life***

A disciplined life is vital for Christian perfection. An authentic Christian life consists in living Christian values and sharing them where one lives. Chavara’s spirituality is expressed in a multiple forms- in the form of Canticles, colloquies and spiritual union with the Lord. Thomas Merton describes the life of contemplation and action as charity drawn inward to its own divine source and action is charity looking outward to other persons. Contemplation is the spring and action is the stream.<sup>4</sup> The beautiful aspect of Chavara’s personality was that in him both of these aspects blended in fine harmony at a highest level. This harmony made him see the universe, nature, the rivers, the flowers, the mountains and the valleys, humanity and the world as God’s own. And so he loved them. It was a love that emerged from his Godly mind. So for some authors he is the ‘Indian Benedict’ and Mannanam, the ‘Indian Monte Cassino.’<sup>5</sup> The consecrated and chosen people are invited and obliged to live this mission in an authentic way. In the perspective of Chavara spirituality, Christian religious and missionary life become profoundly lived through contemplation of God’s Word constantly incarnated in the day to day context.

### ***C. An Ecclesial Spirituality***

Chavara had a deep sense of the *ecclesia* which is visible from the greater degree of love and commitment reflected in his various apostolates. Religious consecration in the Catholic Church is not

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<sup>3</sup> *The Letters*, 65.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. T. Merton, *No Man is an Island*, New York: Image Books, 1967, 65.

<sup>5</sup> St. Benedict is described as father of European monasticism in the fifth century. It was Monte Cassino that gave vigour and inspiration to all other religious institutes. Similarly, Chavara stands as an inspiring model in Kerala. Cf. K. Kunnassery, “Blessed Chavara: Inspirer of Indian Christian Religious Life”, *Herald of the East* 6 (July 2004): 8.

an independent factor in itself, but essentially ecclesial and missiological. We have sufficient examples from the historical documents regarding the commitment of Chavara to the Church of his time. It is said that the founding fathers of the CMI Congregation, following the direction of their bishop, decided to build a monastery at Mannanam for the good of the Church. They positively responded to the Bishop's view <sup>6</sup> whose words conveyed the message that religious life is not an isolated unit, nor is it a fleeing from responsibilities in the world, but part of the Church's mission, assisting in her pastoral needs as responsible persons. These words gave a positive and timely support to their new venture to start the religious life. Even after the demise of Fathers Palackal and Porukara, the other two co-founders of the CMI Congregation, Chavara was successful in guiding the newly formed community to fulfil its responsibilities in the manner ecclesial authorities wanted him to do. So his contemporary church authorities had full faith in him. The apostolic zeal to fight for unity in the Church in the face of the Rocco, Schism proved Chavara as a man of the Church, one who lived for the Church, moved with the Church, led the Church and protected her. It testifies that one's ecclesial life draws the strength and energy from strong commitment and dedication.

The religious communities, CMI and CMC, which were founded years ago are icons of inspiration for the founding of other religious communities in the Syro-Malabar Church. The value and benefits of religious life are much appreciated until the present. Today the Syro-Malabar Church which was renewed and revitalized by Bl. Chavara, has many religious communities.

#### ***D. Kingdom-centered Spirituality***

The Kingdom of God preached by Jesus aims at an integral liberation of humankind from various bindings and at transforming it into a true people of God. Justice, peace and love are the fundamental characteristics of the kingdom of God preached by Jesus. Chavara and the other founding fathers began the new community at Mannanam as a spiritual movement for the transformation of society. The Testament (*Chavarul*) introduced by Chavara is his own unique effort to initiate his project of liberation

<sup>6</sup> *The Chronicles*, 6-7.

and transformation of the society. This transformation could only be realised in the society in which human values are properly applied. In chapter four we discussed the values underlined in the *Testament of Chavara*.<sup>7</sup> The Kingdom spirituality is well reflected in various apostolates initiated by Chavara such as education, social uplift of the lower castes and the poor, the ministry of the Word of God, media communication, socio-cultural activities, and the works of inter-religious dialogue, etc. The missionary spirituality of Chavara unveils the fact that any evangelising mission that fails to work for the promotion of justice, love and peace is not properly fulfilling its duty.

## **II. Pastoral implications and Praxis of Chavara Spirituality**

As we have seen, in the core values in Chavara spirituality, we are reminded of two challenges before us. First, we are reminded of the great importance and relevance of the life of contemplation and action. For every religious missionary priest, one's life witness is a vital factor and can be tested against the lives of holy people like Chavara. Today a good number of religious Congregations are inspired by this way of charism of contemplation and action.

Secondly, there is an invitation to live the spirituality of Chavara. There is no other substitution for the religious missionary priests than living a life of contemplation and action. In the light of our study, the following factors which derive from Chavara spirituality seem to be essential in today's world.

### **A. Priority in Imitating Christ**

According to Chavara spirituality, to be a religious missionary priest means a firm determination to imitate Christ who was a mystic and an active missionary, in the face of great challenges. First and foremost, every religious is to be a man/woman of prayer, be a contemplative, and a mystic, and then be an active man/woman for the Church and the world. In a country like India, which takes pride in its spiritual roots, this lifestyle can be more effective means of evangelization. One has to increase day by day in the personal union with Christ and thereby become a person of holistic spirituality.

<sup>7</sup> See "Chavara's Concept of Human integrated Life expressed in Testaments," Ch.4, section B.

The ideals of the study house envisaged in the CMI Constitution, point to how this end can be achieved: “Rooted in the spirituality specific to CMI, combining *karma* (action), *jnâna* (knowledge), and *bhakti* (devotion) in true *tapas* (austerity), the students shall practise faithfully the application to study (*svadhyaya*) and personal union with Christ our Lord in prayer (*ishwarapranidhana*).”<sup>8</sup>

### ***B. Renewed Commitment and Dedication to the Church***

Chavara spirituality invites each one of us to be enriched with the invaluable richness of one’s commitment and dedication to the Church. The three dimensions of Chavara’s missionary spirituality -love, hope, and authenticity, add power to our dedicated life to witness to Christ. Here one should know the reality of the context in which one lives. As we know from his work, Chavara lived out his spirituality against the background of Indian society, which is pluralistic in several areas, namely religious, cultural, social, political, and economic. Seen from the historical and traditional perspective these factors exert a notable influence on the life of the Indian people. India is widely known as a society with a mosaic of cultures, languages, and religions. Generally these aspects have represented real challenges in every age of Christian witnessing. Pope Benedict XVI also observed that, “in the modern epoch, the *missio ad Gentes* has sometimes seemed to be slowing down because of difficulties due to the changes in humanity’s anthropological, cultural, social and religious contexts.”<sup>9</sup> Even today the centre and north of India continues to be a mission field for missionaries from the south.<sup>10</sup> Thus a proper pastoral application and its proper results consist in our strong commitment and dedication.

### ***C. Practice of Chavara Values***

Chavara spirituality gives much stress to the integral development of human society. This is realized only when the human values are practised authentically. Chavara himself is *par excellence* as a

<sup>8</sup> *CMI Constitution*, no. 117.

<sup>9</sup> Benedict XVI, “Proclaiming and Living the Gospel: duty of all,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, No.12, March 22, 2006.

<sup>10</sup> One third of India’s Catholics are in Kerala and the state is blessed with major vocations to priesthood and religious life. The Catholic presence in north India is entirely different from that in the south, and lacks vocations to missionary life.

person of values and an authentic missionary of Christ as we have already seen in our discussions. As we understand, Christian mission is basically an invitation to repentance and reconciliation between God and man. It is defined in terms of human relationships. It consists of two core aspects, namely, one's relation to God and to neighbour. As a Christian missionary, one is obliged to lead others to this Christian love in a concrete way, recognizing God and neighbour. These values are explicit in the life and message of Chavara in which we can define mission as an act of bridging and restoring the broken relationships. Hence, missionaries are entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation (cf. 2Cor. 5:18). This instruction is an authentic and valid model for all in their Christian witnessing. A glance at Chavara's various fields of activities, such as the ecclesial, social, and literary, reveals the gigantic amount of work he has done!

However, there are limitations as far as the changing scenario of present-day society is concerned. It has changed and continues to change so much that new challenges and trends greatly affect the Church's mission, in particular the mission context of India. The Indian society is very sensitive to the activities of Christian missionaries and the Church. The non-Christians and the leaders of society are very watchful of the activities of missionaries, specifically in the matter of conversion of non-Christians to Christianity. It is necessary to make a careful assessment of the style and purpose of mission in the emerging context of a pluriform society because the term "mission" is not only a Christian term but is also widely used in different contexts by people of other faiths and by secular strategists.

Great men do not disappear from this world without leaving their footprints for the guidance and inspiration of future generations. Chavara was a visionary far ahead of his times. He has left enough prints on the shores of the Church and the society of Malabar of which every son and daughter of the Indian Church can be proud. Many of his dreams have been realized, but many others await their fulfilment, and it is up to his spiritual children to see that the dreams of their holy founder are realized.

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