



The Lord of Heaven & Earth



Chavara Studies
in Honour of
Fr. Lucas Vithuvattickal, CMI

Edited by

PAUL KALLUVEETIL, CMI
PAULACHAN KOCHAPPILLY, CMI

THE LORD OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

Chavara Studies in Honour of Fr. Lucas Vithuvattickal, CMI

K1144.d
6583

THE LORD OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

Chavara Studies in Honour of Fr. Lucas Vithuvattickal, CMI

Editors

Paul Kalluveetil, CMI

Paulachan Kochappilly, CMI

Dharmaram Publications

Bangalore – 560 029

2004



THE LORD OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

Chavara Studies in Honour of Fr. Lucas Vithuvattickal, CMI

Editors

Paul Kalluveetil, CMI

Paulachan Kochappilly, CMI

© Editors

Published 2004 by

Dharmaram Publications

Dharmaram College

Bangalore - 560 029

Cover Design: *Jijo Theethai, CMI*

Layout: *Jinu George*

Printed at: Matha Prints, Bangalore

ISBN: 81-86861- 67-X

Price: HB. Rs. 320.00; US\$22

PB. Rs. 275.00; US\$18

Dharmaram Publications
Dharmaram College, Bangalore - 560 029, India
E-mail: dpinformation@yahoo.com
Web: www.dharmarampublications.com



Rev. Dr. Lucas Vithuvattical, CMI

CONTENTS

MESSAGES

<i>His Beatitude Varkey Cardinal Vithayathil, CSsR.....</i>	1
<i>Very Rev. Antony Kariyil, CMI.....</i>	3
<i>Rev. James Narithookil, CMI.....</i>	5

INTRODUCTION.....	8
BIO-DATA.....	11

PART I

FR. LUCAS AS A DEVOTEE OF CHAVARA

1. Padre Luca.....	15
<i>Franca Bonaiuti</i>	
2. You are the Wind Beneath My Wings.....	16
<i>Mathew Adackapara, CMI</i>	
3. An Authentic Human Being and a Beacons of Light.....	19
<i>Domitian Manickathan, CMI</i>	
4. Our Father Prefect and Professor.....	23
<i>Camil, CMI</i>	
5. An Appraisal of Personality.....	28
<i>Cherian Thunduparampil, CMI</i>	

PART II

FR. LUCAS AS POSTULATOR

6. The Cause of the Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara.....	35
<i>Paul Kalluveetil, CMI</i>	
7. The Rose of Carmel: Venerable Euphrasia CMC.....	39
<i>Cleopatra CMC</i>	

8. Mathew Kadalikkatil, A Servant of God..... 57
Pelagia, SH
9. Mar Kurialacherry, An Apostle of the Blessed Sacrament.... 69
Anet Chalangady SABS

PART III CHAVARA STUDIES

10. A Heroic Son of the Church in India 79
Pope John Paul II
11. Chavara Represents Indian Christianity at its Best 86
R. Venkataraman
12. A Man of Deep Vision 90
P. Ramachandran
13. Biographical Sketch of Chavara 93
Sebastian Punayar CMI
14. A Life Full of Virtues 97
Lucas Vithuvattickal CMI
15. Writings of Chavara..... 115
Sebastian Poonoly CMI
16. Chavara A Prophet of Our Times 127
Joseph Pathrapankal CMI
17. A Contemplative in Action 135
Thomas Kochumuttom CMI
18. Dedicated to the Cause of the Sick and Poor..... 163
Thomas Felix, CMI
19. Chavara's Vision on Education..... 169
Mathew Chalil CMI
20. The Ecclesial Dimension in Chavara's Endeavours 185
Thomas Panthaplackal CMI
21. The Christian Family, A Prototype of Heaven on Earth
in the Vision of Bl. Chavara 210
Thomas Kadankavil CMI

22. The Ethical Lagacy of Chavara for Our Times	231
<i>Paulachan Kochappilly CMI</i>	
23. The Lord is My Portion (Ps. 119:5)	
A Key to the Spirituality of Bl. Chavara	250
<i>George Kaniarakath CMI</i>	
24. The God Experience in Bl. Chavara	260
<i>Sebastian Mullooparamabil CMI</i>	
25. Christ Experience in Atmanuthapam	267
<i>Sophy Rose CMC</i>	
26. Marian Vision in Atmanuthapam	280
<i>Lisieux Therese CMC</i>	
27. Chavara, The Dynamic Hermeneut of the Word	294
<i>Paul Kalluveetil CMI</i>	
28. Behold the Man! The Person of Chavara in His Letters.....	312
<i>Santhi CMC</i>	
29. The Humanity of Chavara in the Chronicles	325
<i>Elizabeth Saly CMC</i>	
30. Eschatological Perspectives in Dirge	334
<i>Gabriel Aranjaniyil CMI</i>	

MESSAGE

H. B. VARKEY CARDINAL VITHAYATHIL, CSSR

I am very much pleased that you are bringing out a volume of Blessed Chavara Studies in honour of Rev. Fr. Lucas Vithuvattickal CMI. This is indeed, a timely and worthy venture, as Fr. Lucas was the Postulator for the cause of the Blessed. In an admirable way, he entirely devoted his time, energy and charism for the canonization of the Man of God. Because of his untiring endeavour, the Positio on the introduction of the cause and virtues of the Blessed was completed within a short time. The Positio in the Latin language consists of 704 + I - xcv pages.

Fr. Lucas is my personal friend, whom I know very closely. He had been to me a great help whenever, I went to Rome, by accompanying me to different places, meeting all my needs, getting tickets for me on unexpected and sudden eventualities. I greatly admire his generosity, spirit of selfless and untiring service. I am certain that it was only because of Fr. Lucas that the cause of Chavara was speeded up, and the Venerable was proclaimed Blessed.

This volume *The Lord of Heaven and Earth* is devoted to the study of the multifarious personality of Blessed Chavara, the Pioneer of Kerala renaissance. He was a great visionary, a *Rishi* of the Indian tradition, who dreamt God's dreams for South India, and put his heart and soul to make them a reality. Blessed Chavara is a *karmayogi*, a man of contemplation and action. His dynamic personality with broad vision and non-abating pluck has worked wonders not only in the Kerala

Church but also in the society of that time. One may compare him to a glittering Morning Star that appeared on the horizon of Kerala, heralding the dawn of a new heaven and a new earth. He had no money in his hands; but it did not deter him from undertaking adventurous schemes. With the Midas' touch he converted everything into gold. I do not go into details about the Blessed's visions and schemes, since this study will shed light on them. Although Chavara spent his time and energy for carrying out his activities in the pastoral, liturgical, ecclesial, social, educational and communication fields, he found time to live in the presence of his Beloved Father (thus he called Christ in his work *Colloquies*) and write numerous spiritual treatises.

Once more I would like to record my great appreciation for this volume in honour of Fr. Lucas Vithuvattickal. I bless all those who have worked for the realization of this *Festschrift*.

Mar Varkey Cardinal Vithayathil, CSsR
Major Archbishop of Syro-Malabar Church
Mount St. Thomas
Kakkanad, Kochi

MESSAGE

REV. DR. ANTONY KARIYIL, CMI

"Our Father Kuriakose Elias of the Holy Family resembled the sun rising on the face of the earth: it journeys round it dispelling darkness, causes the growth of all living beings, being the source of light helps in the creation of jewels like diamonds and agates in the land, and pearls and corals in sea, contributes to the formation of metals like gold and silver, with such accomplishment comes the sun set." (Very Rev. Fr. Kuriakose Elisius Porukara, the second CMI Prior General, in the Biography of Bl. Kuriakose Elias Chavara)

I am extremely happy to know that you are publishing Chavara Studies in Honour of Rev. Lucas Vithuvattickal CMI, under the title "The Lord of Heaven and Earth." In the name of CMI Congregation, as its Prior General I appreciate, applaud, and acclaim this august and timely venture.

Chavara was on fire by the spirit and attentive to the prompting of the spirit. The spirit animated his thoughts, activated his words and empowered his actions. The Blessed was gifted with the divine vision; this mystic dreamt the dream of Deity (Joel 2:28); this zealous Elijah became Jesus' prophetic face and voice in his times. He was guided by the yardstick of Christ's values. He endeavoured to realize the dreams of God concerning the Kerala Church and people.

This Son of Bharat imbibed the rich heritage of Indian *sanyasa*. He knew the importance of *tapas* for attaining *darsan*. Hence he founded *tapasbhavan* which was also called *darsanaveedu*. Chavara was a *muni* who practiced the inner

solitude and conversed more with God than with man. The fire of this interior silence transformed him into a *rishi*, a visionary, as well as a *karmayogi*.

This man of God made himself pulsate with the heart beat of the human beings. He could feel the aspiration of the Christian Community of his times. He could identify himself with the concerns of the people. Fortified with the divine vision and the human dreams Chavara, like his Guru, assumed the form of a slave in order to serve the Lord in his least privileged brethren. He testified by his contemplative and dynamic life, to the truth of the words of Pope John Paul II: "The glory of God is man fully alive with the life of God." The Blessed was a man of God as well as man of man.

One may say that Chavara was a superman. He could concentrate at the same time his attention on religious, ecclesial, liturgical, pastoral, spiritual, social, financial, educational, cultural, and administrative fields. This visionary started schools attached to the churches, printing press and publishing house, house of charity and a confraternity for happy death in his parish. I do not enter into details, since the essays of this volume will illustrate the multifarious apostolic endeavours of Kuriakose Elias Chavara.

Once more I would like to congratulate the editors for undertaking this felicitous and pertinent endeavour. May Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara bless the Kerala and Indian Church as well as the citizens of India.

Rev. Dr. Antony Kariyil, CMI
Prior General
Prior General's House
Ernakulam, Kochi - 682 011

MESSAGE

REV. DR. JAMES NARITHOOKIL, CMI

Blessed Chavara believed that discipline is the means of human spiritual evolution. Hence he decided to leave the distractions and commotions of the world and start the *Tapas Bhavan* where he could spend time in contemplation and intimate union with God. The motive and energy for discipline is nothing but love. Love for him is a concept too large, too deep ever to be truly understood or measured or limited within the framework of words. Genuine love implies commitment and the exercise of wisdom, which Blessed Chavara was endowed with. The energy for the work of self-discipline derives from love and any genuine lover behaves with self-discipline and any genuinely loving relationship is a disciplined relationship. He ordered his behaviour in such a way as to contribute the utmost to the spiritual growth of those whom he loved. He knew well that the absence of love is the major cause of mental illness and that the presence of love is consequently the essential healing element.

Here is a man who sincerely believed in The Holy Thursday Revolution, which has two stages. The first stage occurred when Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. Until that moment the whole point of things had been for someone to get on top, and once on top to stay on top or else attempt to get farther up. But Jesus already on top suddenly got down on the bottom and began to wash the feet of his followers. In that one act Jesus symbolically overturned the whole social order. Then Jesus gave us a new social order through the Last Supper, in the symbolic form of Communion. The exemplary

life of Blessed Chavara bears testimony to the efficacy of these twofold revolutions of Maundy Thursday.

He is one among the few people in the world who are hones to themselves. For if we wish to hear ourselves correctly, our wavelength must be honesty. If we wish to hear others correctly, our wavelength must be sympathy. If we wish to hear God correctly, our wavelength must be humility. Blessed Chavara was on the right wavelength and heard the right thing from himself, from his fellowmen, and from God.

Fr. Lucas is one of those rare visionaries who have splendid dreams about the future not only of CMI Congregation but the whole Catholic Church. First and foremost, Fr. Lucas is an exemplary and vibrant religious who never turned back after making the solemn commitment. The incredible role he played in the building up of Dharmaram seminary, along with other pioneers, will go down in the annals of Dharmaram.

He was really a *Guru* (teacher) who loved his *sishtya* (disciples) keeping up the tradition of the Indian culture. While at Dharmaram despite his busy schedule as Professor, animator of seminarians he spent enough time to look after the sick with great care and concern. He believed that work is worship and devoted his time and energy for achieving definite goal he had set.

One of the greatest achievements to his credit is the consistent hard work he put for the successful canonization of several holy souls. He has a special Charism and patience to pursue this process and see its successful completion. In this process he trusts people who work with him and empower them to bring out the best in them to do extraordinary things. He is a person who sees himself intact when he sees the sea stormy and wild, quiet and serene, dark and moody. He has a

third eye, an eye of love, with which he looks others and sees the good in them and offers all possible help for their integral growth and progress.

The greatest dream and earnest desire of Fr. Lucas is to see Blessed Chavara canonized a saint. He had been doing literally everything possible to achieve this.

Lord of Heaven and Earth is a worthy tribute to Fr. Lucas and a substantial document, which sheds light to the inspiring life of Blessed Chavara. I am sure that this book will induce the readers to widen the horizon of their knowledge and create a special liking for the person of Blessed Chavara and his holy life. I do congratulate Rev. Dr. Paul Kalluveetil CMI and Rev. Dr. Paulachan Kochappilly CMI, the editors, of this book and the contributors of various erudite articles for their impressive and laudable achievement.

Fr. James Narithookil, CMI
Rector
Dharmaram College, Bangalore

INTRODUCTION

PAUL KALLUVEETIL, CMI
PAULACHAN KOCHAPPILLY, CMI

"I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise learned, and revealed them to little children..." Then he turned to his disciples and said privately, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see." (Lk. 10: 21, 23)

These words of praise and blessing were uttered by Jesus, at the return of his disciples from their mission. They were sent to proclaim the good news of the coming of the kingdom of God on earth in Him. They announced the peace of God to those on whom the divine favour rests (Lk. 2:14). In Jesus' name the disciples healed the sick, cleansed those who had leprosy and driven out demons (Mt. 10: 8). Through such acts they were ejecting Satan from the human hearts, and making God the King of earth. As the disciples were narrating the success of their mission, Jesus had a vision. He saw Satan fall like a lightening from heaven (Lk. 10: 18). The Son of God could see through his inner eyes the downfall of the Satan's reign and the dawn of God's kingdom on earth. He could see with his eyes, look at and touch with his divine hands (1 Jn. 1: 11) the meeting and merging of heaven and earth. Both external and internal forces of evil are rooted out. The physical, mental and moral shackles have fallen off. God has become the Lord of both heaven and earth (Lk. 10: 21). Then "love and faithfulness meet together, righteousness and peace kiss each other" (Ps. 85: 10). At this vision the Son of Man could not restrain himself. He exulted over the inauguration

of the eschatological salvation, and exalted the heavenly Father in the creation, this new Adam was seeing the divine faces, and hearing the divine voices. Every face is transformed in to the face of God; every voice echoes the divine voice. In Jesus a new generation on the redeemed ones are born, who are blessed with the celestial eyes of the Divine Babe. This new creation with its first-born is in slavific celebration. "Day speaks to day, night displays knowledge to night" (Ps. 19: 2). "The streams clap their hands and the mountains sing together with joy (Ps. 98: 8). Thus a new heaven new earth (Rev. 21:1) which celebrates the divine praises has come into existence. These are 'the little ones' of Lk. 10: 21 who are granted the divine vision.

Every human being is called to be blessed with Jesus' vision.- They are to enter in union with new Adam into celebration of the new creation. Their sacred duty is to build the Kingdom of God on earth by bringing down the reign of Satan from the human hearts. Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara was such a *karmayogi*, who continued the mission entrusted by Jesus to his disciples. Like prophet Elijah has been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty (1 Kgs. 19: 10, 14). He spent his time, energy, and charisms without reservation for the service of God and His living images. Jesus whom he affectionately called 'My Father' showered on this 'little one' His innumerable gifts. Chavara was blessed with vision of his Guru. Thus he could see the cosmic faces of God, and hear the cosmic voices of the creator in the entire creation. He dedicated his life to make every face the divine face, every voice the heavenly voice. Thereby he made God the Lord of heaven and earth. Indeed, Chavara became the living and loving image of the new Adam.

We are very happy to present these Chavara Studies to the public, which may shed light on the dynamic and divine personality of this heroic son of the Church in India (Pope John Paul II), a man of deep vision (P. Ramachandran) who represents Indian Christianity at its best (R. Venkataraman).

This volume is dedicated to Rev. Lucas Vithuvattickal CMI, whose name and person are intertwined with the name and person of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara. It was on account of the assiduous work of Fr. Lucas as the Postulator for the cause of Chavara that this missionary is raised to the honours of the Altar of God. We would like to thank sincerely every one who has contributed by messages and articles to this volume.

May all of us be inebriated with the vision of Chavara and make the following prayer of his our own:

"Your sacred limbs, holy face
Your sparkling eyes nostrils bright.
Ruby lips, coach-shaped teeth
The honeyed words flowing from your lips
I wish to hear, for a vision I long
Though steadfast to look, unworthy my eyes,"

(Complete Works of Bl. Chavara, Vol. II: V. II 153-158)

BIO-DATA

REV. FR. LUCAS VITHUVATTICKAL, CMI

Birth : 9-9-1918
Baptism : 17-9-1918
SSLC : 1936
Aspirants house, Mannanam: 18-9-1936
Profession : 24-11-1938, Ambazhakad
Final profession : 24-11-1941 (Mangalore)
Philosophy : Mangalore 1941-43
Theology : Pune, De nobili College, 1943-1946
Ordination : February 18, 1946 Pune

1946 March: Kandy, Licentiate in Dogmatic Theology
1947 January: Professor, Dogm. Theology and allied subjects,
S.H. Scholasticate, Chethipuzha
1949 September, Rome, Oriental Institute
1953 Doctorate in Oriental Theology and Liturgy
1954- 57 January Professor Dogm. Theology, Chethipuzha
1955 Master of Juniors, Chethipuzha
1957 -1972 Dharmaram College, Bangalore: Professor
Dogmatic Theology, Liturgy
Dean of Theology
Prefect of studies etc.
1967 President of the Tribunal, Cause of the Servant of God KEC
1970 Informative diocesan process concluded
1972 to Rome to prepare the Positio on the life and virtues of
the Servant of God Kuriakose Elias Chavara
1978- 79: Provincial undivided SJ Province, Kottayam
1979- 1981 Provincial SJ Province, Trivandrum
1981-1987: Procurator General, Rome
1987-1990 Provincial SJ Province Trivandrum

1991-1993 Parish priest St. Michael's church, Vallinfreda (Tivoli)
1993-1999: Procurator General, Rome
2001 Dharmaram College, Bangalore

Postulator

1972 to Rome to prepare the Positio of Servant of God KEC
Positio submitted in 1978
Positio on the miracle submitted 1981

Servant of God Thomas Kurialacherry
Postulator: 1983,
Diocesan process begun 1986, concluded 1991
Positio submitted (3 volumes) 1996

Servant of God Euphrasia CMC: Postulator 1987
Tribunal concluded 1991
Positio (2 volumes) submitted in 1994
Positio on miracle: Tribunal concluded 1999;
Positio submitted February 2001

Servant of God Mathew Kadalikattil: Postulator 1987
Tribunal concluded 1991
Positio submitted 1994

PART I

FR. LUCAS
AS A DEVOTEE OF CHAVARA

Padre Luca

SIGNORA FRANCA BONAIOUTI

Se ciò che vedo e sento
È sogno
Tu sei la bellezza
Se è incubo
Tu sei il risveglio
Se sogno o incubo
è vita
Tu sei la grazia di Dio

Ed io ora so
Di essere una Sua creatura

A Literal Translation of the Poem

If what I see and feel
Is a dream
You are the beauty
If it is a nightmare
You are the awakening
If dream or nightmare
It is life
You are the grace of God
And I know now
That I am His creature

CHAPTER 2

You are the Wind Beneath My Wings

MATHEW ADACKAPARA, CMI

O Father, Your name speaks for itself
You often deny you your very self
And put yourself down in the casket
That by right you are the light in the Seedbasket

Seedbasket the Romans called Seminarium
By your light you made it a Luminarium
And you shine in it as if from Candelarium
For all who pass through the Dharma Arium

You made it renowned as any in the Planetarium
To wit, Georgianum, Canisianum, or Leonianum
And the All Hallows of the land of Hibernium
Or the Eternal City's renowned Gregorianum

While their splendour seems waning, as it may,
Yours is fast ascending, as astrologers say,
While your torchbearers travers the seas
And reach distant lands and your ship sails

Loaded with virtues approach foreign sands
As Oxford's alumni for pearls and diamonds
Once made the nightly skies with glowing stars
Resplendent for all to see the wonders of Mars.

Yours go in all the world and say with one voice
You are the wind beneath their wings.

You taught them the fundamentals of religion
Believed or practised in any of worldly region.
You created the academic calendar and set the schedule
For everyone that goes to the church or to the school.

You reigned graciously in the hearts of all
Who came to you in any need or after a fall
Not with commanding power or with authority
But with tender love, sweet smile, and congenial generosity.

Then said many silently but often in their hearts
You surely, are the wind beneath my wings.

At the news of the end of Derdidodiedi, the wry
You expressed your approval as for corn or rye
When the speech and song reached the heights of this century
As Mozart's Requiem surpassed Maria Theresa's memory.

When you are the thousandth full moon shine in the sky
There I see the words written clearly and shining high
I hear my friends and comrades say with many a ply
"You are the wind beneath my wings", they imply.

The wind blows and blows and the birds fly and fly
Constantly and consciously rising up and up in the sky
Let God give you the grace, to blow in nigh and nigh
That still more and more soar on you high and high

And say with loving hearts full of gratitude
Without any show of hesitant turpitude
That it was you who turned their years of ineptitude
Into days of courageous and boisterous fortitude

Every star in the heavens is a micro chip
That guides the ocean going ship
They say for all in the form of worship
You are the wind beneath my wings.

The Silicon valley of the East still rehearse
The Big Bang theory of the origin of the Universe
As micro chips the story of the Big Bang galore
Your seedlings sing the mystery of Bangalore

Almost fifty years you served in the garden of virtues
And showed yourself always to be the model of virtues.

As reward you received never a single dime
The wages you get is the music of the heavenly chime
That harmonious music you hear of voice sublime
O the heavenly hosts singing soundly all the time

"You are the wind beneath my wings."

CHAPTER 3

An Authentic Human Being and a Beacons of Light

DOMITIAN MANICKATHAN, CMI

John Powell in his classical book, *Fully Human Fully Alive* gives five steps to grow into the fullness of life. They are: 1) to accept oneself, 2) to be oneself, 3) to forget oneself in loving, 4) to believe and 5) to belong.

In early 1960s, when I was a student of theology in Dharmaram College, Bangalore, this is the type of man I found in Fr. Lucas. He was our section master, Professor of systematic Theology, Methodology, and many other allied subjects. He was also busy with the administration of the Institute, as it was in its infancy and only a few were on the staff unlike today.

Fr. Lucas was always at home with students. He was exceptionally soft-spoken in the classroom and very considerate and sympathetic to the weak students. Precision, loyalty to the magisterium, punctuality, and clarity were the hallmarks of his personality.

He was at his best during community outings. There was time-consuming planning, interest-creating handouts, and thought-provoking announcements in preparation for

such occasions. An item of the menu card read thus: "(p) riceless dinner" Priceless precious. But 'P' is bracketed. Only the intelligent and humorous ones would understand that it was a dinner without rice. He loved to be one among the students without wearing masks and playing games. He could be all this and more just because he was a totally contended person, who had accepted himself.

To forget oneself in loving is a *sine qua non* qualification of an authentic personality. At that time, Fr. Lucas was the infirmarian of Dharmaram. A good number of new comers used to fall sick during the first weeks of their arrival. In the summer season chicken pox was a regular visitor to Bangalore. The care of these requires relentless and sensitive service. Fr. Lucas spared no effort to meet the needs of the sick. He spent night after night to look after these students. He was filled with an empathy that helped him to feel deeply and spontaneously with others.

I remember with interest that Fr. Lucas had a personal liking for Lk. 6: 43. "No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; for each tree is known by its won fruit." This was almost the motto of his life. He used to inculcate this idea strongly in his wards. Concerning the study of the Bible and Theology, he insisted upon the interiorization of the ideas. He believed that ideas should inspire ideals in humans. Persons with ideals and conviction only could produce good results in life, he insisted. Indeed it was his personal conviction and life-experience. And he reflected it in his personal life.

The last and the most important aspect of his personality was his sense of belongingness. The CMI Congregation was not a mere religious community of which

he was a member. It was his mother; Dharmaram, his second mother. The staff, students, and the inmates of Dharmaram were all his beloved brethren in Christ Jesus. This spirit of communion and togetherness was exceptionally vibrant in him. In classrooms as well as in conference he tried to instill this idea of the family into his students. Being himself as exemplar in this quality, he could easily impart it.

Only a saint can recognize a saint in others. No wonder, that he happened to be instrument in the canonization process of many servants of God. As any other human being, he had his own limitations, failures, and shortcomings. But he was and is a fully alive person, joyful and vibrant even in his 80s. The enthusiasm and creativity shown even today is unique and amazing.

Before I conclude, let me share an instance that keeps hunting me whenever I think of Fr. Lucas. Once, long back, we were sitting in a convent lounge in USA along with the inmates. I wanted to smoke a cigarette. However, to do it in the presence of Fr. Lucas was unbecoming as he was once my master, and senior to me. Hence, I withdrew into a private room and enjoyed the freedom. Later, on my return I felt strangely amused and teased when Fr. Lucas himself asked me for a cigarette. Thereby he giving his nod of acquiescence. That is Fr. Lucas, an unusual blending of seriousness and humor.

Over and above, of all his qualities what struck me most was his unassuming nature. He moved about like a royal, might liner sailing quietly in the turbulent waters. He always remained calm and composed. He liked to serve but was never over ambitious. Easily available, accessible and

approachable he was an affable personality whose presence and company every one liked.

He took special interest in discerning the aptitude and interest of scholastics with a view to encourage and shape them for their future ministry. He was very humble and simple all through his life. I consider him an authentic person who will ever be inspiring and shedding light to posterity.

CHAPTER IV

Our Father Prefect and Professor

CAMIL, CMI

1. Days in Chethipuzha

I have sweet and loving memories concerning our beloved Prefect (one who was in charge of the batch of students in the seminary) and Professor Fr. Lucas. In 1956 we finished our novitiate in Ampazhakad monastery, and came to Chethipuzha for our philosophy studies. From that time till we were ordained deacons, Fr. Lucas was our Prefect. He was in charge of our religious and priestly formation. When we began to study theology, he was also our professor. Let me share with the readers some of the loving and interesting memories.

For outsiders Lucas was a serious person. But if we approached him, we could experience his tender, kind and loving personality. He was always approachable, and ready to render any kind of service to all his students.

"A teacher communicates to his disciples what he is, more than what he knows," says Ruskin. This is true with regard to our beloved professor. Through his personal charism he has exerted a great influence over his students. His sincerity and religiosity were admired by all.

During recreation time, he used to come to our community. Then he was no more a Prefect and professor, but he was one of us and made our recreation time very lively and enjoyable. He used to crack jokes and hilarious remarks and all of us roared with laughter. He felt free to make fun of us. But his words were never taken as an offence. He was very careful not to wound any one.

Fr. Lucas was a model religious in the eyes of his students. He never swerved from his noble ideas. During my early days in Chethipuzha I was falling homesick. Once I approached him for permission to write a letter to my parents, although recently I had written a letter, promptly (Fr. Lucas) gave me paper, envelope, and stamps. Then he made an observation, which is still imprinted in my mind. He said: "Remember this is not a boarding house." He was not angry at all. Still his words penetrated my innermost depths. Since then I seldom write letters to my beloved ones. This may seem very unnatural and unkind to the modern mind. But times were different, and religious rules and regulations were different during those days.

2. Days in Thevara

After the completion of our philosophical studies we were preparing ourselves to go to Bangalore for our theological formation. First we went to Thevara for our holidays. We were accommodated in a hostel attached to the Thevara College. During the month of May, which is the month dedicated to the devotion of Mary, Fr. Lucas encouraged every one of us to render a homily in honour of the Mother of God. It was his earnest desire that all of us become beloved children of Mary. He was full of ideas how to cultivate our talents in intellectual and literary fields. For this

purpose he came forward with the idea of a manuscript magazine. Everyone was bursting to articulate his ideas and talents.

3. Journey to Bangalore

Bangalore is outside Kerala, our native state. To undergo our theological studies there – everyone was thrilled at the very thought. We were impatiently waiting for the realization of this dream. Fr. Prefect participated in our enthusiasm and hilarity. At the end of May 1957 we took the train to Bangalore. There were altogether 75 persons including our professors. We have to book a special bogie. Jokes and funny recitals added to the merriment. The very presence of Fr. Lucas contributed to our excitement. Fr. Prefect did not forget to provide us with sumptuous meals and snacks.

4. Days in Dharmaram College

As we arrived at the seminary, which is known as Dharmaram College, the construction work was not yet finished. Hence separate rooms were not available, and we had to be content to sleep in a hall. Fr. Lucas was at pains to provide us with all the possible comforts. Hundreds of mosquitoes formed ranks to attack the young men. Fr. Prefect could not connive at this invasion. Promptly he shielded us with mosquito nets.

With rejuvenated vigour the young theologian restarted the manuscript magazine, with the title *Vimala* (the immaculate one). Fr. Lucas continued to champion the cause. His inspiration encouraged the timid and budding writers and artists to come out of their shells. At the same time he devoted

his time, talents and energy to mould us into ideal religious priests. As St. Paul puts it, the love of Christ compelled him (2 Cor. 5: 14) to engage himself for His cause. No realm of our life escaped his attention. With the wisdom of an able administrator he saw to everything, and earnestly arranged everything, so that our life at Dharmaram College became a joy and a blessing. Every one of us still cherishes loving and living memories about the days of our theological formation.

5. The Beloved Professor of Theology

Besides serving as our Prefect, Fr. Lucas also excelled himself as professor of Theology. He taught us mainly the Theology of the Church and the Holy Trinity. His lectures inspired and incited us to grow in the love of our Mother the Church and to appreciate and imbibe the doctrines and exhortations of the Church. Our beloved professor used to cite the famous dictums of the Father of the Church. I still remember some of them: *Extra ecclesia nulla salus* ("Outside the Church there is no salvation"); *Roma locuta, causa finita* ("Once the Church has spoken, the issue is finished"); "Rome moves slowly".

6. I am a Son of the Church

Fr. Lucas had imbibed the Ecclesial spirit of St. Teresa of Avila, the mother of the Carmelite family. Borrowing her dictum, he could exclaim, "I am a son of the Church." He loved the Church as his beloved mother, and was ready to do everything for her honour. This loving son dedicated his time, talents, and energy to her service. I remember an instance, which touched me very much at that time. It was Fr. Lucas who meticulously translated into Latin the voluminous documents of the diocesan court concerning the beatification

process of Sr. Alphonsa. After finishing this labourious enterprise, he devoted his time to reproduce them in beautiful handwriting with the help of a selected number of students. For this he took them to Kottagiri which was famous for its pleasant and salubrious climate. There he spent with them a whole month. Those students greatly enjoyed that period. He rewarded them with an excursion to Ooty, the famous holiday resort of wealthy people.

7. A Man of Paternal Heart

This man of multifarious talents was gifted with a paternal heart. He poured into the heart of the student's affection and love. Because of this everyone cherishes a tender and lingering memory of him. Those who spent their formation days under his guidance, consider that time a rare blessing. He used to give us presents, which, though not very costly, still enthralled the recipients. Fr. Lucas knew that the young men needed rest and relaxation. Thus he took care to organize frequent excursions to cheer them up. I remember the trips we made to Mysore, Jalahalli, and Brindhavanam. Sumptuous food, mimicry, songs, and jokes added to the merriment.

Conclusion

As Prefect and professor, Fr. Lucas exerted an important and decisive influence on our priestly and religious formation. We are happy to record our great appreciation of and gratitude to his noble, learned, hilarious and humble person.

CHAPTER V

An Appraisal of Personality

CHERIAN THUNDUPARAMPIL CMI

"Frailty, thy name is woman" is one of the famous sayings of Shakespeare in his most celebrated work, *Hamlet*. Shakespeare depicts woman as the personification of weakness. During the celebration of the birthday of Rev. Fr. Lucas Vithuvattickal the deacon who felicitated him, parodying the words of Shakespeare said: "*Concern, thy name is Lucachan; love, thy name is Lucachan.*" The deacon who, years ago, as a first year aspirant in the Trivandrum Province, experienced Lucachan's love, concern and personal care and attention in a concrete way, when he was bed-ridden subsequent to an accident at home. Indeed, the deacon is indebted to Rev. Fr. Lucas if the former's hands function properly today. Therefore the above attributes are not without basis. Yes, not only he but all those who have come into a deeper contact with Fr. Lucas will have no difficulty in admitting that he is the personification of the virtues of love and concern. These two characteristics may be the most attractive features of Fr. Lucas' personality for those who have known him and experienced him intimately.

Apparently Fr. Lucas is a person of seriousness and sobriety. My memories go back to 1979-'80, the time when I met him for the first time during some vocation camps. Then he looked so serious and contemplative, that he did not seem to be approachable and friendly. However, it did not require

much time to get convinced that judgements based on external appearance alone need not always be correct. By the grace of God, I got the opportunity to know him more closely as I joined the CMI congregation in the year 1980. He was the Provincial of the St. Joseph's Province, Mannanam, Kerala, India while I joined. We, the aspirants and the Rector, late Rev. Fr. Damascene Manamel were lucky to enjoy the paternal concern and love of Lucachan.

He was a 'father' figure for us, the little ones in the religious house. At that time provincial house was at Mannanam and therefore it was easy for him to visit us as and when he wished. Most often he came to visit us with handful of prizes and gifts. It was an expression of his love and affection. He was well aware of the fact that children who were transplanted from their homes to the new atmosphere of a religious house needed much care, attention, love and encouragement. His short but frequent visits created in us the impression that we are really loved and cared and it was a great feeling indeed. Such good memories occur as I note these lines. It might not be an exaggeration if I say that young priests, scholastics, novices and aspirants were his obsession in the sense that he always had a special concern and love for them. Both as aspirants and later as scholastics we all enjoyed his affectionate company during short excursions or one day picnics.

Hard work is one of the outstanding characteristic notes of Fr. Lucas. No matter where he is or how old he is, whether he is sick or healthy, he exploits the time at his disposal and brings about wonderful results through incessant hard work. God has blessed him with rather good health. He thanks and glorifies God by employing his physical health, and mental and intellectual soundness in a most befitting way. The scriptural invitation that one should eat bread out of the sweat of his forehead, finds its real application in Fr.

Lucas. Be it abroad or at home in India, all wonder at the pace with which he works and accomplishes things, even in his eighties. He is a challenge to the youngsters who become or pretend to be old and act thus, much before they become chronologically old. Looking at the way he moves through the streets of Rome depending on the public means of transportation to go to the various offices, one cannot but wonder how he manages it even at this age. In the month of September 2003 he was admitted to a hospital for a week or so due to some physical illness. The very next day he got discharged from the hospital and returned to Dharmaram, resumed his activities although he had not fully recuperated. He went to take Latin classes and also was preparing documents related to the causes of the Servants of God as a preparation for the journey to Rome. These all manifest his sense of duty and hard working nature.

He is a man dedicated for the cause of Bl. Chavara. His commitment for the cause of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara is very much appreciated and admired. The huge volumes of *Positio* speak at length about his committed effort. The *Positio* also talks about the proficiency of Fr. Lucas' in Latin language as it is composed in Latin. Today the St. Thomas Christians in India, in general and the CMI Congregation in a special way are proud that Blessed Chavara, along with some other Servants of God have been raised to the honours of the altar. At this juncture one cannot forget the fact that behind the beatification of Blessed Chavara, there is the sweat and hard work of Fr. Lucas in preparing the documents and the *Positio* based on which the Congregation for the Causes of Saints passes judgments regarding the virtues and miracle of the Servants of God.

Fr. Lucas is a great devotee of Blessed Chavara. Among the living members in the congregation, Rev. Fr. Lucas must be the person who can speak about Bl. Chavara most

authoritatively. In addition to being simply one of the members of the congregation founded by Bl. Chavara and hence possessing the spiritual heritage bequeathed to all the members, Fr. Lucas has the vantage point of being the postulator for the cause of the founder. Thus he has studied the life of Bl. Chavara thoroughly and drawn inspiration from the same. I have never heard Fr. Lucas addressing Bl. Chavara as *Chavarayachan* as many do. Instead he addresses Bl. Kuriakose as *Chavarappithavu*. It is indicative of Fr. Lucas' reverence to, love towards and trust in Blessed Chavara.

Conformity to the mind of the superiors is another feature of his noble character. He had been the Provincial of St. Joseph's Province, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala and the Procurator General in Rome for several terms and still is the Postulator for the cause of Bl. Chavara and many other Servants of God. But such high posts and positions have not made Fr. Lucas an assuming person. Just for example, as mentioned above, in the month of September 2003 he was hospitalized in St. John's hospital, Bangalore. One day some of us visited him in the hospital and he told us that he would be discharged the same evening. We brought him back. As soon as we reached Dharmaram, Fr. Lucas told me, "let me just meet and inform Fr. Rector." He had difficulty to walk, and Fr. Rector's room is on the first floor. Still the inner urge to hold on to the good old tradition and practice made him say so. However, since he had difficulty to walk and climb the staircase, I told him that I would inform Rev. Fr. Rector.

Fr. Lucas is a man of relationships. He is a friend of all and all are his friends. He knows every member of the province, and nearly all senior members of the congregation in person. He has a huge network of relationship in all walks of life, with the ordinary as well as the celebrated personalities, both in India and abroad. The best in him is that one who ever happened to meet Fr. Lucas would never easily forget him as,

he would definitely be taken up by this soft-spoken, gentle, loving and great but simple man.

The age of a person is usually counted by years. In that respect, Fr. Lucas, indeed, is in his eighties and hence, pretty old. But one can also be called 'aged' by virtue of one's wisdom. Certainly, Fr. Lucas is a '*jnana vridhan*' with immense treasure of divine wisdom and spiritual experience. What makes him distinct is that he avails his experiential knowledge and divine wisdom for the gain of the community through his enlightening words, enriching deeds and enlivening presence.

Besides, Fr. Lucas is a man of vision. He has played an inimitable role in the evolution of the CMI congregation in one of its peculiar transitional periods. Being the Provincial of the undivided St. Joseph Province, and later, of the Province of Thiruvananthapuram. He acted with great foresight, enviable discretion and clear vision, always placing the interest of the congregation in the forefront. We should never be blind to the great services he rendered guiding the provinces in an age of change and confusion. It was his tremendous and unwavering faith in the Lord, trust in his co-religious and total commitment to the community that saw him through all the times of trouble and tribulations. To conclude, Fr. Lucas is a man of integrity as well. He is a caring pastor, practical philosopher, reasoned theologian, excellent linguist, able administrator, experienced spiritual director, model religious, and above all a good human being. He knows no extremes. Rather, he combines in himself all the qualities of a Carmelite, oriental and an Indian, at the same time being open to other traditions and outlooks. As he inherits the patrimony and wisdom of the earlier generation, so also, he synthesizes them with new currents of thoughts, ideals and trends. This keeps him a class apart - mature in age, unique in personality, gentle by nature, loving in character, modern in outlook, updated in knowledge and perfect in discipleship.

PART II

FR. LUCAS
AS POSTULATOR

CHAPTER VI

The Cause of the Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara

PAUL KALLUVEETIL CMI

Introduction

Since the Part-Three of this Book is devoted to the studies on the person, spirituality, and ministries of Kuriakose Elias Chavara, we do not enter here into such details. Only the part played by Fr. Lucas in the Canonization process of Kuriakose Elias Chavara is pinpointed in this article.

President of the Tribunal

It was under the leadership of Fr. Lucas that the works of Kuriakose Elias Chavara were translated in to Latin. In 1967 he was appointed as president of the Tribunal for the cause of the Servant of God. The informative diocesan process was concluded in 1970.

Fr. Lucas in Rome

In 1972 Fr. Lucas, as the Postulator went to Rome to prepare the positio. All at once he put his heart and soul into that laborious project. Because of his assiduous and indefatigable work he could submit the Positio in 1978.

Positio

Positio super Introductione Causae et super Virtutibus ex Officio Concinnata has XCV + 704 pages. It contains general information (274 pages), summary of the life, virtues, death and burial, and fame of sanctity of Chavara (71 pages), 21 types of Documents (639 pages), three appendices on Photos (17), Bibliography and glossary (28 pages), alphabetical index on proper names (17 pages), and table of contents (12 pages). Further the Positio contains three geographical tables: India in the 19th century (in p. 16-17), Kerala in the 19th Century (pp. 178-179), and India in modern times (pp. 196-197).

The addused Documents speak volumes for the meticulous research mentality of the Postulator. First part is reserved for the documents concerning the life, activities, and death of Chavara:

- Documents on the family, place of birth, baptism, confirmation and primary education: 2
- Documents on the seminary life and Ordination: 1
- Documents on the foundation of Religious Congregation and its approbation: 8
- Nature of the Religious Congregation and its Constitution: 5
- Progress of the Congregation and its Affiliation to the Order of Carmelites with the title T.O.C.D: 9.
- Efforts of the Servant of God to maintain the unity of Malabar Church: 9.
- Efforts of the Servant of God for the renewal of Christian life in Malabar: 12.

- Part of Chavara in the foundation of Religious Congregation for women in Malabar: 3.
- Chavara as Superior: 3.
- Activities of the Servant of God in the administration of temporal affairs: 3
- The Writings of the Servant of God: Letter 6, The Chronicle of Mannanam Monastery (Excerpts) 1; Writings concerning the administration 3; Spiritual writings: excerpts from 3 books.
- Fame of Sanctity during his life time :1
- The Testament of the Servant of God: 1
- His last days, death, and burial : 3.
- The Second Part of the Documents is devoted to the theme of Fame of Sanctity of Chavara after his death.
- Two Biographies written by Fr. Kuriakose Eliseus Porukara and Fr. Leopold Beccaro OCD in the year of his death: 2.
- Excerpts from some chronicles: 5
- Written Testimonies about His fame of Sanctity after his death :11
- Written Testimonies about the Servant of God: 8.
- The Transfer of reliquiae of the Servant of God: 6.
- Favours received through his Intercession: Excerpts from the Book "Servus Dei Kuriakose Elias, Favoures et Sanationes: 1
- Excerpts from the Ordinary Process in the Archbishopric Curia of Changanacherry: Testimonies 23 Witness 3.

Chavara as the Blessed

The Sacred Congregation having scrutinized the writings of the Servant of God and other relevant Documents formally introduced the cause on March 15th 1980. Fr. Lucas submitted in 1981 the Positio on the miracle. On April 7, 1984 Pope John Paul II solemnly declared the heroic Virtues of Chavara thus elevating him to the status of the venerable. On February 8, 1986 Pope John Paul II raised Venerable Kuriakose Elias Chavara to the honours of the Altar declaring him Blessed. Now Fr. Lucas is working for the approbation of another miracle, which will lead to the Canonization of Chavara.

CHAPTER VII

The Rose of Carmel Venerable Euphrasia CMC

CLEOPATRA, CMC

The Congregation of the Mother of Carmel (CMC), founded in 1866 by Blessed Chavara Kuriakose Elias and the Carmelite Missionary Fr. Leopold Beccaro, is the first indigenous Congregation of Kerala. Sad at the barrenness of the Syro-Malabar Church of Kerala in nurturing saints, they founded our Congregation so that women also could have the same chance as men to lead a consecrated life, love God and neighbour and serve with total commitment. It is in the Boarding house of the first Convent at Koonammavu, in Ernakulam, that Rose Eluvathingal lived for nine years hoping to join the convent, imbibing the spirit of the founders and pioneer sisters.

1. Birth and Childhood

Rose, the eldest child of Eluvathingal Cherpukaren Antony and Kunjethy in Kattur in Irinjalakuda diocese (then in the Trichur diocese) was baptized on 17 October 1877, in the Mother of Carmel Church, Edathuruthy. Rose acquired from her father firmness in decision and a bad temper and from her mother endurance, piety and devotion to Mother Mary.

2. Vocation

Rose was very prayerful and followed her mother in going to the church, in fasting and abstinence. One night at the age of nine, while she was pondering over the phrase in the Litany of our Lady, "Queen of Angels", a beautiful Lady appeared to her and told her that the Mother of Jesus is the Queen of Angels and she is her mother and the mother of all people. She was also instructed to speak to her father about her vocation. Rose got up, knelt down and surrendered herself to God, offering her virginity to Him. For long her father was adamant that she was to marry the man he had arranged. But when her little sister died, Antony mellowed and allowed her to join the convent.

3. In the Koonammavu Boarding House

Rose liked the prayerful atmosphere of the convent boarding house and grew in her prayer life. She learned some languages and crafts like making rosaries. But often she got sick. Once she was fatally ill and the sisters decided to send her back home. But the Holy Family appeared to her and gave her a miraculous healing.

4. At the Ambazhakkad Convent

In 1896 when the dioceses were reorganized, the Bishops took back the sisters who belonged to their dioceses from Koonammavu. Bishop John Menacherry brought to Ambazhakkad the sisters from the Trichur diocese--one professed sister, four novices, one postulant and nine aspirants including Rose Eluvathingal. On 9 May 1877 the convent was blessed and the next day the aspirants were given their

headdress and Rose received the name Euphrasia of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Rose was immensely thankful to God for the grace she received. But she soon found herself amidst problems, sufferings, diseases, trials and temptations. Evil spirits started attacking her; at the same time there were heavenly visits also. She was being tested in the burning furnace of excruciating pain. She made strenuous efforts to overcome her weaknesses, peculiarities of temperament and temptations from various sources. She resolved to live in constant contemplation of the Lord, seeking the path of absolute detachment. She prayed that she become a partner in the Lord's sufferings, to be one with him in his agony for souls. As if in answer to her prayer, she had a severe attack of rheumatic fever and acute arthritic pain which became fatal. But she was miraculously healed again.

5. Vestition

On 10 January 1998, the blessed day of Vestition dawned. Euphrasia with her companions, after long preparation received the holy Carmelite habit and it was a moment of rare joy and fulfillment for her. She offered herself totally to her Lord and Master Jesus, thereby rendering herself as the Lord's own property. She made remarkable progress in prayer and contemplation in an all-absorbing love for God. Once she was severely tempted by the devil to leave the Congregation and go home. The evil spirits even threatened her saying that they would destroy her family and all would meet with severe sufferings and contagious diseases. But the Mother of Carmel appeared to her and saved her from that affliction.

6. Profession

On 24 May 1900, the first convent in the present Trichur diocese was founded at Ollur in the suburbs of the Thrissur town by Bishop John Menacherry. It was named after the Blessed Virgin Mary in accordance with the ardent wishes of the Christian community there and the desire of the Bishop himself. On the same day of the blessing and inauguration of the St. Mary's Convent, Sr. Euphrasia and her companions offered their Vows to God for ever in everlasting love and service of the Lord. Euphrasia surrendered her life entirely to Him. She was prepared to undergo any number of trials and tribulations, to pay any price to be a sacrifice for her Lord and be an instrument in his hand to fulfill His will upon the earth.

7. Spiritual Direction

When the sisters were brought to Trichur, Mother Agnes the Superior of Koonammavu Convent wrote a letter to Bishop Mar John Menacherry, referring to the miraculous cure wrought by the vision of the Holy Family. The letter continued: "It was because of this incident and the great devotion and self-discipline of the girl, that the authorities had once more decided to have her back in the convent although they had decided to send her away." These words of the Mother Superior appeared so significant and meaningful to Mar John Menacherry that he took upon himself the responsibility of her spiritual direction.

With childlike innocence Sr. Euphrasia wrote all her natural inclinations, attacks of the evil spirits, God-experience, divine visions, revelations and depressions in spiritual life to the Bishop for close scrutiny and guidance. She accepted all his instructions as God's own inviolable law. She could derive

much energy, consolation and progress through this spiritual contact with the spiritual director. Though Sr. Euphrasia had always requested him to destroy her letters, the Bishop by the promptings of the Holy Spirit preserved the letters without her knowledge. By God's grace these letters have come to us revealing the working of the Spirit, her God-experience, her spiritual marriage, union with God and her life of union.

8. Novice Mistress

Immediately after her profession she was appointed assistant to the Novice Mistress. Though frail in health, Sr. Euphrasia exhibited rare moral courage, spiritual power and a very high sense of responsibility and so she was soon appointed Novice Mistress of the Congregation. Sr. Euphrasia was very particular that novices should grow in great ascetic discipline, holiness and deep spirituality following in the footsteps of the great Master, Jesus. She had the strong conviction that asceticism was not meant for the casual and the careless, but that it required unreserved obedience, prayerfulness and readiness for sacrifice, in short, self-abnegation. Some did not like her strict ways. But with the help of the Master and Mother Mary she continued her loving service of formation. Sr. Euphrasia took care of all the needs of the novices. She nursed the sick showing affection, mercy and tenderness like a devoted mother and imparted a new energy to them. Besides, as she had the gifts of the Holy Spirit, she was able to help them and others in many ways.

It was at this time that Blessed Mariam Thressia, Foundress of the Congregation of the Holy Family, came to stay in the Convent, Ollur, at the instruction of Bishop Menacherry. She stayed there for two months. It was a rare meet of two holy souls who recognized each other and

understood the wonderful workings of God in each other. Sr. Euphrasia taught her prayers and gave training in religious life. She even wrote a small prayer book for her.

9. Mother Superior

Immediately after her service as Novice Mistress for nine years, she was made Mother Superior of the same St. Mary's Convent Ollur. She found it very difficult to accept the post. She complained to the Lord about it. Then our Lord told her, if she could not be the superior, He would if she asked Him. Mother Euphrasia understood the meaning of the Lord's words. She immediately got a beautiful statue of the Sacred Heart and kept it in a niche beautifully decorated. The statue was consecrated and prayers were offered. From that moment onwards the Sacred Heart of Jesus was the Superior of the convent. She would entrust to the Lord everything in the morning. In the night she would converse with Him giving him a report of what had happened. During the day when she passed by the niche, she would cast loving glances at the Lord.

As superior she devoted herself to the care of the sisters. Her Motherly heart went out in tender, loving care to the sick and the weak. She tried to give the sisters delicious food, but her prophetic courage did not deter her from correcting the erring sisters. She was very strict in obeying the rules and made others also obey. She herself led a very ascetic life, which served as an inspiration to the sisters.

10. The Praying Mother

The people gave Mother Euphrasia sweet appellations like 'The praying Mother', and 'the Virtuous sister of Eluvathingal Cherpukaren family'. The way she went about with eyes perpetually fixed on God and with her soul

immersed in divine life, was sufficient to arouse devotion in the onlookers. We could say, that Euphrasiamma had the same zeal as our father Prophet Elias, "I stand in the presence of the living God." Prayer was her life breath wherever she was. Observing the peace and zeal on her face, the sisters used to call her "the mobile tabernacle." She used to pray for the souls in purgatory who used to request her prayers.

In the search of the living God Mother Euphrasia climbed all the steps described by St. Teresa of Avila. Three times the Lord of her soul gave her the mystical wedding ring. She became one with her Lord in mystical union and attained the highest peaks of mysticism. This is the highest glory that can ever be achieved by a saint on earth. She wrote to her spiritual director: "For the last four months, I have noticed a special thing in me. Whenever I do a job or make conversation someone lovingly speaks to me in my heart without ceasing" (1 June 1912).

11. Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus

Euphrasiamma had only one aim—to be in union with her Lord, to give Him some consolation in his sufferings and pain from sinners. Her devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus was an everlasting flame in her. One day Euphrasiamma was praying before the statue of the Sacred Heart. Suddenly the statue radiated rays of light and the picture of our Lady, on the other side, also radiated rays of light, and in the middle, the rays coming from both places met and merged. Euphrasiamma showed it to the housemaid who was there in the bedroom with her. As it was night all the others were sleeping.

Once Euphrasiamma advised an aspirant to pray the rosary of the Sacred Heart. Later, when she got into trouble, Euphrasiamma appeared in a dream and instructed her to continue with the rosary, which she had given up. This sister prays the rosary daily and still lives in the congregation.

12. With the Eucharistic Lord

Mother Euphrasia always prayed, "O loving Jesus, most sweet Jesus! let my heart be an ever-burning lamp for you." She used to pray in the chapel sitting on a stool for hours and hours quite oblivious of herself and her surroundings. Like an iron drawn to a magnet, Euphrasiamma was drawn to her Eucharistic Lord. She was the first to enter the chapel and the last to leave the same. Her unquenchable thirst for Holy Communion can be seen in her letter to Mar John Menacherry: "Because that greatest fortune the Holy Mass is not celebrated here often, there is great inner pain and desire to repair this loss, and great hunger and thirst increase in me to do something for this" (3 July 1902). Euphrasiamma wanted everyone to love the Eucharistic Lord and make reparation for the sufferings He undergoes from sinners. She wrote to Bishop Menacherry:

My loving Father, I have one more ardent desire. Let us have one day recollection every month. Let that recollection be on the first Friday of every month and on that day let the Blessed Sacrament be exposed for adoration. If you don't object, let this be a blessing to us. If the whole day is kept apart for recollection, the Divine Saviour will be pleased and glorified. At any cost, let the Heart of Jesus be adored and comforted through any person (1 October 1906).

13. With the Crucified Spouse

The all-absorbing love for her Crucified Lord engulfed her completely. She used to kiss the crucifix repeatedly and silently speak to it holding it close to her bosom. During such moments she used to go into a trance and no one could take the crucifix from her hands. She partook of the Passion of Christ by inflicting severe blows of the scourge on her delicate body, wearing a chain of thorns on her waist, kneeling on hard stones, making stones her pillow and giving up food altogether. When the authorities found fault with her, even when she was in the right, she accepted the accusations without justifying herself. After receiving Holy Communion Jesus Himself used to manifest to her the different stages of His passion and suffering, His sacred wounds, His utter misery and excruciating pain. Once she was blessed with a vision of the Crucified Christ and he spoke to her:

I experience bitter suffering from those who pretend to be my faithful followers. My daughter, you should receive Holy Communion daily and in a penitential spirit. You offer me and my blood as a sacrifice to my Father in heaven. Let there be a recompense for the great harm the unkind, ungrateful souls are causing me. Let solace come to me through you and by your powerful intercession(26 Nov.1902).

14. With the Blessed Mother

The Mother of Jesus was Euphrasiamma's mother too. From the very beginning of her life till the end Euphrasiamma was nestling close to the Divine Mother like an innocent baby. She used to refer to the Blessed Virgin as a mother "par excellence", much above her own mother in loving care and tender solicitude. Euphrasiamma made it a practice to pray with Mother Mary. The Blessed Virgin also used to come to

her and pray with her for the needs of the Church, for the conversion of sinners, and for the authorities. The Blessed Mother was a true mother to Euphrasia, and Euphrasia a true daughter to Mother Mary. When evil spirits attacked her and her wards, she used to take refuge in the Heavenly Queen, who crushed the serpent. Mother Euphrasia had great devotion to the Rosary. She prayed the 153 beads Rosary always. She used to call others also to pray the Rosary with her. Praying the Rosary and seeking the powerful intercession of Mother Mary, she helped the souls in purgatory. Many people used to come seeking her prayer for healing, in financial difficulties, family problems, for passing examinations, for securing jobs, etc. She used to intercede for them with Blessed Mother Mary and the prayers were granted.

15. A Perfect Model of Charity

Mother Euphrasia loved God with all her mind, heart and strength. In the same way she loved people also. Her love, care and prayer reached out to everyone who was in need. Even her enemies benefited a lot from her. School children crowded around her to see her, touch her and tell her their troubles. It is difficult to find someone in the locality who has not received her help. If anyone helped her in any way she used to thank her saying, "I won't forget even after death". When a mother and child who got her help asked her who would help them after her death, she smiled and softly said; "Oh, I won't go like that. I will be hereabouts."

16. To the Eternal Home

At the age of 75, one day Mother Euphrasia while in the chapel suddenly felt great exhaustion. Her tongue was

paralyzed. She pleaded in writing for the last sacraments. The news of her sickness spread like wild fire. Sisters and people came in big numbers to have a last look at her and get her blessing. Only for three days she lay in bed, her fingers moving the Rosary beads, and her hands blessing the people. On Aug 29, Friday, at 8.40 p.m. her holy soul flew to her heavenly Bridegroom. At that time the bells of Cherlayam Convent, for which she had prayed a lot, automatically rang. The sisters wondered why and how the bells rang. No one rang them. In the morning when information reached them, they understood that the bells announced the departure of Mother Euphrasia to her heavenly abode. Everyone tried to get something as a keep- sake. Even flowers were snatched away. The next day Mother's body was buried in the tomb next to the chapel where none had been buried before and no one has been buried since.

17. From the Obituary

There is a custom among the Carmelites to prepare an obituary, an assessment of the life and death of the deceased nun and send it to the other convents. The following lines are from the Obituary:

Sr. Euphrasia is a blessed soul who worked not only for her own spiritual benefit, but also for the welfare of the Congregation and the Church in general, making use of all the powers and gifts given by the Lord. From the very moment of her entry to the convent, everyone felt that Sr. Euphrasia was specially chosen by the Lord to fulfill great tasks; she was very careful and strict in the performance of her duties in the convent. She observed strictly all the rules of the Congregation and made others observe them. She was always prepared to undergo any number of sacrifices for the Lord however hard they may be. From the very beginning till the end she was dead

to all material interests. So even in her lifetime, her associates could trace in her the making of a future saint. Very often at different stages she was subject to attacks from the evil spirits and they used to torture her endlessly. Besides it was made manifest to her companions that she often enjoyed heavenly visions especially on special feasts.

18. Showers of Graces

Mother Euphrasia, who promised people that she wouldn't forget even after death, started fulfilling her promise. Showers of blessings came down on all those who prayed at the tomb. Children prayed for success in examinations and they passed and they came to thank her. A handicapped child got healed. A deaf and dumb child got the gift of speech. People began to increase at the tomb. So, in 1963 Bishop George Alappatt published a prayer for the Canonization of Sr. Euphrasia. At his request, in 1970 Rev. Fr. Philip O.C.D. wrote and published the first biography of Euphrasiamma, *Kerala Carmela Kusumum*.

19. Steps towards Canonization

One day, after I became Provincial of the Trichur Province, in 1986, I went to visit the Cheralayam Convent. Sr. Venustha asked me why I was not doing anything for the beatification of Mother Euphrasia. Many miracles had taken place. A lame child there had been cured perfectly and both his legs were all right. I met the boy and was convinced of the miracle. His mother was saying the beatification prayer that Sr. Venustha gave her. Mother Euphrasia came at night and healed both legs one after the other. I started praying to God as to what I should do and how to go about it.



20. Meeting Rev. Dr. Lucas Vithuvattickal, CMI

When I consulted our chaplain Fr. Caius, CMI, he advised me to go without delay to Trivandrum and see Fr. Lucas Vithuvattickal C.M.I., who is the postulator of Blessed Chavara Kuriakose Elias and who was here in India at that time. So I started with Sr. Peregrin for Trivandrum and reached the monastery early in the morning on 8 April 1987. I asked the Brother for Fr. Lucas Vithuvattickal C.M.I. "Have you seen him before?" He asked me. "No, I have not seen him, but I want to meet him", I replied. Then the Brother went and brought me the morning newspaper. I wondered why he gave me the newspaper. I just glanced through it and saw a photograph. On reading I understood that Fr. Lucas Vithuvattickal had become Provincial just a few hours back. Then I saw someone coming towards me. I looked at him and the photograph. It was the same. It was Fr. Lucas! He greeted us and said that he would see us later and invited us for the Liturgy.

All the priests concelebrated together the Holy Mass, presided over by Fr. Lucas Vithuvattickal C.M.I., the new Provincial. They prayed and sang with gusto. The Mass was an experience of worshipping with the "royal priesthood". I offered to God along with Christ's offering of Himself, Fr. Lucas Vithuvattickal C.M.I., my intention and myself.

After Mass, Fr. Lucas Vithuvattickal C.M.I. came to us and said: "Come! We will have breakfast together". He appeared relaxed, even though he was the newly elected provincial and had to preside over the chapter sessions. At breakfast he asked me about the purpose of my visit. I knew nothing about saints and their causes. I simply told him that we wanted him to take up the cause of Mother Euphrasia of

the Sacred Heart of Jesus, of the Trichur Province of the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel. He asked me quite gently about the fragrance of holiness and virtue of Mother Euphrasia. Well, I blurted out what I knew. Of course, I had been living as a novice in the St. Mary's Convent, Ollur, where Mother Euphrasia was and so I had seen her for a whole year. He told me that he would look into it and see what could be done. I gave him the Beatification prayer leaflet printed in 1963 and a copy of *Kerala Carmela Kusumam* written by Fr. Philip OCD.

We were happy that we met him. We felt that he would take up her cause. Joyfully we returned to Thrissur. Fr. Caus told me that I was lucky because as Fr. Lucas was elected provincial, he would be in India for at least three years. Oh the providence of God! I thanked God for the way he was guiding me. Later, when I heard that he had come to CSR, Pariyaram, for the meeting of the superiors, I went to see him. Then he told me that he was not convinced of the validity of the cause and so he could not do anything. I felt very sad and helpless, and then I went to Fr. Canisius CMI and asked his advice. He said: "It is true. He has to be convinced or else, he won't take it up. Wait and pray. It is better that he gets the conviction and takes it up". I understood that there was nothing more I could do, but entrusted the cause to the Lord and prayed for the manifestation of His will. Even though I was sad, I decided that I did not want anything God did not want. I started to pray. I was at peace.

21. Fr. Lucas takes up the Cause

Then I saw him at the CRI meeting climbing the steps with great difficulty, as his legs were red and swollen and perhaps in great pain. I told him that I was going to pray for

him to Mother Euphrasia for his healing. He didn't object. I wrote a letter to all our convents asking the sisters to pray for Fr. Lucas Vithuvattickal C.M.I., for the healing of his swollen legs. The sisters prayed. After about two months Fr. Lucas wrote a letter to me saying that he was convinced of the holiness and fragrance of virtue of Mother Euphrasia and that he would take up her Cause. I was happy. The Lord gave me the signal to go ahead.

As Fr. Lucas directed me, after getting the necessary permissions and approval from my Superior General, the CMI Prior General and from Bishop Kundukulam of Trichur I gave the formal letter of appointment to Fr. Lucas Vithuvattickal C.M.I. as Postulator for the Cause of Mother Euphrasia. Fr. Lucas sent his letter of acceptance on 18 August 1987.

22. Servant of God Euphrasia

On 29 August 1987, the 35th anniversary of the death of Mother Euphrasia, Fr. Lucas Vithuvattickal C.M.I. took the oath of office as Postulator before Bishop Kundukulam. On 7 September 1987 Sr. Perigrin and myself met Fr. Lucas at the Prior General's House in Ernakulam. On 9 September 1987 he appointed Sr. Peregrin, Vice-Postulator of the Cause of the Servant of God Mother Euphrasia of the Sacred Heart.

After receiving the no-objection from Rome to proceed with the Cause of the Servant of God, Bp. Kundukulam appointed the Diocesan Tribunal and on 21 October 1988 the Tribunal members took their oaths before the Bishop. On 30 January 1990 the tomb of the Servant of God was formally opened and after identifying the remains they were re-interred in the new tomb in the chapel.

On 19 June 1991 at the solemn function in Lourdes Cathedral, the Diocesan Tribunal was closed and the records were signed and sealed by Bishop Kundukulam before the public. On 20 June 1991 I took the reports and records in sealed boxes to Delhi and as Fr. Lucas told me, entrusted them with the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop George Zur, to take them to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in Rome. On 26 June 1991 Fr. Lucas Vithuvattickal C.M.I. also went to Rome to do what was necessary. Sr. Alphonse Shanti too went to Rome to help Fr. Lucas to write the POSITIO of the virtues. On 4 March 1992 the Postulator Fr. Lucas also appointed Sr. Cleopatra Vice-Postulator. On 20 April 1994, the Postulator Fr. Lucas Vithuvattickal C.M.I. submitted the POSITIO of the Virtues to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

When the miracle of bone cancer healing happened to a patient of Dr. Rajiv Rao of Mission Hospital on 4 December 1997, I called Fr. Lucas and requested him to come to enquire about the miracle. He came and did what was necessary. On 8 January 1999, the Apostolic Miracle Commission was instituted and started functioning. On 12 February 1999, the Apostolic Miracle Commission was closed and Fr. Lucas took the records to Rome. After writing the Miracle POSITIO, on 6 March 1999, he submitted the same to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

23. Mother Euphrasia becomes 'Venerable'

The Lord sent a shower of blessings in the Jubilee year. On 5 July 2002 the Decree approving the heroic Virtues of Mother Euphrasia was issued in Rome. Fr. Lucas was there in Rome participating in the function. On the same day we also celebrated the event here in Ollur. The Servant of God has become 'Venerable' now. Praise be to God!

On 29 August 2002, the Golden Jubilee of the death of Mother Euphrasia was celebrated on a grand scale. Fr. Lucas was present. On 17 October 2002, the 125th anniversary of the birth of Mother Euphrasia also was celebrated.

At present the miracle is being examined by the Vatican doctors. On 27 January 2003, Fr. Lucas also went to Rome to see to the Cause of Venerable Euphrasia. We hope and pray that the Lord will deign to approve of the miracle soon and make his dear daughter 'Blessed'!

By Way of Conclusion

As I look back I see the hand of God in everything. And the most important of the graces he showered on us, especially with regard to Venerable Euphrasia, is the meeting of Fr. Lucas Vithuvattickal C.M.I.. I have heard that a Kerala judge when he saw in the court Blessed Chavara, who was falsely accused by a man, he stood up in absolute reverence and exclaimed: " This is a man of God, he cannot do it; he will not do it", and dismissed the charge against him without any further ado. This is my experience too in meeting Rev. Fr. Lucas Vithuvattickal C.M.I. The more I saw him and worked with him, my feelings of reverence have also increased.

I have been struck by his absolute simplicity, humility, silence and gentleness. He does things in silence without notice. He has a calmness and serenity which is unsurpassed. He listens to the Holy Spirit before he acts. It is not human praise that he looks for, but divine approval. There is a disarming simplicity about him, which reminds me of the great rishis of our land. I have learnt a great deal from him.

I have worked with Rev. Dr. Lucas Vithuvattickal for 16 years now. I have never heard him utter a complaint. He never spoke ill of anyone. He always spoke well of others. He never got angry. He prayed. I have heard it was he who arranged for our house in Rome, which is Procura now. Even at this age, he does not speak of any difficulty. He is not eager for money, power or fame. A man like St. John of the Cross, he is totally detached from everything and lives in complete abandonment to God. After seeing him I got the feeling that only a saint can take up the Cause of a Saint. God is glorified through him and through the cause of the saints he has taken up.

CHAPTER VIII

Mathew Kadalikkattil A Servant of God

PELAGIA, SH

1. Early Days

Fr. Mathew was born on Thursday April 25, 1872 as the second son of Cherian and Rosa Kadalikkattil. This was an ancient and distinguished Syrian Catholic family belonging to the Parish of Pala. From the hardworking character of his father he inherited the enterprising spirit for the glory of God and it was from his mother that he received his solid piety, his ardour in prayer, his refined taste and manners and his generosity towards the firmness of faith and dedication to the Church which would lead him to perform so many acts of heroism. Fr. Mathew recalled the richness of the sound advice of his mother with a grateful heart after becoming a priest.

Fr. Mathew was fortunate enough to have his initial schooling under the local guru, which was possible only for rich families at that time in Kerala. While things were going on pretty well his father had a very severe accident, which resulted in the dislocation of his hip. It forced him to be ion bed for four to five years. This affected the rhythm of the peaceful happy life of the family. His nephew, Thomas Cherian testifies, in the Kadalikkattil family history, as follows:

"The little who never tasted any hardships or roughness of life had to undergo a period of groaning and travail for a few years. This trial was a stepping stone in the life of Fr. Mathew. It turned his mind and heart to feel "compassion" for the poor and the suffering. This rich boy was transformed into a very powerful and affective instrument in the hands of God, to become the Father of many orphans, destitute, widows and sick for whom he poured out his life to give them refuge in orphanages and homes for the aged that he himself constructed. The continuous treatment and attention for years, improved the health of Mr. Cherian and with the co-operation of his children he regained his original state of happiness."

2. Vocation and Response

Mathew grew to the age of eleven lending a helping hand to his parents and studying whatever he could at home. He was then sent to the elementary school attached to the parish church of Thanoly. While he was studying there, Fr. Thomas Kuzhimattathil noticed the signs of a priestly vocation in Mathew. He gave him all the encouragement possible and motivated the parents of Mathew, to allow him to become a priest. Fr. Thomas taught him Syriac, the liturgical language, the essential spiritual values and the lessons for a virtuous life.

The pastoral visit of the vicar Apostolic of Kottayam Vicariate, Dr. Charles Lavinge S. J., opened the door for him to seminary life. With the blessing of Dr. Charles Lavinge, he joined the seminary at Mannanam, attached to the Carmelite Monastery, in 1896. In preparing himself for the priesthood, he focused his attention on the growth in virtues as well as attaining knowledge.

On February 17, 1901, he was ordained priest by His Excellency Bishop Mathai Makkil, the Vicar Apostolic of Changanacherry. Fr. Mathew celebrated his first Holy Mass on February 28, 1901, in the monastery chapel at Mannanam. Hymns of praise flowed out of his heart. Joining the psalmist, he sang "I will lift up the chalice of salvation and call on the name of the Lord" (Ps. 116: 12-13). Soon after his ordination, he spent a couple of years in his own parish helping parish priest as the assistant.

He was appointed as the Vicar of the Sacred Heart church at Karro in 1903. Being an ardent devotee of the Sacred Heart, he worked hard for the parishioners in their spiritual and temporal needs with the affectionate solitude of a mother and the prudent concern of a father. He enrolled them in the apostleship of Sacred Heart of Jesus and this reformed their lives accordingly. Within three years he successfully managed to construct a beautiful new church in the name of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. He visited all the families in the parish regularly; he found time to be with the miserable, helpless, aged, sick and destitute. He did all that he could for their spiritual and material well being

In 1906, he was transferred to the church at Lalam (old) in the centre of Pala town. The young priest was greatly embarrassed by the low morality of the people. Among them there were public scandals. Fr. Mathew sought all ways and means to bring them closer to God. From his own personal experience in prayer and communion with the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, he realized the effects of consecrating people and families to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, for the renewal of the parish. He had a very simple and ascetic life style. He used to wear a thorn belt on his hands for penance. By prayer and fasting he did penance for the

conversion of hard-hearted public sinner and was very compassionate towards them.

After his devoted service for four years at Lalam parish (old), he was appointed as the assistant in response to the request of Fr. Joseph Thayyil, the Vicar of Pala, to get him to his home parish at Pala in 1910. He accepted this in obedience to the will of God, which was the special providence of God and resulted in the founding of a religious congregation. The parish was a very large one, with centuries of Christian tradition. Being an active and zealous apostle of the Sacred Heart he found time to visit families, to talk to them, to console the sick, and to encourage them to consecrate their families to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. He was very considerate towards the poor, afflicted, aged, sick, orphans and destitute irrespective of caste or religion. He took their needs and burdens to the Lord in prayer. He remained in prayer for hours, lost in the presence of the Divine.

3. Founding of the Sacred Heart Congregation

During the 10 years of pastoral experience in the nearby parishes of Pala, he was brought into contact with many fervent young women, longing for religious life, for whom the doors of many convents were closed. Being their spiritual father he knew the genuineness of their vocation. All these years he was growing deeper in intimacy and communion with the Heavenly Father by dwelling in the heart of Jesus in front of the Blessed Sacrament in prayer. Like a beloved son approaching his dear loving father, he placed the sufferings of the poor, aged and the forsaken, the burning desire of his spiritual daughters, before God in prayer. Many days and nights he prayed to find out the will of God. Finally, one night while he was immersed in deep meditation, he

heard a very gentle inner call, to form a religious congregation for women, for the glory of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and for the service of the poor and downtrodden. He shared his experience with the elderly and saintly priest with whom he had close spiritual communication. They encouraged him to go ahead without hesitation.

Ordinary young women with meager education and poor financial resources found it is very difficult to join the then existing congregations. To be in a religious congregation without any fixed patrimony and a higher degree of education was a challenge at that time. By placing his ardent trust in the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Fr. Mathew continued his mission as an enlightened shepherd, active in sharing his love compassion and life with the last, least and lost ones.

Having obtained the permission of Bishop Mar Mathew Makkil, on 1 January 1911, he blessed a small house owned by Mathew Jnaralakat and consecrated it to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. It began with four young devout women. The sole capital for the new venture was his total trust in the divine Providence. A few more applicants were received later. Within a year he could manage a permanent building for the newly founded community.

The candidates accommodated some destitute and orphans in the same house, sharing the facilities mutually. In 1944, he completed the construction of another building and the destitute and orphans were transferred to the new house, separated from the sisters but shared the same food.

His work as assistant in a big parish, the supervision of the construction work of a permanent building for the sisters and orphans, the effort to impart religious training to the

young candidates who were educationally and culturally backward were altogether strenuous and taxing. He drew his strength from his intimacy with the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the Eucharist. The Lord instructed His servant as the psalmist says "even in dreams."

4. A Good Pastor

The Sacred Heart Congregation was only one of his concerns. Pastoral assistance to the people around was his main concern right from the beginning to the very end. He spent long hours in the confessional drawing people closer to the Sacred Heart of Jesus by his loving advice. Devout parents even from nearby parishes brought their children to Fr. Mathew for their first confession.

He was transferred twice as parish priest to the church at Lalam (new) from 1914 to 1917 and from 1921 to 1922. He was very zealous to establish the reign of the Sacred Heart in the homes of the faithful.

Fr. Mathew was later twice in charge of the church at Kannadiurumpu, Pala from 1917 to 1921 and from 1922 to 1935. His compassionate love, divine gift of wisdom, touching words and the small medical assistance given to them were all deeply appreciated by the people. People from various far and near parishes would come to Pala to hear his sermons especially on Good Friday. He bestowed special attention to the enlightenment and uplift of the backward classes like the Paraya and the Pulaya. They belonged to the lowest classes in every respect and were considered untouchables by other communities. Fr. Mathew came down to them as a good shepherd and worked strenuously for their betterment. He started a primary school for them at Kannadiurumpu. He

took particular interest in the harijan Christians and in sending their children to school and catechism classes. Gradually many embraced Catholic faith. Ignoring his poor health and fatigue he travelled long distances on foot to visit homes and places where his help was needed.

Meenachil being a rural area at that time education for women was neglected. He bestowed his fatherly care upon the primary school and middle school at Kannadiurumpu. Later he started St. Mary's High School at Lalam, Pala. When the English middle school at Kannadiurumpu was shifted to Lalam. Only by facing insurmountable difficulties and hardships could he complete the construction of the school building in 1925. This school is considered today as one of the illustrious schools in Kerala.

Fr. Mathew had great devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Unable to walk owing to a serious, painful swelling on his foot in 1930 he promised and later fulfilled a pilgrimage to Pampoorampara, a small mount, making the Stations of the Cross on seven consecutive Fridays in Lent. Subsequently he prepared a route to the top, erected along the same the fourteen Stations of the Cross and built a chapel dedicated to the Mother of Sorrows. Since then this has become a centre of pilgrimage especially during Lent. This proves to be a source of spiritual joy and solace to many people.

Though the Sacred Heart Congregation was started in 1911, it did not get its own identity, centering on the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The dreams of the father-founder came true providentially only in 1931, after many trials and difficulties, when His Grace Mar James Kalacherry was inspired to change the title to the Congregation of the Sacred Heart with its own identity and charism. Tears of joy flooded the eyes of Fr.

Mathew as he uttered triumphantly to his daughters " I have put my trust in the Lord, and I shall never be ashamed."

5. The Last Days of Fr. Mathew Kadalikkattil

In 1930 Fr. Mathew was forced to change his residence from his humble dwelling at Kannadiurumpu to St. Thomas Church, Pala, on account of his fast declining health. Thirty-four years of physical strain, continuous attention to difficult works frequent rheumatic and diabetic complaints had been depleting his energy. However, he discharged faithfully all his duties as vicar of Kannadiurumpu church and chaplain of two convents and keep up his routine observances of priestly spirituality and devotional exercises.

On April 25, 1935 in the morning he celebrated Holy Mass at Sacred Heart Convent. He was found to be very weak, still he proceeded to Kannadiurumpu for night adoration. He laid the foundation stone for the new building for the Clarist Convent at Kannadiurumpu on 26th morning. After night adoration he was so exhausted and was not able to walk, so he went to bed there itself. Throughout his life he had never accepted any special services from the sisters, but perhaps with a premonition about the end, he allowed them to nurse him. Three-week passed by. He knew that he could not return to his presbytery. So he agreed to be transported in an armchair to his room in St. Thomas Church, Pala. When he passed by the S. H. Convent he asked the bearers to stop there for a while. All the sisters and inmates of the 'destitute home' lined up before their father. He spoke to them all about the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. He raised his weak hands and blessed them all.

The sick and dying father, in spite of his acute pain, gracefully received the guests and blessed them. His condition became critical towards the evening of Wednesday, May 22, 1935. On Thursday, May 23, immediately after receiving the last sacraments he peacefully entered into the eternal joy of the Lord. On the same day in Rome Pope Pius XI authorized Bishop Mar James Kalacherry to approve of the Congregation drawing up a suitable constitution appropriate to the time and place. This providential event of the canonical approval for which he was longing, was real evidence of the heavenly reward of the saintly father, who desired to fulfill God's plan.

6. Sacred Heart Congregation Today

During his last days of illness, Fr. Mathew had said "The Congregation will flourish after my death." This prophecy of the founder has been realized ever since. The congregation has now 2350 professed sisters who live and work in about 400 houses spread out in almost all states in India and abroad. These now come under 10 provinces. The sisters are engaged in all areas of apostolate rooted in the charism of their beloved Father founder.

7. Canonization Process

In May 1986 a committee was appointed by the Superior Sr. Theresa Margaret under the leadership of Sr. Pelagia Thekkaparambil S. H. to study about Fr. Mathew Kadalikkattil and to collect material related to his life. The committee did the work entrusted to it and submitted the records related to the life the Founder. The Superior General of the Sacred Heart Congregation submitted these records to Rev. Fr. Lucas Vithuvettickal CMI, the Provincial of

Trivandrum Province, and requested him to be the Postulator on Aug. 25, 1987. On May 14, 1988 he took the oath as the Postulator before the Bishop of Pala, Mar Joseph Pallikparambil. We, the members of the Sacred Heart Congregation really regard the appointment of Fr. Lucas as a special gift of God and a symbol of the love Jesus for us.

On the same day he visited the tomb of Fr. Mathew Kadalikkattil and prayed and dedicated himself for the cause. He has been really working hard for this cause. He advised the members of the Sacred Heart Congregation that the spirit of the Founder must be revealed through the life of the members and it is one of the important factors behind the canonization of the Founder. The work for the canonization started with great vigour and enthusiasm under the leadership of Fr. Lucas. He has studied the case and is convinced of the fame and sanctity and has requested Mar Joseph Pallikparambil to institute the process of canonization. After getting the approval from Rome, the Bishop instituted the Diocesan tribunal to conduct the informative process of the Servant of God, Fr. Mathew Kadalikkattil. The Tribunal was inaugurated on June 24, 1989 by His Excellency Mar Joseph Pallikparambil.

Fr. Lucas Vithuvattickal, who is the postulator of many causes of canonization, is really a holy priest with a deep spirit of dedication and responsibility. His unique personality is worth appreciation. Only holy persons can handle these matters which are related to the causes.

Fr. Lucas translated the introduction and conclusion of all the sessions of the Tribunal into Latin. He worked hard for this process for many days even without any rest though he was his seventy. From his dealings with us we understand

that he has deep faith in the saintly life of our Founder Father. He never utters a single unnecessary word. There are no words to explain his spirit of dedication and hard work. He is very soft spoken humble and simple in his dealings. He is always available. He knows very well how to proceed and always gives us directions. He uses his time, knowledge, energy, experience, and ability without any reservation for this cause. He does not interfere in any matters not entrusted to him.

Sr. Pelagia, the Vice Postulator cum provincial of the Sacred Heart Congregation Pala (1991) recorded in her report that the efficient leadership of Fr. Lucas has greatly speeded up the process. He did whatever was possible for him to the maximum. We remember him with reverence and gratitude. He came to the S. H. Provincial House, Pala several times for this cause towards its completion. The tribunal was concluded on January 12, 1991.

The documents of the tribunal were officially submitted to the Congregation for the Cause of Saints on March 20, 1991. The said congregation has examined the documents and issued a Decree of validity of the diocesan process on May 31, 1991.

Then Fr. Lucas spent his days in Rome to write the tedious and tiresome work of the positio and submitted it at his earliest. Now we are waiting for the reply from Rome. We believe that in the near future the Servant of God will be a raised to the honours of the altar. His Heavenly Blessings are felt by all of us in the abundance of grace that we daily receive.

The members of the Sacred Heart Congregation cannot forget Fr. Lucas Vithuvattickal who has worked hard for the

cause of our Founder Father. We offer all the credit and honour to Rev. Dr. Lucas Vithuvattickal for having completed the process of the cause of our Founder Father so thoroughly and well with in a short span of time. His name and his work for the Cause is written in golden letters in the history of our Congregation. We wish and pray that God may reward him abundantly.

CHAPTER IX

Mar Kurialacherry **An Apostle of the Blessed Sacrament**

ANET CHALANGADY, SABS

1. Early Days

Thomas Kurialacherry the sixth child was born of pious and devoted catholic parents – Chacko and Annamma, on 14 January 1873, at Champakulam in the present archdiocese of Changanacherry. He was baptized on 21 January and was given the name Thomas.

Kunjuthommachan, that was his pet name, even from his childhood was extremely devoted to the Holy Eucharist and the Blessed Virgin Mother. As a boy he was under the supervision and the spiritual guidance of his uncle Fr. Thomas Kurialacherry.

After his primary education he studied in the government public school Changanacherry. His secondary education was at St. Ephrem English School, Mannanam, conducted by the CMI Fathers. He had the best education then available in the country. In association with the CMI Fathers his love and attachment to the Holy Eucharist and to Blessed Virgin Mary had a steady growth which was so prominent in him right from his childhood.

2. Towards the Priesthood

Kunjuthommachan had an eager desire to become a priest even at a tender age. He informed his mother of this good desire. But the mother was not quite willing to send him to the priesthood as the family had lost its head. She compelled Kunjuthommachan to take up the responsibility of bringing up the family. But the prayer and insistence of the son compelled the mother to comply with his request. She permitted him, at last, to pursue priestly studies.

As he finished his school career in 1890, Bishop Charles Levigne, the Vicar Apostolic of Kottayam, accepted him for priestly studies. The bishop immediately sent him to the Propaganda College, Rome for studies. He was ordained priest in Rome on 27 May 1899.

3. A Zealous Pastor

Fr. Thomas Kurialacherry returned to India in 1899 ablaze with the great love of Jesus in the Eucharist and fraternal charity as well. He was so overpowered with this love that he was determined to have religious community of adorers to draw every one to this fount of love. First he was appointed the vice-rector of the boarding house attached to St. Berchamans' English School, Changanacherry. In 1901 he was appointed vicar of the parish at Chennankary and later of Kavalam, Edathua, and Champakulam. Wherever he was, he worked hard to raise the spiritual and moral standard of his people and was greatly concerned for the poor.

While he was vicar in his own parish at Champakulam he was appointed Bishop of Pella and Vicar Apostolic of the Vicariate of Changanacherry in 1911. He was consecrated

bishop at Kandi (Sri Lanka) by Msgr. Zaleski, the Apostolic Delegate to India, on 3 December 1911.

4. Founder of SABS Congregation

In his intense desire to lead everyone to the Blessed Sacrament, he had already started a new religious community of adorers in 1908. After being appointed Vicar apostolic of Changanacherry, he officiated at the first visitation of this community of the Sisters of the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. The members of the congregation received strength and light from the most Blessed Sacrament and use their physical and spiritual capabilities for the good of the people of God. The sisters take care of the poor, the sick, and the helpless. They run educational institutions to bring about the all-round development of children. Above all they dedicate themselves to the glorious task of bringing the whole world to Jesus in the Holy Eucharist.

5. A Bishop after the Heart of Christ

During the fourteen years of his pastoral service as bishop of Changanacherry, he put his whole effort into its all-round development. "Renew everything in Christ" was his motto. He visited every parish at least three times during this period. At a time when the caste-system was so prevalent in society, he worked hard for the uplift of the poor, downtrodden and the low casters... One of his major concerns as a pastor and bishop was education, especially of women, and he started schools almost in every parish. To facilitate the higher education of youth, he founded St. Berchmans' College in 1922.

He was a great apostle of the Blessed Sacrament. In spite of his daily tight schedule he spent long hours before

the Blessed Sacrament and gave a new impetus to the Eucharistic devotion in the country. As a great devotee of the Blessed Virgin Mary, he exhorted his flock: "To the Father through Jesus, to Jesus through Mary." Out of his 133 pastoral letters, 22 of them deal directly with the Bl. Virgin Mary. He also promoted various kinds of devotions, especially to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and started confraternities of the Holy Eucharist, Sacred Heart, Bl. Virgin Mary, and Franciscan Tertiaries in several parishes.

At every period of his life, as an altar boy, a seminarian, a priest, and a bishop – he is a challenge to the modern world and particularly to priests and bishops. The resolutions he made as a seminarian reveal his farsight and pastoral vision, and hold up an exemplary life as the ideal. He paid great attention to the catechism classes of children, the formation of priests and laity, the evangelization and the unity of the various Christian denominations.

6. A Saintly Death

In 1925 during the "ad limina" visit he died in Rome on 2 June and was buried in the Chapel reserved for the Propaganda College in Campo Vernano cemetery. In 1935, ten years later, his mortal remains were transferred to Changanacherry and were re-interred in the sanctuary of the cathedral church, Changanacherry where they remain to the present day.

Bishop Kurialacherry, who took his flock to the heights of holiness through his ardent charity, care, and concern, still lives in the hearts of the people as living and loving memory. His flock was aware of his holiness. No wonder after his death they sought his divine assistance. They found real help and consolation in his intercession.

7. Showers of Favoured

Reports of the favours received through the intercession of the Servant of God began to appear in the media. St. Mary's Cathedral, Changanacherry, where the saintly bishop was buried, became a pilgrim centre. The faithful began to pray for the canonization of their saintly bishop. With the blessing and permission of the then bishop, the members of SABS Congregation began to recite a prayer for his canonization.

8. Canonization Process

It was in 1983 that the then Superior General Mother Lambert submitted the official letter of request for canonization of their holy founder to the then Archbishop of Changanacherry, Mar Antony Cardinal Padiyara. The Archbishop told the Superior General to find a postulator. We did not know whom to approach. After much of prayer and thought the name of good Fr. Lucas Vithuvattickal came to our mind. We have a strong feeling that he would go out of his way to help us. One of the reasons for our strong hope was that the SABS Congregation has a very healthy, spiritual kinship with the CMI Congregation, from the very beginning. Accordingly we approached Fr. Lucas Vithuvattickal. As he hails from the neighbourhood of Champakulam, the home parish of the Servant of God, he has ample knowledge about the family, its background, surrounding and the times of Bishop Kurialacherry. He most willingly consented to our request. After consulting Archbishop Antony Padiyara, the then Superior General of the SABS Congregation Mother Lambert appointed Fr. Lucas Vithuvattickal as a postulator of the cause of canonization of Mar Kurialacherry.

Ever since his appointment he has been making deeper and deeper studies on the life of the Servant of God. He is

convinced of the holiness of the Servant of God. On 25 January 1985 he submitted the "Supplex Libellus" to the then Archbishop of Changanacherry. Since then every step taken in the direction of the canonization is fully under his able and efficient leadership. Being an exemplary priest and a dedicated religious it is easy for him to study the various aspects of the sanctity of Bishop Kurialacherry.

Deeply rooted in the faith of the Catholic Church, sharing in all her spiritual riches and dedicated to the building up of the Catholic Community, Fr. Vithuvattickal is our pride and joy. We can very well delineate him as an exemplary priest who lives the life of the Church and is fully dedicated to her cause.

It is his insatiable thirst to identify himself with the Church, to think with her, to live with her and to show his commitment to the Evangelization mission and the related activities of the Church, that has made Fr. Lucas leave his home land and go to Rome to serve there. It is his constructive commitment to the cause of the Catholic Church in Kerala that prompted him to accept the arduous task of the postulator of Bishop Kurialacherry. Though he is far away from us territorially he is very close to us spiritually. His simplicity and sense of responsibility are singularly praiseworthy.

He is very generous, extraordinarily careful, extremely interested, and quite prompt in giving guidance and help to the Vice Postulators, the canonization tribunal, and the members of the historical Commission. When the Servant of God's tomb was opened for scrutiny and at the end of the diocesan processes of canonization he was present and gave us very valuable suggestions and directions.

On 27 April 1991, with Mar Joseph Powathil, the Archbishop of Changanacherry in his Cathedral, the diocesan

process of Mar Thomas Kurialacherry was concluded. His Grace sealed all the files related to the canonization process and entrusted them to the Pontifical Commission for canonization.

It is in the infinite mercy of God that the Commission appointed Fr. Vithuvattickal himself as the Roman Postulator of Mar Kurialacherry, the Servant of God. He is the official link between the Roman Secretariat and the 'actors' of the process. Fr. Lucas took upon himself the onerous responsibility of preparing the positio. He appointed Sr. Anet Chalangady SABS as external collaborator. It was in an ill-furnished presbytery without the heating system that he stayed on and worked. His life with the motto 'to live with the minimum' is indeed a miracle. He cooked for himself, cleaned the presbytery and the surroundings. His poverty became a model for all those around him, his colleagues, as well as his parishioners.

Even during the very difficult task of preparing the Positio he had the full charge of a parish. He found time to prepare simultaneously the Positio of the Servant of God, Mathew Kadalikkatt, the founder of the S.H. Congregation and St. Euphrasis, another Servant of God. He used to work more than 18 hours a day. Of course, he never neglected his daily supreme duty of offering the Holy Qurbana praying the Breviary and other spiritual exercises. In between he used to find time for his personal prayer too.

Where Fr. Lucas was relieved of his parish duty he was appointed superior of CMI House in Rome. Besides he had the responsibilities of the Procurator General. He has been extremely kind and considerate to the tourists who arrive in Rome and is always very hospitable to them.

9. Positio Submitted

It is because of the strenuous efforts of Fr. Lucas that he has been able to complete the Positio bringing out the heroic virtues of the Servant of God Thomas Kurialacherry in such a short time. It runs into 2038 pages divided into 3 sections:

Informatio	- 545
Summarium	- 575
Documentatio	- 918

Fr. Lucas has already submitted the 'Positio' to the Congregation for canonization. He has thorough knowledge and deep awareness of the sanctity of the Servant of God and the yeoman services he rendered to the society at large. He is proud of the saintly bishop.

10. Words of Appreciation

Now the SABS (Sisters of the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament) Congregation, the Church in Kerala, and the Archdioceses of Changanacherry in particular are filled with satisfaction and joy. The people of God have clearly understood the services of the Servant of God, the richness of his sanctity, his most exemplary life, and his life-style centred on the Holy Qurbana. Now people are ready to imbibe inspiration from the holy and heroic life of Bishop Kurialacherry, to become real adorers of the Blessed Sacrament and to dedicate themselves to the service of humanity.

Let us salute Fr. Lucas who has had an incomparable part to play in bringing about this salutary situation. Let his spirit of sacrifice, selflessness, dedication and exemplary life inspire us.

PART III

CHAVARA STUDIES

CHAPTER X

A Heroic Son of the Church in India

(Extracts from the Homily during Beatification of Chavara, 08-02-1986)

POPE JOHN PAUL II

"I thank you Father, Lord of the heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and have revealed them to the little ones." (Mat 11.25)

These are the words of Jesus of Nazareth, and he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit when he uttered them. How full of meaning they are for us today: "I thank you Father, Lord of the heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and have revealed them to the little ones." (Mat 11.25)

What things has the Lord hidden? What mysteries has he revealed? Truly the deepest ones, the mysteries of his own divine life, those known here on earth only by him, only by Christ himself. For he says: "All things have been delivered to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." (Mt. 11:27)

And behold, the Son does reveal these things. At the same time he reveals the Father. The Father is revealed through the Son. And to whom does the Son reveal these

things? He reveals them to those whom he chooses: "for such was your gracious will," Jesus tells the Father. He reveals these things to the little ones.

Today, in this Sacred Liturgy, we wish to unite ourselves in a special way with Christ the Lord. Together with him we wish to bless the father, for the particular love which he has shown to a son and a daughter of the Church in India. We praise the Father for his countless blessings during the two thousand years the Church has existed on Indian soil. With Christ we glorify the Father for the love that he has shown to these little ones of Kerala and all India.

The Church throughout the world rejoices with the church in India as Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara and sister Alphonsa of the Immaculate Conception are raised to the ranks of the Blessed in the great communion of saints. This man and this woman, both members of Syro-Malabar Church here in Kerala, advanced to great heights of holiness through their wholehearted co-operation with the grace of God. Each possessed an ardent love of God, yet each followed a distinct spiritual path.

Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara was born here in Kerala, and for nearly all of his sixty-five years of earthly life he laboured generously for the renewal and enrichment of the Christian life. His deep love for Christ filled with apostolic zeal and made him especially careful to promote the unity of the Church. With great generosity he collaborated with others, especially brother priests and religious, in the work of salvation.

In co-operation with fathers Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara, Father Kuriakose founded an Indian

Religious Congregation for men, now known as the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate. Later, with the help of an Italian missionary; Father Leopold Beccaro, he started an Indian Religious Congregation for women, the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel. This Congregation grew and flourished and religious vocations became better understood and appreciated. Though the common efforts of the members of new religious families, his hopes and works were multiplied many times over.

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 the Holy Eucharist and the Holy Family. In particular, he dedicated himself to encouraging and counselling Christian families, convinced as he was of the fundamental role of the family in the life of society and the church.

But no apostolic cause was dearer to the heart of this great man of faith than that of the unity of the harmony within the Church. It was as if he had always before his mind the prayer of Jesus, on the night before his sacrifice on the cross: "That they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us" (Jn 17:21). Today the Church solemnly recalls with love and gratitude all his efforts to resist threats of disunity and to encourage the clergy and faithful to unity with the See of Peter and the universal Church. His success in this, as in all his many undertakings,

was undoubtedly due to the intense charity and prayer, which characterized his daily life, his close communion with Christ on earth.

Father Kuriakose bears witness to the beauty and greatness of the religious vocation. And I would like to take this occasion to direct my thoughts particularly to the men and women religious who are present here and to all religious in India.

Every one who has been baptized into Christ has discovered a "pearl of great value" and a "treasure" worth all that one has in life (Cf. Mt. 44-45). For all the baptized share in the very life of the blessed trinity and are called to be "light" and "salt" for the world (Cf. Mt. 5: 13-16). But within the great family of the Church, God our father calls some of you to follow Christ still more closely and to dedicate your lives with a special consecration through the profession of chastity, poverty and obedience. You, the Religious of the church, bear public witness to the Gospel and to the primacy of the love of God. By a permanent commitment and lifelong fidelity to your vows, you seek to grow in union with Christ and to contribute in a unique way to the life and mission of the church. And what a vital contribution is yours:

In a rich variety of forms, you live to the full of your evangelical consecration. Some of you have heard the Lord's personal call to the contemplative life where, though hidden from the world, you offer your lives and prayers for the sake of all humanity. Others have been called to an active apostolic life, where you serve in teaching, health care, parochial work, retreats, works of charity and many forms of pastoral activity.

No matter how you serve, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, never doubt the value of your consecrated life. Whether your service resembles the great apostolic endeavours of Father Kuriakose, it is important in the life of the Church. Remember the words of Saint Paul, in today's second reading, "We know that in everything God works for good" (Rom 8:28). Even when you feel discouraged or weighed down by personal failures or sin, trust even more in the love of God for you. Turn to him for mercy, forgiveness and love. For as Saint Paul says in the same reading: "the Lord helps us in our weakness" (Rom 8:26). It is in him that we find our strength, our courage and our joy.

Without the vital contribution of men and women Religious, the charity of the Church would be lessened, her fruitfulness would be diminished. Thus I pray that the beatification of these two exemplary religious of India will give you renewed zeal for your precious vocation. In your own love for Christ may you be inspired by their fervour. And like them, may you keep the simplicity of the "Little ones" of the Gospel, be pure of heart and filled with compassion. Be always eager to please the Lord. For it is to the little ones that the mysteries of God are revealed (Cf. Mt. 11:25).

Therefore, we sing together with the psalmist in today's liturgy. Together we give thanks:

"It is good to give thanks to Lord
to make music to your name, O most High;
your deeds, O Lord, have made me glad;
For the work of your hands I shout with joy."

O Lord, how great are your works" (Ps 91 (92): 1, 4-5).
Truly great are the works of God: And the greatest work of

God on earth is man. The glory of God is man fully alive with the life of God. The glory of God is the holiness of each person and of the whole Church.

Holiness is the work of divine grace. When we proclaim it solemnly in the midst of the people of God in this land, we give glory to the most High. In the words of St. Augustine we praise God, saying, "In crowning merits, you are crowning your own gifts."

Truly extra-ordinary is this day. The prophet Isaiah says: "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Is 55:9)

Today it is given to us to penetrate more deeply into these divine thoughts. It is given to us to know better the divine ways. And behold, what ways? The apostle writes: "for those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son, in order that he might be the first born among many brethren. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified" (Rom. 8: 29-30). These are the divine thoughts; these are the divine ways.

Today it is given to us to see how these thoughts are accomplished in Blessed Kuriakose Elias. Today we see how these ways of God lead through their hearts, throughout their earthly pilgrimages, to the glory of the altars.

"Father, it is true." Jesus says, "you have graciously willed it so" (Mt. 11: 26). And he continues: Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me: for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Mt 11: 28-30).

Jesus speaks in this way. And he speaks to everyone. We are called to holiness. We are called to enter into communion with him, with his heart, with his cross, with his glory.

Jesus speaks in this way. And together with Jesus so does Blessed Kuriakose. His heart is united with the heart of the divine Redeemer and are filled with love for all the sons and daughters of your Blessed land. Amen.

CHAPTER XI

Chavara Represents Indian Christianity at Its Best

R. VENKATARAMAN
FORMER PRESIDENT OF INDIA

I deem it an honour to participate in this function which commemorates the great pioneer in social reforms, Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara. It is well over a hundred years since Father Chavara left us. And yet he is a living inspiration for thousands and thousands of persons. He is gratefully remembered as a profound scholar, an educationist, a builder of institutions for the under privileged, the illiterate, the destitute and the needy.

Few people have been able to combine the contemplation of God with the service of man as naturally and creatively as Father Chavara did. There was in fact no dichotomy in his mind between the world of faith and the world of action. Chavara represented both. A mystic, he could also be an engine of activity. Capable of withdrawing into his inner most being, Chavara was at the same time a motive force for the establishment of a social order in which everyone could live in dignity and faith. It is only appropriate that His Holiness the Pope declared Father Chavara "Blessed" during the papal visit to India in 1986.

Father Chavara lived at a time – the nineteenth century – when our society was passing through a period of intense depression and gloom. An alien power, which ruled as, bothered little about the living conditions of the people. The roots of our culture and tradition had been shaken by an insidious propaganda, which sought to highlight our weaknesses and undermine our strength. The result was that a great sense of inferiority and despondency came over our people. Father Chavara was one of those precious persons who knew how to link India's past with her future destiny. He turned to the Vedas and sacred texts, studied Sanskrit and Tamil and brought our ancient wisdom in direct in touch with all that he imbibed through Christian theology. He wanted to share his knowledge with the people. He therefore, recorded for posterity his experiences over forty years in the *Chronicles*, which is an authentic history of Kerala from 1829-1870. He also wrote the biographies Fr. Thomas Palackal and Fr. Porukara. These latter form a worthy supplement to the history of Kerala in the latter in the 18th and early 19th centuries. He also wrote for the common people documents unsurpassed in their sincerity and practical wisdom.

Education was an activity close to his heart. Religious and general education was for him two sides of the same coin. Father Chavara regarded education as a means of uplifting the poor. Drawing inspiration from the lives of Father Thomas Palackal and Father Porukara he ensured that all parishes maintained schools as auxiliary to them. Going further, Father Chavara threatened to close down those parishes, which failed to comply with his instructions regarding the maintaining of schools. It is remarkable that his schools were open to members of all communities who sought admission, including Harijans. It was indeed a revolutionary act at that time.

Father Chavara's vision anticipated modern development in yet another field: the role of women. As early as 1864 Father Chavara laid the foundation for the Indian congregation for women, thereby accelerating the great change that has come about in the status of women. Father Chavara represented a major manifestation of the Indian Renaissance, which was to raise our underprivileged, alleviate distress and infuse our people with a sense of pride in themselves. It was Father Chavara's unique privilege to do so through the great medium of Christianity. The first President of India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad has observed on the antiquity and significance of Christianity in India as follows:

"Remember, St. Thomas came to India when many countries in Europe had not yet become Christian and so those Indians who trace their Christianity to him have a longer history and higher ancestry than that of many of the European countries. And it is really a matter of pride to us that it so happened."

Father Chavara represented the spirit of Indian Christianity at its best and the Malabar Church at its most resplendent.

It has rightly been said St. Peter's founding of the Roman Church are equally distinguished in terms of chronology and their pioneering character. St. Thomas set foot in Cranganore in 52 AD. From then on until the present times, when Mother Teresa's example has shone our soil, Christianity has become a part and parcel of the Indian ethos.

South India offered hospitality to Christianity from the earliest decades of the Christian era. But the establishment of these missions all over India by itself would not have held

significance were it not for the fact that the initiators of these activities also started schools and colleges under the aegis of these missions. The educational initiatives of Father Chavara take their place in this distinguished tradition.

This development led, in course of time, to the building up of powerful intellectual aspirations. Historians have traced the origins of some of our powerful reformist movements such as the Brahma Samaj and Arya Samaj to the example and influence of Christian missionary enterprise.

Christian missions worked among the *adivasis*, the aboriginal and among the Harijans in a practical implementation of the Christian ethic of service. Few people have exemplified this dimension of Indian Christianity as memorably as Father Chavara.

CHAPTER XII

A Man of Deep Vision

P. RAMACHANDRAN
FORMER GOVERNOR OF KERALA

Chavara is the pride not only of Kerala, but also of entire mankind. It is rare indeed where so many sterling virtues have blended so perfectly in one individual. Chavara was born a mortal, but the good he did over a span of six and half decades cast him in the mould of immortal of humanity. Yesterday, today and forever to the last syllable of recorded time this God-realized soul will remain among mankind's most cherished possessions.

Chavara's life is an inspiring and edifying saga. From the day he was ordained priest the father dedicated himself wholly to God and worked piously for the social, cultural and educational uplift of his fellow men. Like lesser mortals he did not seek pomp and fame, or worldly riches, or acclaim.

Chavara was a man of deep vision who thought and acted far ahead of his times. He had a sure grasp of spiritual verities as well as social realities. There is the wooden printing press preserved at Mannanam as eloquent witness to the Father's pioneering efforts to educate the people through the printed word. His awakened social conscience would stop nothing short of communicating enlightenment and comprehension to others. This is the true stamp of those who belong to the blessed community.

The house of charity was started at Kainakary by Fr. Chavara in 1869 as an institution to receive sick, poor and destitute people. It was the first of its kind in India. The Carmelites of Mary Immaculate and the sisters of the Congregation of the Mother Carmel are two other organizations inspired by the Father. The members of these two organizations honour the memory of their founder by means of the dedicated social and educational work they are carrying out in various parts of the country.

There are today several colleges and schools, technical institutes, homes for the aged, the blind, the deaf and the physically handicapped, and hospitals and clinics, which owe their origin to the Father's vision and zeal for educational and social uplift of the community. If the test of true faith is the extent to which it transforms the individual and the social order, we must say that Chavara and generations of the dedicated band of missionaries he animated have stood this test with eminent success.

Religion as Chavara exemplifies it, is the fulfillment of life. Those who are devoid of religion, those who have missed the comforts and consolation of religion are incomplete human beings. The aim of a truly religious being is to serve God by serving mankind. He aims at completeness by enlarging the object of sympathy and compassion. This is the eternal truth, which has been affirmed by all our seers and saints through the ages. Chavara also reaffirmed this verity by his selfless service to the lowly and the lost.

The Catholic Church has honoured Chavara by enlisting him among the holy men of the Church. It is a fitting gesture on the part of the Postal Department to honour Chavara by issuing a commemorative stamp. I would like to

utilize this opportunity to congratulate the postal authorities. The presence of the Rashtrapathi here to release the stamp is yet another token of recognition of the saintliness and greatness of this son of Kerala. May I also pay my own tribute to this great servant of the Lord who endeavored throughout his life to fulfill the real mission of the Church.

CHAPTER XIII

Biographical Sketch of Chavara

SEBASTIAN PUNAYAR, CMI

Kuriakose Elias Chavara was born on February 10, 1805 in Kainakary, a village in Kerala, India. When the child was yet a few months old, the pious mother took the child to the shrine of Blessed Virgin Mary and dedicated him to the Mother of God. The child had his early education at home under the immediate care of his pious and devout parents. As the child grew in age, the mother used to remind him often, that he is no more her son, but of the Mother of God and admonished him to live always in that spirit and with that attitude. Undoubtedly this event of the dedication had great influence in his spiritual formation.

At an early age, the mother taught him the prayer and the mysteries of faith. She inspired him to pray with her, even at night, awakening the boy from sleep. All this naturally led the child to a devout and holy life.

At the age of 13, he entered the seminary at Pallipuram and committed himself to the care and direction of his Rector, Fr. Thomas Palackal, who through his austere and disciplined life of prayer and study greatly influenced the young cleric and contributed much to his spiritual and intellectual formation.

Ordained as priest in 1829, he soon associated himself with his Rector, Fr. Thomas Palackal and with Fr. Thomas Porukara, who, at the time, were contemplating on founding a religious congregation dedicated to prayer and apostolic work. On May 11, 1831 foundation stone was laid to the first religious house of the congregation, at Mannanam. In 1866, on February 13, with the cooperation of Fr. Leopold Beccaro OCD, he was able to start also a congregation for women at Koonammavu. From these tiny seeds, in the course of years, have grown up two huge trees spreading their branches all over the country and around the world.

In 1855 Chavara made his religious profession together with his ten companions. In religious congregation he took the name 'Kuriakose Elias of the Holy Family.' Blessed Kuriakose Elias loved the Church, which was verified for him in the local Church. All his priestly and religious life was dedicated to bring this Church to the maturity of Christ. With this scope in mind he started seminaries for the education and formation of clergy; organized annual retreats for the clergy and the faithful. He himself preached several retreats. In order to spread the catholic doctrine, he established a printing press, the first one of the Catholics in Kerala. As Vicar General of the Syro-Malabar Church, he instructed that schools be started attached to every parish church; at the request of the local Ordinary he revised and reformed the liturgical books of the Syro-Malabar Church and arranged the liturgical calendar and rubrics in such a way that the faithful experience devotion in the liturgical celebrations and live the Liturgy in their daily lives. In order to give a solid foundation to the Christian families, he left a testament to the Christian families, which could be regarded as a code for Christian families. Though originally it was written to the parishioners of Kainakary, the code is universally applicable and many of the points are

relevant even in our times. He also took the initiative to start a home of charity, where the sick and the dying and the destitute are received and taken care of.

The Church of Malabar was threatened by a schism in 1860-61, creating a very critical situation. Kuriakose Elias Chavara, then Vicar General of the Syro-Malabar Church is gratefully remembered by the then and later leaders of the Church and by the catholic community in general for his strenuous fight, strong stance and effective leadership in thwarting Bishop Thomas Roccas' intrusion, and thus saving the Church of Malabar from schism.

Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara was, above all, a man of prayer who, at the same time was fully involved in every apostolic activity. The apostolic activities he was involved in, did not deter him from prayer and constant union with God; on the other hand, they only allured him to draw nearer to God in prayer. Bro. Rochy TOCD, his spiritual child and contemporary, notes in his private diary about his own personal experience: "Fr. Chavara who was preaching several sermons in the morning, calling the people to repentance and penance, was found in the evening, in his private room shedding tears before the crucifix." Thus, the people who knew Chavara, even for a short while, recognized in him 'the man of God.' This is the spiritual legacy he has left to us.

Chavara who knew Syriac, Latin, Portuguese and Italian besides Sanskrit, Tamil and his mother tongue Malayalam, has also left for us a few writings, both in prose and in verse. Unlike many authors, he wrote not for the pleasure of writing. His writings, for the most part, are the overflow of his inner spirit, apt to inspire others and to open their inner eyes. Many of his writings reveal his self.

After a short illness, Fr. Chavara died on January 3, 1871, comforted by the sacraments and prayers of his spiritual children, after giving a small exhortation to those assembled in the room.

Much before he was affected by the fatal disease, Chavara had written in his own hand his testament exhorting his spiritual children and begging pardon for his shortcoming and failures.

Pope John Paul II, during his visit to India, on February 8, 1986, at Kottayam, declared Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara, Blessed. Let me conclude this biographical sketch with a quote from the late Archbishop, Mathew Kavukatt: *The life of Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara, a monk of extraordinary sanctity, a man of dynamic personality with a broad vision and powerful push and unabating pluck, ever remains an inexhaustible source of inspiration to all who care to look at it.*¹

End Notes

¹Archbishop Mathew Kavukatt, "Forward" to the Biography: *Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, written by Sri. K. C. Chacko, 1959.

CHAPTER XIV

A Life Full of Virtues

LUKAS VITHUVATTICKAL, CMI

(This is a translation of the pertinent part of the Italian document VOTO VII of the Sacred Congregation for the Cause of Saints, P. N. 1174, presented at the special assembly on the Virtues of Cyriac Elias Chavara on 22 November 1983)

1. Virtues in General

Fr. Beccaro concludes the biography of Chavara with these words: "Let us who desire to die as did Fr. Prior, imitate his life full of virtues."¹

As the document of *Positio* amply attest, the Vicar Apostolic held here in high esteem. Francis Xavier Pescetto (1831-1844) constitutes the Servant of God Malpan (worthy to teach and direct in the seminaries) and examiner of priests.

Ludovic martini (1844-1852) nominates him preacher of spiritual exercises in the vicariate.

Bernardin Baccinelli (1852-1868) constitutes him the vicar general for the Syrians of the vicariate:

"I am convinced that you have the fortitude, zeal, wisdom, and the virtues necessary for the right fulfillment of this office."²

The same Baccinelli describes him before the Sacred Congregation of the Propaganda Fide in these words:

"A man truly Christian, virtuous, very prudent, who in the circumstances has shown with deeds, most attached to the Catholic faith and to the Holy see... He enjoys great esteem of the people and their respect and consequently wields great influence over them."³

He also writes to the Prior General:

"A great man. Monsignor Oward, apostolic commissary, remained greatly marveled of him."⁴

Leonard Mellano (1868-1897) esteemed him so much that he nominated him superior of Fr. Gerard and Fr. Philip who were, respectively, the pro-delegate of the vicar provincial of the Congregation and the pro-vicar apostolic of Verapoly, instructing them to do everything according to the counsel of the Servant of God.

Charles Hyacinth, pro-vicar apostolic of Quilon describes the Servant of God as "the best priest." Monsignor Saba, the commissary apostolic, was so much edified by the good qualities of the Blessed that he spoke of him with great esteem.

Frs. Leopold Beccaro, Marcelline Bernardin and Gerard Beccaro had always-great respect and veneration for Chavara and they gave expression to this on various occasions.⁵ Fr. Bernardin dedicated to the Blessed already during his life, the biography of the seraphic St. Theresa of Jesus, (Mannanam 1866).

Not only did the clergy hold Chavara in great esteem, but also the beautiful, as was made clear by the parishioners of Anakkallu, who declared that they were prepared to accept any decision made by the Blessed on an issue which divided themselves.⁶ On one such occasion a Hindu, the public official, was so much taken up by the conduct of the Blessed, that he described him "a man of God."⁷ A disciple of Chavara, Fr. Varkey Muttathupadathu, had so much veneration for him that he treasured up a wisp of the hair of the Blessed, and later, he passed it on to his nephew.⁸ Among the testimonies of great esteem for the Blessed we have no record what the Marthomite metropolitan, Mathews Mar Athanasius, said of the Servant of God and what the first Judge of the district court of Alleppey said on hearing him.⁹

The acquiring of virtues was the prime concern of Chavara and a way of authentically living the devotion to the blessed Virgin and to the saints, his celestial patrons, so that "when the Lord Jesus comes to the tent of his heart, he may not weep, as did seeing the city of Jerusalem, but that he may find it adorned with those ornaments with which the tents of his celestial patrons are adorned."¹⁰

2. The Theological Virtues

2.1. Faith

If the testimonies describe the Blessed as "a man of God," "a man adorned with divine grace" or "a man of divine vision," or "a man full of the Holy Spirit", this was because he lived in the presence of God, and sought union with him through the fulfillment of his divine will.

He saw the presence of God in the beauty of creation, which allowed him to see the ultimate cause, and to

understand the glory of God and the blessed state of the other world.¹¹ His faith made him see always and in all things and events of life, the providence of God; and especially, if anything happened contrary to his will and prior planning, as in the case of affiliation of the Congregation to the order of the discalced Carmelites.¹²

Very often, we come across in his letters, the admonition to practise the presence of God.¹³ How else do we explain his meditations and colloquies with Jesus and Mary if not as the expressions of his faith?

But, above all, the Blessed conducted himself in faith towards the Eucharist. In the biography written by Fr. Beccaro, we are told that "of reason of his great veneration and faith in the blessed Sacrament, offered the mass with great zeal, devotion and recollection to the great edification of all those who were present. Beside the visits to the Blessed Sacrament, prescribed in the Constitution, the Servant of God used to spend long hours in meditation, on his knees, before the Blessed Sacrament."¹⁴

Chavara exhorted the Christian families that at least one in the family, in turn, should assist at the Divine Liturgy every day.¹⁵ It is worth mentioning in this context that he introduced the 40 hours adoration in Malabar.¹⁶

Union with God was not merely a sentiment for the Blessed, but he thought that the will of God is manifested in the will of his superiors. As examples of this divine will, which he preferred to his own, could be seen a) acceptance of his transfer to Pallipuram, while he was actively engaged in the construction of the monastery at Mannanam.¹⁷ b) The acceptance of the Constitutions imposed by the Vicar

Apostolic in 1855, though the excessive severity of the Constitution had already been noted and referred to Chavara.¹⁸ c) The starting of the monastery at Plasnal, as desired by the Vicar Apostolic in 1859, but considered by the Blessed unfit for habitation, being a Malaria infected zone.¹⁹ d) The very affiliation of the Congregation to the disclaled Carmelites, while it was being modeled to that of the Order of the preachers.²⁰

Obedience to the authority was the criterion which guided him in the difficult circumstances of the schism of Rochos:

"Those who do not enter the sheepfold through the right door, are assassins and wolves dressed as angels."²¹

His faith was demonstrated in a special way in his devotion to the church and to the Pope:

"Among the virtues of Chavara there shine the faith and the ardent devotion for the Catholic Church and to the Holy Father."²²

How concrete his devotion was to the Holy Father could be seen in the fact that he sent a sum of Rs. 32,000 to him for the expenses of Vatican Council I, which amount he collected from the faithful.²³

From such a submission to the divine will, which he recognized in the disposition of the superiors, he derived that serenity of the spirit, which always made him tranquil and peaceful.

It was prayer that nourished such a faith. His predilection for liturgical prayers appeared when he was still a

seminarian, and consequently he made a study of the ancient manuscripts and compiled for himself a book of the divine office, a practise which had almost ceased among priests in the Syro-Malabar Church and which he wanted to revive.²⁴ The practice of religious life in his institute consisted of frequent prayers and long meditation, with night vigils.²⁵

There are witnesses at the ordinary informative process who affirmed that the Blessed had reached a very high grade of prayer and contemplation;²⁶ this made him propose to his sisters to cultivate the same: Reading, silence, prayer, reflection and contemplation.

2.2. *Hope*

The desire of Chavara to remain always united with our Lord was obviously not based on his own personal strength, as he was always very conscious of his weakness and of his sins.²⁷ His whole trust was in God alone, from whom he could obtain everything. Also like the one invited to the nuptial banquet, but later thrown out of the hall as it was found that he was not in the nuptial dress, he could have obtained it had he asked for that. "In fact, he who invited him was not incapable of giving him this too. So also, you too ask the one who led you so far, and you will obtain this gift."²⁸

Meditating on the parable of the prodigal son he exclaims; "I confide firmly in my salvation, because I reflect on what you have taught in the Gospel. This prodigal son comes to your feet.²⁹ Having meditated on your favours, I confide, more than in the past, that you will make me a saint."³⁰

The confidence of the Blessed did not vacillate, when after the foundation stone of the monastery was laid at Mannanam, the new vicar apostolic planned the transfer of the

fathers concerned to distant parishes;³¹ nor did he vacillate on the occasion of the schism of Rochos, although out of the 155 parish churches, 86 parishes wholly and 30 others partially, accepted the intruder bishop and the schismatic group required of Chavara to set apart two of his monasteries for the residence of the schismatic bishop, and although he had the civil authorities on his side.³²

On various occasions the Blessed experienced the divine intervention. We seem him having recourse to St. Joseph and the guardian angel to obtain the money necessary to pay the workmen³³ the construction in the convent of St. Theresa was begun with a sum of Rs. 18; all the same he was able to complete the construction in the course of one year spending about Rs. 8000.³⁴ He used to say "We work; God will give the money. This work is not ours, but the patrimony of Jesus Christ. It is enough if we work."³⁵ Also, when he was on the point of death, he could confirm: "I feel joy and peace."³⁶

2.3. Charity Towards God

Fr. Beccaro, the spiritual director and the co-operator of Chavara, describing his death affirm: "...after a life of great innocence, such that he himself could declare before the death that he had never lost the baptismal innocence."³⁷

In the spiritual writings of the Blessed, we often come across the expression of his gratitude to God for the gifts he had received. It could be said that gratitude is the characteristic mark of his spirituality,³⁸ from which springs both his meditations on the gifts received from God and the consciousness of sin, which manifests itself in the

compunction of heart, springing above all, from the reflection on the various mysteries of our Lord.

The epitaph testifies that Chavara had entrusted his soul to the care of God: "Whom he ardently loved all his life."³⁹

2.4. Charity Towards the Neighbour

It could be said that the spirituality of the Blessed Chavara God imparts to his charity an ecclesial aspect, in the sense that his love for the neighbour is realized particularly in the ecclesial dimension of the local Church, translating it into acts of a concrete nature the founding of the two Congregations; the renovation of the liturgy; institution of schools attached to the parish churches for the education of the youth; preaching in order to impart moral and religious instruction in Christian life; the starting of the printing press (the first Catholic press in Malabar) to propagate the Catholic doctrine; his efforts to preserve the unity in the Syro-Malabar Church; his ardent desire to bring back the separated brethren into the unity of the Church, as is clear from the letter addressed to the Jacobite bishops to participate in the Vatican Council I (the signature is that of the vicar apostolic, but the text is in the handwriting of the Servant of God.)⁴⁰

All this he did with such great zeal that his biographers could not help writing that the many things which he accomplished, could have been realized only through the combined efforts of many priests.⁴¹

The concern of Chavara for the Christian formation of those confided to his care appears, for example, in the letter to the parishioners of Kainakary,⁴² mentioning such things as the rule of life for the families, relations with others, business,

justice, compensation for workmen, the proper use of things, patience, good reading, spiritual obligations, daily time-table, education of the children, etc.

With regard to those under the authority the Blessed knew how to correct them with charity, combining with that a magisterial prudence, not making an exception even in the case of superiors of the monasteries.⁴³ He was very solicitous as regards their health in selecting sites for locating the foundations⁴⁴ and visiting and consoling the sick.⁴⁵ In the scope of the institution of the confraternity of St. Joseph for happy death (1843), he had incorporated in clear terms a programme of visiting and assisting the sick⁴⁶ besides helping the poor⁴⁷, for whom he wished to provide clothes, food, care and hospitality.⁴⁸ He wanted charity to continue even after death by means of the suffrages for the dead.⁴⁹

3. Cardinal Virtues

3.1. Prudence

That Chavara was a man of great prudence is proved by the fact that the vicars apostolic entrusted him to take up responsibility of very delicate nature⁵⁰ besides the very important responsibility as vicar general, for the Syro-Malabarians.

Baccinelli presented him, with the following words, to the Sacred Congregation of the *Propaganda Fide*: "A man truly Christian, virtuous, very prudent." The vicar apostolic proposed that he should be made the co-adjutor bishop for the Syrians, because, "he is good, prudent and obedient."⁵¹ The discretion and moderation of Chavara are clearly seen in his adopting the Carmelite rules, the severity of which he knew very well.⁵² In the selection of the sites for locating the

foundation he was very cautious to see that the places were healthy, easily accessible and pleasant.⁵³

Knowing well the situation of the Church in Malabar, and wishing to overcome the danger of schism, he proposed to the cardinal prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the propagation of faith: "that there may be two bishops here, one for the Latins and the other for the Syrians, so that the desire to have a bishop of their own may be satisfied and communion with Babylon may be interdicted."⁵⁴

In a brief note written in 1865,⁵⁵ the Blessed revealed clearly the difficult situation in which the Syro-Malabar Church was placed, and proposed means, which he thought would be effective to eliminate the possible cause for schism, favour ecumenism and bring about the re-union of the schismatic Jacobites.

The vicars apostolic often commissioned Chavara to function on their behalf so that, in his prudence, he may settle the disputes that arose in the vicariate either between the parishioners themselves or between the parishioners and the parish priest.⁵⁶ The Blessed was also often consulted by the vicars apostolic on financial matters of the vicariate.⁵⁷

The Chavara had many occasions to deal with money matters in connection with several of his activities. But, there were never any accusation against him, because he acted true to his conscience in these matters and he always preferred to be kind and understanding as regards dues.

He was very correct in maintaining the statement of the income and expenditure⁵⁸ he used to note down very diligently the various offerings along with the obligations

connected with the same, such as masses or donations.⁵⁹ He preached for respecting the ownership rights of others and one's obligations to pay the workmen their wages.⁶⁰

So delicate was the conscience of the Blessed as regards right handling of the money that he preferred to leave out certain amounts for purposes of expenditure in cases of doubt. This is what he did, for example, when he received a donation of Rs. 100. As he was not very sure of the origin of the amount, he did not use it for the construction of the convent but distributed the whole amount in alms to the poor.⁶¹ The same way he preferred to remit the whole amount of money due to the monastery of Mannanam, for which the claim was rightly filed by the advocate, but without the authentic signature of the Servant of God.⁶²

Just as he was solicitous about the things of others, likewise he was solicitous about the good name of others, and tried not to offend any one in his writings either by mentioning certain names or omitting them. For example, see his history of the schism of Rochos,⁶³ omitting the names of the person concerned.⁶⁴

A clear example of the heroic exercise of this virtue by the Blessed was set in the parish church at Pallipuram, where he assisted a sick man, suffering from small-pox, until his death, although many dissuaded him from doing so because of the fear of contagion.⁶⁵

We have already referred to the immense difficulties he had to undergo in the founding of the Congregation. But he calmly received the transfer from Mannanam, where he had to begin the construction of the monastery and the church, to a distant place. The transfer lasted for two years.⁶⁶

We can imagine the difficulties he had to encounter in starting the printing press.⁶⁷

The critical situation created by the schism of Rochos was really terrifying. Nevertheless Chavara succeeded in repatriating the schismatic bishop within ten months of his arrival in Malabar, and within two years he could bring back all the separated churches into Catholic unity. In these circumstances he did not hesitate to proclaim the truth openly,⁶⁸ notwithstanding the opposition of some of his own followers and even at the risk of his own life.⁶⁹

Here we should take into consideration the difficulties of undertaking journeys and the poor means of transport, especially when the Blessed was suffering from elephantiasis and also rheumatism which gave rise to fever from time to time, etc.⁷⁰

Towards the end of his life, Chavara was affected by a disease in the eyes, for which he had to undergo a very painful surgical operation. For about three months he was very sick; but he bore all the pain with great patience, obeying the doctors and the other staff.⁷¹ He always had a smile on his face.⁷²

3.2. Temperance

In the life of the Blessed physical penance was not wanting. For example, according to the prescription in the Constitution very rigorous fasting was required during the quadragesima and Advent; and a form of mitigated fast on several other occasions as fixed in the rules. The daily food was very simple,⁷³ and Chavara was very austere in his food habits.⁷⁴ The discipline of flagellation was being practiced three times a week according to the Constitution.

The ascetical life of the Blessed consisted above all in modelling himself in conformity with the life of Christ. For example:

"Now I meditate on the imposition of the crown of thorns on the head of our Lord because now I suffer greatly from headache."⁷⁵

4. Religious Vows

4.1. Poverty

Having left his family, Chavara dedicated himself to religious life in 1833, depending on the alms of the faithful and donations from churches and priests for financial support.

Fr. Leopold Beccaro testifies to his poverty,⁷⁶ so also Fr. Louis Manjummel⁷⁷ and Fr. Marcelline.⁷⁸ He always exhorted his confreres in religion: "Not to lose even one drop of the reward of the poverty."⁷⁹ We have already noted how meticulously he rendered his accounts.

4.2. Chastity

The love of the Blessed for this virtue was reflected in his preoccupation to educate the faithful in modesty.⁸⁰ His desire for starting the Congregation for women was prompted by his keenness to provide facilities for women to live their vocation with integrity. In his exhortation to the sisters he used to remind them of their dignity, being the queens and spouses of Jesus Christ.⁸¹ Fr. Palakunnel, his disciple, says that Chavara was like an angel.⁸²

4.3. *Obedience*

We have already made a reference to this virtue of the Blessed, considering it as an expression of his faith.

He observed all the rules of the seminary faithfully.⁸³ He also obeyed his companions in the foundation.⁸⁴ On the occasion of his transfer to Pallipuram by which he was taken away from the work of the foundation at Mannanam, where he had started the new religious houses, he behaved most heroically in preferring the wishes of his superiors to every project he himself had contemplated.⁸⁵

Fr. Louis Manjummel testifies that Chavara was the first in the observance of the rules, always obedient like novice.⁸⁶ The sisters of the convent of St. Theresa admired him for his obedience in his last illness, and they wrote in the chronicles: "This father obeyed al as a child... His life was an example of the virtue of obedience."⁸⁷ In the testament of the Blessed we read: "The one sign of a true religious is obedience, deaf and blind, who denies his proper will. He who practices, such an obedience is a true religious."⁸⁸

4.4. *Humility*

This virtue which, in the Congregation of Chavara constituted a formal promise, along with the religious vows⁸⁹ was manifested above all when he refused the episcopacy which the schismatic offered him in order to draw him to their side.⁹⁰

In his writings, the Blessed does not hesitate to confess his own faults and shortcomings,⁹¹ as also his unworthiness.⁹² He attributed to God the good works he did. He attributed to Frs. Palakal and Porukara the work of founding the

Congregation for men,⁹³ to Fr. Leopold Beccaro, the founding of the Congregation for women.⁹⁴

4.5. Devotions

The pious mother of Chavara led the child, not long after his birth, to the shrine of our Lady at Vechoor to dedicate him to the Virgin Mary, which was renewed every year.⁹⁵

Again, it was in the atmosphere of the family that the Blessed acquired a singular devotion to the Holy Family, so that on the day of the religious profession he chose the name of "Elias of the Holy Family."⁹⁶

He dedicated his religious Congregation to the Holy Family.⁹⁷ The picture of the Holy Family, always placed in front of him on the table was very dear to Chavara and he drew inspiration from it during his life.

As a sign of his special devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, he translated into Syriac the little office of the Blessed Virgin Mary.⁹⁸

His devotion to St. Joseph, his special patron in heaven and protector in whom he took refuge in all his necessities,⁹⁹ was linked with the propagation of the confraternity of St. Joseph for happy death (from 1843)

Another important devotion of his was that of St. Theresa of Jesus, so dear to the Blessed, that Fr. Marcelline Bernardin dedicated to him the biography of the Seraphic St. Theresa, which he wrote in 1866.¹⁰⁰

Endnotes

- ¹Positio. p. 494.
- ²Ibid., p. 217.
- ³Ibid., p. 259.
- ⁴Ibid., p. 436.
- ⁵Ibid., pp. 189 ff; 614.
- ⁶Ibid., pp. 398 ff.
- ⁷Ibid., pp. 543ff.
- ⁸Ibid., pp. 573 f.
- ⁹Ibid., pp. 361 f.
- ¹⁰Ibid., p. 430.
- ¹¹Ibid., p. 37.
- ¹²Ibid., pp. 243, 443.
- ¹³Ibid., p. 339.
- ¹⁴Ibid., p. 493.
- ¹⁵Ibid., p. 296ff.
- ¹⁶Ibid., pp. 282, 382, 631.
- ¹⁷Ibid., p. 73ff.
- ¹⁸Ibid.
- ¹⁹Ibid., p. 171 ff.
- ²⁰Ibid., pp. 441ff.
- ²¹Ibid., pp. 214f.
- ²²Ibid., pp. 192, 493.
- ²³Ibid., p. 325.
- ²⁴Ibid., p. 435.
- ²⁵Ibid., pp. 480, 525.
- ²⁶Ibid., pp. 623ff.
- ²⁷Ibid., pp. 428ff.
- ²⁸Ibid., p. 428.
- ²⁹Ibid., p. 48.
- ³⁰Ibid., p. 45.
- ³¹Ibid., pp. 403, 491.
- ³²Ibid., pp. 223, ff; 492, 626 ff.
- ³³Ibid., p. 364, p. 635.
- ³⁴Ibid., pp. 307, 415.
- ³⁵Ibid., p. 341.

-
- ⁸⁶*Ibid.*, p. 466.
⁸⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 456, 563.
⁸⁸*Ibid.*, p. 3ff.
⁸⁹*Ibid.*, p. 506.
⁹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 278.
⁹¹*Ibid.*, pp. 576; 580 ff.
⁹²*Ibid.*, pp. 292-307.
⁹³*Ibid.*, p. 359.
⁹⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 172, 347.
⁹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 503.
⁹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 279.
⁹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 253.
⁹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 303.
⁹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 385.
¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, p. 383.
¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, pp. 259-260.
¹⁰²*Ibid.*, p. 519.
¹⁰³*Ibid.*, pp. 173ff.
¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, p. 295.
¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 423ff.
¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 359ff.
¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 477, 479.
¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, p. 424.
¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 424.
¹¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 295.
¹¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 367.
¹¹²*Ibid.*, p. 611.
¹¹³*Ibid.*, p. 238.
¹¹⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 380 ff.
¹¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 491.
¹¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 402.
¹¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 491.
¹¹⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 214, ff, 241.
¹¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 643.
¹²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 541.
¹²¹*Ibid.*, p. 547.
¹²²*Ibid.*, p. 465.
¹²³*Ibid.*, p. 564.

-
- ⁷⁴Ibid., p. 193 ff.
⁷⁵Ibid., p. 341.
⁷⁶Ibid., pp. 193ff.
⁷⁷Ibid., pp 563ff.
⁷⁸Ibid., p. 563.
⁷⁹Ibid., p. 359.
⁸⁰Ibid., pp. 296ff.
⁸¹Ibid., p. 330
⁸²Ibid., p. 566.
⁸³Ibid., p. 496.
⁸⁴Ibid., pp. 517ff.
⁸⁵Ibid., pp. 554ff.
⁸⁶Ibid., pp. 561ff.
⁸⁷Ibid., p. 465.
⁸⁸Ibid., p. 444.
⁸⁹Ibid., pp. 95ff.
⁹⁰Ibid., pp. 244ff.
⁹¹Ibid., pp. 40, 404 ff.
⁹²Ibid., p. 428.
⁹³Ibid., p. 326.
⁹⁴Ibid., p. 316.
⁹⁵Ibid., pp. 32-34.
⁹⁶Ibid., p. 377.
⁹⁷Ibid., p. 548.
⁹⁸Ibid., p. 381.
⁹⁹Ibid., pp. 243, 381, 428, 449 ff.
¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 440.

Writings of Chavara

SEBASTIAN POONOLY, CMI

1. Introduction

It is quite surprising that Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara (1805-1871), the first of the Thomas Christians in India to be beatified (along with Blessed Alphonsa in 1986), founder of two religious Congregations (the C.M.I. for men and the C.M.C. for women), fighter of schism in the Church, Vicar general of the whole Syro-Malabar Church for ten years, who was occupied with external activities his whole life after priestly ordination, could find time and leisure to write so much. He was indeed a versatile linguist: he could write with ease both prose and verse, in his mother tongue Malayalam; he learned Tamil and Sanskrit during his pre-seminary education; he had a working knowledge of Latin, Italian and Portuguese; he was well-versed in his liturgical language Syriac. His writings extended over a period of forty years, from 1829 when he was ordained, to 1869 when he became weak and sick at Koonammavu. The last ten years was apparently his most creative period.

2. Why Chavara Wrote

It would be very revealing to ask why Chavara wrote at all. It could not have been for the mere pleasure of writing, though, of course, he seems to have relished writing. Neither

could it be to win fame as writer. He published almost nothing himself, though he could very well have done so as he had a printing press at Mannanam from 1846. Chavara seems to have written from an inner, spiritual urge to build up the Malabar Church in general and his spiritual children in particular. He wanted to leave to posterity an accurate account of what he saw and heard in those critical years, to give a description of his spiritual-mystical journey, to seek guidance from his ecclesiastical superiors, to give guidance to his spiritual children and to reform and renew the liturgy of his Church. Though Chavara did have an inborn talent for writing, he wrote not according to a plan worked out in advance, as a professional writer would, but wrote spontaneously as opportunities sprang up, or as the spirit prompted him.

3. Chavara's Writings

Much research has gone into the manuscripts that have come down to us purportedly written by Chavara. This was done in the 1950s and 1960's with the help of the experts in the Manuscript State Library in Trivandrum to fix up the authentic writings of Chavara, as required by the rules of the process of canonization. Reverend Father Lukas Vithuvattickal and Anslem Perumalil took the initiative. The writings thus authenticated as Chavara's are 102 of varying length, distributed as follows:

Letters	-	67
Chronicles	-	5
Liturgical books	-	6
On matters related to administration	-	16
Spiritual writings	-	8
Total	-	102

Another way of looking at Chavara corpus of writing is as follows:

He wrote a total of 5267 verses in Malayalam¹, 563 pages in Malayalam prose, the average size of the page being 21 cm x 17 cm; in addition to 67 letters (mostly in Malayalam, a few in Syriac with Latin/Italian translations) of varied length; and 6 liturgical books in Syriac.

Chavara's output as a writer is quite impressive and varied. The volume of Chavara's writings takes his claim as a foremost writer of 19th century Kerala.

4. Writings in Print

Practically none of the writings of Chavara, except liturgical writings, appeared in print during the author's life. After his death surprisingly enough the most popular of his writings turned to be the "Testament" that he wrote to his parishioners which was printed 16 times before the definitive edition in 1981, of which 150 thousand copies had been in circulation. In 1981-'82 in commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the foundation of the CMI Congregation, a four volume definitive edition of the writings of Chavara, except liturgical books, appeared in print in the original Malayalam. Father Z.M. Moozhoor, CMI led this project. Similarly, an English translation of the same was out in 1989-'90.

5. An Accurate Historian

Chavara regularly wrote a dairy in his own handwriting for over a period of fortyone years from 1829 to 1870, a total of 399 pages in Malayalam. It consists to five chronicles: Parts I (total of pp. 156) and II (pp. 14 on the

foundation at Mannanam; Part III (pp 48) on the schism of Bishop Thomas Rochose; Part IV (pp 25) on the foundation of the monastery at Ampazhakad, and Part V (pp 19) on the foundation of the convent at Koonammavu.

The Chronicles of Blessed Chavara are comparable in scope and style to the Foundations of St. Theresa of Avila. These pages are a treasure for historians of Kerala, both secular and ecclesiastical. It is an authoritative historical record of the events that unfolded in the Church in Malabar, in which he had a pivotal role. He had a very developed sense of history. When narrating an event he always gives an account of the events that took place before it as well as a brief description of the protagonists. He gives facts and figures accurately. In about ten places he leaves space for noting later the day and year of an event, which remained unfilled.

Chavara does not merely give us a sketchy account of facts and figures, but as a keen observer of men and matters, gives interesting details. To mention a few instances: while mentioning the priestly ordinations that the schismatic Bishop Roccas conducted, he gives a detailed description of the Chaldean ordination ceremonies which were new in Kerala; in the biography of Father Palackal he gives a graphic account of the priestly attire used then by the Latin priests and Syrian priests respectively. The documentary value of these chronicles is enhanced by the important ecclesiastical decrees and circulars and state orders that he copied verbatim.

The Chronicles reveal the thoroughness, honesty, humility and simplicity that Chavara possessed in great measure. The deep sensitivity with which he introduces Father Antony Kudakkachira, the great supporter of the schismatic

Bishop Roccas, best illustrates Chavara's qualities as a chronicler:

But here my heart and this hand that holds the quill tremble. For though I shall be writing only what I have heard and seen, it will affect his reputation. Some people will read into my words more than what I intended and begin to think the less of him. Yet I feel obliged to write about him, because he has been causing much spiritual destruction and is likely to cause more. A few words about him may prevent further spiritual disaster by acting as a warning to my brethern against being snatched away from our blessed and beloved Mother, the Church of Rome. So I pray to my Guardian Angel to keep me from slipping away to the left or right out of human weakness and make myself guilty.³

The *Chronicles* were written in the great tradition set up by Father Thomas Paremakal's *Varthamanapusthakam* (a travelogue to Lisbon and Rome). Chavara by his *Chronicles* not only set a model for the monasteries and convents that he founded, but also inspired his contemporaries and succeeding generations to record the events of ecclesiastical importance and preserve documents. Parapurath Varkey Achan and Palakunnel Valyachan are just two of a long array of chronicle-writers that drew inspiration from Blessed Chavara.

6. A Mystic Poet

Chavara was a great poet of the 19th century Kerala. We have no evidence to prove that his poems were known to others before his death. He wrote three poems. (1) *Dirge*⁴, a poem of 1162 lines written in a popular chant style called "parvam" or "pana", to be sung while keeping vigil over a corpse before funeral; (2) *Anasthasias's Martyrdom* a minor epic

(kanda Kavya) of 182 lines describing in very moving language and set to the rhythm of a boat song (*Vachipattu*) very popular in Kerala, the martyrdom of the beautiful and holy virgin Anastasia in Rome under the persecution of Emperor Valerian; and (3) *Compunction of the Soul*⁶, an epic poem in 12 parts with a total 3923 lines, intermingled with meditations and aspirations of great devotion, related to events that took place in the life of our Lord and His mother, as well as the poet's own life.

Chavara fulfills very well the Indian traditional criteria for recognition as a "great poet" (*Mahakavi*) the most important of which is that he should have written an epic poem (*mahakavya*). Another claim to distinction for Chavara is that he was the first poet to compose a poem in Malayalam in a new genre called *Khandakavya* (minor epic) , twentythree years before A.R. Rajaarajavarma's "*Malayavilasam*" written in 1885, which is popularly accepted as the first *Khandakavya*. This genre very popular in Malayalam poetry is the first of the 20th Century.

As for the style of the three poems, *Dirge* has a popular, flowing style. The poem that celebrates the communion of saints among the Church triumphant, Church suffering and Church militant, is interspersed with ten stories and follows a storytelling, even playful style that one often meets in chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*:

Hence I tell you the plain truth
 Narrate clear, the root cause
 Do not be troubled over it
 On hearing, be offended not,
 Its true, the same will befall you
 So it is good to know it well.
 (11 511-516)

The style of *Anasthasia's* Martyrdom is sensuous, charged with emotions, very much, as in Donne's poems. He has been successful in depicting the personal charm as well as the holiness of the virgin Anasthasia equally well.

The callous king saw virgin pure
He said with cunning on the spot,
You're nobly born and neatly dressed
Your beauty pure, your virtue high
Are spoilt by your Christian name.
Reject your faith, it suits you not
Recall my words of promise sure
I speak to you with filial love
Listen to me now, nun sublime.
Gratify your thirst for love.
Come to me with open arms
(lines 81-91).

The best of Chavara as a poet, of course, is found in the mystic strains of the *Compunction of the Soul*. In its scope and thrust it can be compared to William Wordsworth's poem *The Prelude*, which he sub-titled "Growth of a Poet's Mind". The poem, which Chavara wrote as a preparation for his final meeting with the Lord in death and judgement, shows the mystic heights of his soul's union with the Lord. It is immersed in *bhakti*, *paramprema*, very much in the style of Indian Poets of the *bhakti* movement. It alternates in pouring out the feelings of compunction, *Penthos* of the Greek monks, and singing the praises of the Lord as an offering. The many Lyrics in the poem prefixed with, "I long to see" (*kanakenam*), exhibits the moments of the poet's mystic exhilaration:

Your mother tenderly holding you
And nursing you, I long to see.
Your chubby cheeks the mother kissing with
joy, I long to see!
The art with which she made you smile

O beauty, I long to see.
 Merciful God allow me unworthy
 In your presence to stand
 You seated in your mother's lap
 In joy I long to see !
 (lines 33 - 42)

The literary value of Chavara's poems to be true, is great, though it is not yet fully discovered or revealed. But their true value is spiritual, mystical, like those of St. John of the Cross. In a final analysis, no other poet in India, ancient or modern, has so powerfully and movingly expressed in verses, the Christian experience of the divine as we find in the verses of Blessed Chavara.

7. A Soirit-filled Guru

When compared with the spiritual writings of saints like Ignatius Loyola or Theresa of Avila the strictly spiritual writings of Chavara in prose is quite meagre: just 60 pages of an average size of 21cm x 17cm consisting of 9 meditations. Chavara did not give any title to the collection; it was the publisher of the work gave it a title.⁶ To this should be added the personal prayer book of Chavara with 87 pages written by hand in the size 12.5cm x 8cm.

Chavara gives in the *Colloquies* his own modified experience of St. Theresa's *Interior Castle* with a deep experience of an abiding sense of sorrow for his sins and a personal encounter with the merciful Lord whom he consistently calls Father ('Appa'). These meditations exhibit the unique features of Chavara's union with God. Here is an instance of his emotion-charged description of his personal vision of the crucified Lord:

The holy eyes, brighter than the splendour of the stars are blurred because of the blood spilling beatings on the head. The lips, as red and bright as ripe apples, are darkened. All these changes have come over the holy face because of my sins. Alas! it increases my pain to think of this.⁷

This meagre collection, though lacking in completeness as a spiritual classic, gives an idea of Chavara's height of mystical union with God.

8. An Inspiring Leader

Under the category of letters and circulars, Chavara wrote 67 pieces which may be grouped under the following heads:

Letters to Pope Pius IX	2
Letters to the President of the	
Congregation for the propagation of faith	7
Letters to Bishop	10
Letters to the Curia of the Discalced	
Carmelite Order	2
To the CMI members	14
Circulars to the CMI Congregation	4
To C.M.C. Sisters	11
To Parish Priests	4
Common Circulars	7
Business letters	3

It can be presumed that Chavara wrote many more letters which have been irrevocably lost. The epistolary style of Chavara includes qualities of warmth, humanity, sincerity and concern for the well-being of others. All these were in one way or other expressions of his pastoral leadership. All these were written to help the growth of the Syro-Malabar Church, give wholesome advice to his parishoners, or spiritual guidance to

the CMI Congregation as a whole and to his spiritual children personally.

In one of his letters to the CMC Sisters, Blessed Chavara wrote:

Dwell in the love of Jesus Christ. Rest before of His eyes. Walk beside him. With Him converse always. When you have attachment or desire or pleasure over anything, this Beloved Lord turns to you and tells you: "Look at me. Will this make you happy more than I..."⁸

The three circulars that Chavara wrote to his own parish at Kainakary give a very comprehensive instruction to Catholic families and is relevant even today. Among other things he wrote: "The day on which you give no help to others will not be included in the account of the days of your life."⁹

In spite of all the problems and sufferings that the Syro-Malabar Church was subjected to under the rule of Portuguese Padroado as well as the Propaganda, Chavara gave great importance to obedience to and communion with Rome. This is amply proved by the letters. Pope John Paul II in the homily at the Mass of Beatification refers to this:

Today the Church solemnly recalls with love and gratitude all his efforts to resist threats of disunity with the See of Peter and the Universal Church.¹⁰

The letters and circulars of Chavara cover the whole gamut of his pastoral experience and service.

9. A Pastor rather than a Liturgist

For the sake of completion a brief note is given on Chavara's liturgical writings. There were six books: (1) Little Office of Blessed Virgin Mary (2) Service for Holy Saturday translated from Latin (3) Lectionary of Syro-Malabar Mass (4) Liturgical Calendar of the Syro-Malabar Church; (5) Ritual of Mass and (6) Ritual of 40 Hours Adoration.

Chavara wrote and translated these books not as a learned liturgist, but as a pastor concerned with the orderly and devotional celebration of liturgical services. It is unfortunate that these writings have brought him a little notoriety as a latinizer. This is hardly justifiable. It is true that he did not take the initiative for a liturgical restoration or revival in the Syro-Malabar Church. How could we blame Chavara for this, who lived at a time when liturgical revival had not been initiated even in the Latin Church?

10. Conclusion

We have given a brief account of the 102 pieces that Blessed Chavara wrote under various categories. What gives a special character and unity to all his writings is the pastoral and mystical dimension permeating all. Whether he wrote chronicles, poems, colloquies, letters or liturgical books, above all, he was a man of the spirit, a lyre of the spirit as St. Ephrem the great Doctor of the Syriac Church is called. The person and life of Chavara on the one hand and his writings on the other, clarify and interpret each other. To adapt what John Keats said of William Shakespeare: Chavara led a life allegory, and his writings are a commentary on it.

The writings of Blessed Chavara, if they are properly disseminated and studied, I can boldly prophesy, would eventually secure for him recognition by the Church as a Doctor of the Church. I conclude by quoting the tribute paid to Blessed Chavara by no less a person than the President of India: "Father Chavara represented the spirit of Indian Christianity at its best and the Malabar Church at its most resplendent."¹¹

End Notes

¹My own counting "Compunction of the Soul" *Atmanuthapam*: 3923 lines; "Drge (*Maranaveetil Padumnathinulla Pana*) : 1162 lines; "Anasthasia's Martyrdom" (*Anasthasiayude Rakthaskshittam*): 182 lines.

²"*Nalla Appante Chavurul*" (Testament of a Loving Father). Whereas he has called it in the epistle "Testament", the editors have added "of a loving father".

³*Chronicles*, English (vol. III), pp. 154-155; Original Malayalam Part III, pp. 16-17.

⁴*Masranaveetil Padanulla Pana*.

⁵"*Anasthasiayude Rakthasakshitam*".

⁶*Atmanuthapam*

⁷*Dhyanasallapangal* ("Spiritual Colloquies").

⁹Letters, p. 114

¹⁰Letters, p. 142.

¹¹Quoted from Rev. Z.M. Moozhoor CMI, *Blessed Chavara: The Star of the East*, Kottayam: 1993, p. 123.

CHAPTER XVI

Chavara, A Prophet of Our Times

JOSEPH PATHRAPANKAL, CMI

A charismatic feature of human society is that it develops or is destroyed through the role played by certain individuals during the course of its history. This applies to the social, political and religious leaders all over the world. Whereas a Francis of Assisi is responsible for the birth and growth of a dynamic spiritual movement in the church during the 13th century, Adolf Hitler is responsible for attempting the total destruction of the world order the 20th century through his political ambition and misguided philosophy. It is the vision of life such people held which ultimately conditioned the kind of role they played in human society either to promote its growth or to bring about its destruction. Posterity looks back to these persons either with gratitude or with hatred, depending on the kind of part they played in shaping the human society at large during that time.

Another important characteristic of our society is that it is very slow in understanding and appreciating the significance of the role played by its great personalities. The honour and esteem which Mahatma Gandhi receives today all over the world is a typical example of this attitude of the people. A Scientist-Theologian, Pere Teilhard de Chardin was considered to be almost a heretic when he was alive during the first half of this century. But now his theology has been

exercising a great influence on Catholic theology so much so that the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World can be said to draw its inspiration and orientation from the theological and cosmic thinking of this great theologian.

When we think of Chavara and consider the kind of honour and admiration he gets today more than a century after his death, we feel that the same is true about him as well. It is not only that the society of his time did not fully understand the role played by him during the 19th century in the history of the Church in Kerala; but we also have been very slow in appreciating the many contributions he made to the Church in India, especially to the Church in Kerala. It is heartening and encouraging to note that, of late, we have started thinking and reflecting for ourselves and we have also begun to appreciate that our cultural and religious identity has a contribution to make to the total well-being and growth of human society. It is within the larger framework of this self-awareness and self-respect that I would like to present the personality of Chavara as a great leader of the Church in the 19th century.

When people speak of Chavara it is customary to enumerate his qualities, his many achievements, his many undertakings in pastoral and social areas, such as education, press-apostolate, etc. Chavara, however, was more than anything else was a prophet of his time. In fact, it was his prophetic personality, which made him, what he was then, and what he is today. The Prophets of the OT were no more than ordinary persons, and when they carried out their ministry, they were sometimes discredited for their enthusiasm for propagating religious values. Some of them were seen as 'trouble makers' by a society that was given to religious indifference. But later generations began to study the role they played for the good of the society. Their oracles were

preserved and codified and so were have in the prophetic books one of the richest contributions of OT theology. Now the prophets of the OT are seen as the true defenders of the Hebrew religion, a role which they played not on account of the official religion controlled by the kings and priests, but in spite of them, though they were the ones supposed to be the true leaders and defenders of the covenant-religion of Israel.

To understand the prophetic personality of Chavara, we should start by examining the very meaning of the word 'prophet.' A prophet for many of us is a 'fore-teller.' This is not what a prophet is, at least in essence. The Greek word 'prophets' is the translation of the Hebrew '*Nabi*' and it means either 'one who is called,' or 'one who calls.' Hence the prophet is one who is called by God or one who calls in the name of God. What is essential here is the God-perspective of the prophetic personality. His role is not a hereditary one as was the case with the kings and the priests. Rather, this came about by the direct intervention of God when certain individuals were urgently called and asked to speak in the name of God. Theirs was a call and a mission at the same time. They were called in order to be sent... Chavara was a prophet of this kind, a man who was called and sent into a society to speak and work in the name of God. Just as Jeremiah was called at a very young age, Chavara, who had to start his mission at a very young age, thanks to the awareness he had of his task and responsibilities, was faithful to the call he received.

A prophet has three major qualities which need to be analyzed to see how well all of them fit the person of Chavara. The three major qualities of the prophets of the OT were: (a) Close intimacy with God; (b) Sense of history; (c) Total involvement in the destiny of the people.

a) Close Intimacy with God

All the genuine prophets of the OT had a profound intimacy with God. They always remained on the side of God and evaluated things from a God-perspective. For them everything was derived from God and everything was destined to move towards God. They had no secular understanding of God; for them the whole world moved in a divine milieu.

The God-perspective of the prophetic personality was very often implied in the very names the prophets bore. Thus Elijah means 'Yahweh is El.' Hosea means 'Yahweh is salvation.' The baptismal name of Chavara was Kuriakose, which means in Greek 'one who belongs to the Lord.' He was one who pertained to the Lord of the new Covenant, and from his writings we know that he kept up that union with Christ throughout his life. It is this sense of belonging to the Lord that prompted him to work so hard for Christ and for his church.

b) Sense of History

The second major quality of a prophet of the OT was his sense of history. The word 'history' does not mean here 'record of the past.' Rather history means the dynamic process of interaction between the past, present and future. Every moment we live very soon becomes a reality of the past preparing itself for the present and opening itself up to the future. The interplay and the interaction between the past, present and future makes history one of the most important realities of the progress of humanity. What is absolutely important is for everyone to develop a sense of history, a certain sense or capacity to see the present in the light of the

past and in relation to the future. In this age of pragmatism, many people do not have this sense of history and it is a real tragedy of our times.

The prophets of the OT characterized by their tremendous capacity to see and understand the past, present, and the future in their relatedness. They had *their faith in the past, their love for the present and their hope about the future*. Their faith in the past enable them to see the past as something precious, as something created and guided by God. Their love for the present compelled them to critically evaluate it in the light of the past. In doing this they had to condemn many things which were not in tune with the ideals of an authentic community. They had to condemn many things which were not in tune with the ideals of an authentic community. They had to condemn the externalism in the cult, the practice of social injustice, and the overall breakdown of the covenant of religiosity. For this prophets were disliked and often persecuted by the people as well as by the official custodians of religion, but their love for the present emboldened them to face such oppositions. They never practised opportunism, they were never prepared to make compromises on vital issues. Rather they were prepared to stand on the side of God and suffer with the assurance that God was with them.

This bold stand to uphold the authentic in the present was possible for them precisely because of their hope about the future. The future is that which is born out of the present. But for the prophets, God is the author of the future and can be looked forward to only in optimism. They did what they could to shape that future to be more and more in tune with God's plan about his people. In other words they were not onlookers of the future. They were collaborators doing what they could and leaving the rest to God for Him to act in His good time.

Looking at what Chavara did for the Church and his people in Kerala during the 19th century, one could very well say that he had this profound sense of history. He knew, only too well, that the Church in that part of India had an authentic apostolic tradition and a genuine spiritual wealth which got blurred and confused through the historical vicissitudes of the 16th and 17th centuries after the arrival of the Portuguese. The Kerala Church was in need of renewal and revitalization. The clergy needed to be updated. Christian families had to be renewed from within. Chavara took up the challenge and did whatever he could to bring about a lasting renewal of the Church in Kerala.

More than anything else it was the Rochosian schism which brought out the real prophetic role of Chavara. Though he was fully aware of the need for maintaining the identity of the St. Thomas Christians and their cherished rite for which a bishop of their own rite was the ideal – he was more concerned about keeping the unity of the Church under the Roman Pontiff rather than falling a victim to the thrill and enthusiasm that was created in Kerala through the arrival of Thomas Rochos. It was in his fight against the schismatic bishop that Chavara proved his real zeal for the Church, something similar to the fight of Prophet Elijah against the Canaanite Gods. Chavara gave more importance to universal values and was ready to sacrifice special narrow interests for the sake of the common good. This is a lesson which all of us today have to learn from Chavara, especially at a time when so much energy is spent on exercising and establishing its own identity at various levels.

The prophetic vision of Chavara enabled him to relate himself to all the various aspects of the life of the Christian community and to adopt ways and means for educating and re-vitalizing it from within. His pastoral vision was so

comprehensive that no aspect of Christian life was left out in his all-embracing commitment to transform the society. Thereby he tried to restore the authenticity of an ancient Church in matters of discipline, worship, and spirituality. Through this he expected to create a better Christian community, a better clergy, better Christian families and a better Church. If today about 70% of the vocation to priestly and religious life in India is from among the St. Thomas Christians, it is because of the renewal of the Christian families Chavara accomplished in the 19th century.

c) Total Involvement in the Destiny of the People

The third characteristic of the prophets of the OT was their total involvement in the destiny of the people. This is something that resulted from their sense of history. The prophets were not only spiritual leaders of the people, in the restricted meaning of the term, but they were also concerned with every aspect of the life of the people. Thus prophet Amos fought against social injustice in the Northern Kingdom. Prophets Michah and Isaiah did the same. Taking refuge in the externalism of the cult in a form was for them a mockery. Isaiah pleaded for justice to be practised which consisted in 'correcting oppression, defending the fatherless and pleading for the widow' (Isaiah 1, 17).

Chavara knew only too well that the progress of a community greatly depended on growth from within and assistance from outside for achieving the former he launched a process of education at various levels, such as theological education and formation of the clergy, education of the children through schools attached to all parishes. For helping the latter he started the medium of the press-apostolate, to accomplish which he had to work very hard. The ministry of

the Word of God as another important means through which Chavara tried to help the people of God to become authentic Christians.

The religious communities which Chavara founded, both of men and of women, were to take up this prophetic task of building up the kingdom of God, not only in the tiny geographic boundaries of Malabar but also throughout India and as far as possible in other parts of the world. For us living during the latter part of the 20th century all that Chavara planned for a meaningful apostolic community is evident. But the fact that more than a century ago he launched all these apostolic activities implies nothing less than a profound prophetic vision and a radical commitment to the cause which he had set before him. While remaining grateful to him for what he has done and bequeathed to us, we should all take up as something precious the challenge of his vision and mission.

In the book of Numbers we read the story of Moses exclaiming before his people: "Would that the Lord's people were prophets that the Lord would put his spirit upon them" (Num. 11, 29). It would also be the prayer of Chavara as he now sees his sons and daughters spread far and wide that they all be prophets like him, that they all display a prophetic vision in the world of today, that they think and act in the present with sense of the past and vision into the future, that they do not remain satisfied with the given and the established, but rather transcend the limitations of the preset to live into the future, that they develop a broad vision about their mission and become available everywhere and to everyone in this vast world to transform it into the Kingdom of God.

CHAPTER XVII

A Contemplative in Action

THOMAS KOCHUMUTTAM, CMI

1. Introduction

"Bl. Kuriakose Elias' success, in all his many undertakings, was undoubtedly due to the intense charity and prayer, which characterized his daily life, his close communion with God and his love for the church, as the visible body of Christ on earth". These words of Pope John Paul II on the occasion of the beatification of Kuriakose Elias Chavara in 1986, are an accurate description of the latter. A person who succeeds in many of his undertakings is indeed a prayerful person. The Indian definition of such a person is *karmayogi*, meaning 'a contemplative in action'. This great ideal of spirituality is the key concept of *Bhagavadgita*, a spiritual classic of India. In it, Arjuna, who, for all practical purpose, represents the sincere seekers of God, is persuaded to engage himself in the service of humanity without counting the gains or losses for himself. This was a call of *niskama karma*, unselfish service. This is something like what Jesus meant when he said: "When you have done all that is commanded of you, say, 'we are unworthy servants, we have only done what was our duty'" (Lk. 17, 10). Then immediately the question is raised: Can one be so unselfish as to be totally unconcerned about one's own gains or losses in the undertakings. In answer to the question, *Bhagavadgita* says: *yougasthah kuru karmani*

(2.48), which means: 'Do the services, while remaining in the state of yogi'. To be in the state of yoga is what the Christian tradition of spirituality basically means by being prayerful or a contemplative. Hence the advice is 'to be engaged in activities while remaining a contemplative'; or be a 'contemplative in action', a *karma-yogi*. This is the ideal that Chavara, true to his rootedness in the Indian and Carmelite traditions of spirituality, realized in his own person.

2. A Man of Steady Mind

Chavara's greatness, in fact, consists neither in the amount of works he did, nor in the contemplation he enjoyed, but in the way he harmonized both of them in himself, a task which *Bhagavadgita* says is a matter of skill (*kausalam*). Therefore, the central concern of this article, more precisely, is how Chavara developed and maintained the spirit of contemplation throughout his active life, united it, culminated in the supreme act of a total surrender into the hands of the Father: the act of death, in which the dichotomy of action and prayer is creatively resolved once and for all.

Anyone being a little familiar with the life of Chavara would easily agree that he was a person who spent hours in prayer, personal as well as liturgical. Important as it is, the focus of this article, however, is not on the amount of his providence formal prayer, but on the fact of his being a contemplative. Such a person spontaneously perceives, admires and adores the loving hands of providence in all that happens to him and around him. This may be described as the life of faith. Here, one's faith in God, instead of remaining just on the theoretical level, is made to bear on every little experience of the person, pleasant as well as painful. Here it is not a question of the person having so many extraordinary

experiences of God, but being able to convert every little experience of life into a God-experience. This contemplative character of the person is proved beyond doubt in the face of painful experiences, as it happened in the case of Chavara. For example, during his seminary life, when his parents and his only brother died, instead of giving up his vocation to the priesthood, he remained fully committed to his call, giving the care of his family to his relatives. He gracefully accepted the humiliation, when he had to return from the Latin rite seminary at Verapoly, where he was sent for further studies of the Latin language, etc. His extraordinary spirit of obedience was manifested when he and Fr. Thomas Porukara, both engaged in the construction work of the monastery, were transferred to distant places in spite of their continued requests to be allowed to continue the work of their project, the monastery at Mannanam. He bore with equanimity the rejection at the hands of the people in the press at Kottayam where he went twice to see and learn the working of a printing press. His sense of religious heroism and dedication was simply admirable in the uncompromising fight against the Roccas schism. He simply laughed at the enticing offer of episcopate made by the opponents during the struggle against it. He was equally unafraid of their threat to seize the monastery at Mannanam and their false accusations and propaganda, as a result of which majority of the parishes opposed him and looked down upon him and his co-workers. On the other hand, the one who was maneuvering the schismatic movement, showed signs of repentance and conversion, Chavara waited six hours patiently to meet him. Never did he hold himself back from any work, or fight shy of any difficulty as he was always prompted by two motives: obedience to his bishop and salvation of souls.

His deep sense of humility and detachment was unparalleled, as it is clear from the concluding words of the Vicar Apostolic Baccinelli to the Prefect of the Congregation of the Propaganda Fide in June 15, 1861, recommending that Chavara be consecrated as an auxiliary bishop: "... but I must warn you that the said person (Chavara) has made the simple vow of humility, and even if he had not taken that vow, he would not accept such a character and dignity without a formal command, as I had to give him to make him accept to be the Vicar General."²

Again, in his old age, in order to comply with the desire of the Vicar Apostolic Baccenelli, he left the monastery at Mannanam where he was living from 1831, and moved to Koonammavu in 1864 and lived there till his death in 1871. In the meantime, when the Vicar Apostolic and Fr. Leopold went to Rome, Fr. Chavara fell ill. Then the physician as also the confreres at Mannanam wished that he went to Mannanam for better treatment and rest. But he said: "Since the vicar Apostolic and Fr. Leopold wish that I should stay here, my conscience does not permit me to go to Mannanam, when they are absent."³ He endured the sufferings of old age, including complete blindness during the last three months, 'with the most heroic resignation, even as martyrdom.'⁴

Chavara would not be elated by any amount of praise or recognition. Already while in the seminary, he was a favourite of the *Malpan* Fr. Thomas Palackal.

The *Malpan* in recognition of the virtues of Chavara and of his ability, made him actively involved in the administration of the seminary and also in teaching the seminarians. Later, in 1844 Bishop Francis Xavier, formally conferred on him the title of '*Malpan*' in the Syro-Malabar

Church with special powers. In 1861 Archbishop Baccinelli, the Vicar Apostolic, appointed as the Vicar General of the Syrians in Malabar.⁴ The same Vicar Apostolic recommended him to the Holy See to be consecrated auxiliary bishop. Fr. Aloysius, who had lived with Chavara for a long time, says that the Syrian Catholic priests showed him towering respect. Fr. M. Palakunnel, another contemporary, had noted down in his diary: "The people called him an angel".⁵ Mr. Mani Kurian Madathikunnel, after meeting Chavara and listening to him, said: "How pleasant an experience it was to see him! He was filled with the Holy Spirit. His voice was very sweet and soft. At the same time all those who assembled in the church could hear his sermon without any difficulty. I still cherish those memories."⁶ The Vicar Apostolic Baccinelli, in his letter to the Sacred Congregation, recommending Chavara for Episcopal ordination, describes the latter as follows:

... a man truly Christian, virtuous, most prudent and well-versed in Sacred Scriptures, most learned in the Syriac language, and who has shown himself in these circumstances by deed, most attached to the Catholic religion and to the Holy See, so much so that the revolutionaries, the intruders and others, even upto Baghdad, have tried very much, used every art and cunning, to the extent of offering to consecrate him bishop, to get him over to their side. If they would have been able to get him, all would have followed him, since he enjoys with all great esteem, reverence and authority ... My thought and request to your eminence is that, if it is judged convenient and if it is possible to consecrate him co-adjutor bishop, he will certainly bring forth fruits much better than those of the Chaldean Patriarch ... because he is good, prudent and obedient.

Thus it is amply evident that every body, the Vicars Apostolic, the missionaries, the priests and the people at large, irrespective of caste and creed, held Fr. Chavara in great esteem. He was respected even by the followers of other religions and denominations and still more even by his enemies, who all admired him and sought his support. But he ever remained a humble servant of God for the service of men. In his writings and even in the letters he wrote, he refers to himself always as a penitent. He may be rightly described a *sthita-prajna*, a steady-minded person, always keeping the mind fixed on God, alike in praise and blame, health and illness, success and failure. He was a *yogi*, a contemplative.

By contemplation or prayerfulness is meant here the ability to live uninterruptedly in all circumstances, keeping the mind fixed on the Lord. This is, in other words, to live uninterruptedly in the awareness of the presence of God. Here the stress is on the *uninterruptedness* of the mind, or of the awareness, so that the contemplation is not confined to the formal hours of prayer. Indeed, it becomes a habitual trait of the person running through every condition and circumstance of life. According to an Indian definition: "Contemplation (*dhyana*) is in the form of a stream of the thought (of God), uninterrupted like the flow of oil."⁸ This uninterrupted stream of thought or awareness of God should keep always flowing, no matter where one is or what one does. This indeed was the great achievement of Chavara, because of which he can be rightly called a contemplative.

3. Heir of Prayer-Culture

Chavara was the proud heir of a prayer-culture, a culture in which prayer was considered of supreme value. In it prayer was an archetype, in which he shared from his very

birth and even from conception, so to say. His parents especially, his mother sowed in his tender mind the seed of the spirit of prayer, were the primary and the most powerful agent of this culture.

The seed of the spirit of prayer that has fallen in the good soil of Chavara's heart, duly sprouted and was nurtured first by the priest in the presbytery, where he was sent by the parents to stay for some time just before he entered the seminary at the age of thirteen.

True to the motto: "the Lord is my portion" (Ps. 16,5), which he had adopted as he received tonsure in 1818, he had decided to follow the Lord's call, accepting the sorrows with submission to the will of God and dedicating himself repeatedly to the Mother of God, as he had learnt from his parents."⁹

4. The Monastic Foundation

The close association with the project of the founding of a religious congregation, starting with the construction works of the monastery at Mannanam, helped Chavara develop further his spirituality, adding to it a new dimension in terms of monastic life. Already from his Malpan, Fr. Thomas Palackal, he was acquainted with an ascetic way of life, which, in no way was less rigorous than that of a monk in a monastery. But it was well complemented by the Dominican way of preaching the word of God. It may be remembered that Fr. Palackal had in mind the Dominican ideal for the new monastery, which in a spirit of detachment, he generously gave up in deference to the sentiments of his companion Fr. Thomas Porukara,¹⁰ the latter's ideal of *vana-vasa*, a hermitage-type in the solitude of a forest, must also have influenced

Chavara's monastic spirit. Even from his seminary days, Fr. Chavara was favourably associated with and involved in the project of the monastery, the *Bes-rauma*, house on the hill top, symbolizing the heights of spirituality which was aimed at through it.

From the seminary days Fr. Chavara was fascinated by the monastic ideal of spirituality. After ordination, under the guidance of Fr. Palackal, he more actively collaborated in the efforts to find a suitable site for the monastery, and in overcoming obstacles. As a new priest, after a short period of pastoral ministry in some parishes, he was sent back to the seminary to assist the *Malpan*, which gave him the opportunity to be still more closely involved in the construction of the monastery. Eventually, after the severe test of being transferred to distant places, Fr. Porukara and Fr. Chavara were fully relieved for the construction work of the monastery and from then the monastic dimension of his spirituality was firmly established, as he himself says: "From that day I began to consider myself fully as an ascetic and was determined to keep myself away completely from my blood-relatives and give myself up to the monastic pattern of life."¹¹

It so happened that the new monastery, from its very beginning, combined prayer and scholarship, as a lasting monument to the mental acceptance of Frs. Palackal and Porukara, in spite of their divergent temperaments. The former an ascetic theologian, felt that if the seminary is attached to the monastery, they could get the services of the seminarians in reading, praying, etc., and thus make the church-services attractive. There may be good vocations from among them to the monastery. Fr. Porukara differed. He insisted that their main concern was to have a monastery, which had grown so far mainly of their trust in God. Concern

for people and their ways should not be a hindrance to this. The seminaries, being teaching places, if attached to the monastery, the monastic objectives might not be fully realized...Eventually Fr. Porukara, out of regard for Fr. Malpan submitted to the latter's view.¹²

Thus, the monastery, which according to Fr. Porukara, is exclusively a house of prayer and penance (*Tapasu Bhavan*), also took on the dimension of a house of insight and learning (*Darsana Veedu*).¹³ Chavara initially was equally open to both the views and easily assimilated the great ideal of combining *tapas* and *darsana*, prayer and penance on the one hand, and insight and learning on the other. And this combination remained a permanent trait of his spirituality.

Very soon life in the monastery cum seminary at Mannanam was so organized that it beautifully combined *tapas* (prayer and penance) and *darsana* (insight and learning). Fr. Porukara interspersed the day long studies with pious practices, like the long rosary, the seven colour rosary, devotion to St. Joseph, holy Mass, preaching, scapular devotion and the way of the cross.¹⁴ A little later, at the end of a retreat, at the suggestion of Chavara and the two others, a few of the seminarians volunteered to live as members of a community observing all the rules followed during the retreat, except that of silence and rooms upstairs were allotted to them, with Chavara as their director and teacher.¹⁵

Thus, immediately after ordination and much before formally becoming a religious through the profession of the evangelical counsels, Chavara had started the monastic style of life and spirituality. Along with it there was in him also the deep rooted pastoral orientation, which he had inherited from the preachers' (Dominican) ideal of Fr. Palackal and the

pastoral background of Fr. Porukara. The pastoral commitment was, in fact the mandate they had received when the Vicar Apostolic Maurilius Stabilini permitted them to start the religious life. He said to them: "If you, the one or two, who know something, go into solitude, who will be there to teach the people? If you so wish it, build a monastery, which will be useful for all"³⁶. Thus, it was very much part of the original charism bestowed upon the new congregation that they integrate pastoral commitment into their vision of monastic spirituality. As a result, the pastoral orientation and for that matter, people-orientation, was consciously built into their monastic life, which would otherwise remain a mere hermitage, *vana-vasa*. In this way it came about that the new congregation was the realization of the Indian ideal of *karma-yoga*, the ideal of engaging oneself in the service of humanity (*karma*), while remaining in the state of contemplation (*yoga*) which implies the skill (*kausala*) of becoming a contemplative in action.

Thus, the monastic spirituality of Chavara and his community was a clear blending of the socio-religious concern and love for the people (*karma*), learning and insight (*darsana*) and prayer and penance (*tapas*). This may be described as the Christian synthesis of the three traditionally accepted Indian spiritual orientations of *karma*, *jnana*, and *bhakti*: action, knowledge and devotion. Fr. Kuriakose Porukara summarizes the life style of the first members in the following words.

They were praying continuously and were meditating and keeping vigil for a long time and were offering Holy Mass such devotions as to cause tears in the participants. Through their sermons on Sundays and Feast days, and through their continuous counselling, they stirred this region and removing the spiritual darkness, spread the divine light."

5. The Carmelite Factor

The decisive factor that gave the final shape to Chavara's spirituality, was the Carmelite tradition. Being providentially introduced into it, he deliberately embraced and whole-heartedly lived it. It was not the initial choice of the founding fathers of the new congregation to associate it with the Carmelite tradition as the Blessed tells us in his testament:

Dear children, due to the special grace of God, we have been called as Carmelites, the most dear to the Mother of God. But we are most certainly convinced that this has not been according to the counsel of man, but according to the counsel of God. The founders of this congregation, the Rev. Frs. Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara were praying and were organizing this community on the model 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.¹⁸

5.1 Dawning of the Carmelite Vision

Thus reading the signs of the times, and fully trusting in divine providence, Chavara promptly responded to the Spirit, working through the Carmelite tradition. An initial gesture of his openness to the Carmelite world of spirituality seems to be that, on the day of profession, December 8, 1855, he changed his name from Kuriakose, to Kuriakose Elias, as a fitting homage to the prophet Elias, the Carmelite Patriarch. It is only significant that a few years later, in the early 1860s, he submitted himself to the guidance of Fr. Leopold OCD, a much younger, but saintly Carmelite monk, who was appointed the Carmelite Provincial Delegate and novice

master of the new congregation. He remained Chavara's confessor and spiritual director till the latter died in 1871.

As his companions and associates like Fr. Leopold and Fr. Kuriakose Porukara, testify, Chavara's life and conduct as a Carmelite was flawless, in conformity with the Carmelite Rules, fully integrated to the community discipline, with child-like obedience to the superiors, full of love for silence, solitude and prayer; poor, simple and austere; perfect in the renunciation of possessions, relations and himself; single minded in the love of God and unquenchably thirsty for the salvation of the fellow human beings; with a deep devotion to the Eucharistic Lord and filial love for the Bl. Virgin Mary. Fr. Aloysius Manjummel, who was under Chavara's spiritual guidance for many years, says:

According to the first Constitution the duration of evening meditation was a complete hour during that hour he was on his knees in ecstatic mood, shedding copious tears. At the end of the hour the confreres closely had to remind him to say the concluding prayers...

Chavara's views about the Carmelite ideals are clearly expressed in his instructions to the fellow religious. In the circular that he wrote jointly with the Provincial Delegate Fr. Leopold, we read:

Persecution by men and discouragement from them cannot destroy it [the congregation]. But one thing can cause its destruction. If we forget our holy vocation and neglect the sacred duties of our state of life and fail in humility, charity, religious modesty and genuine devotion, and are satisfied with valuing them only in spirit and words, and not in deeds, within a short time all those houses will fall to ruin. These monasteries are founded by God and willed by him to

be mirrors of virtues and assembly of holy people, not an association of self-willed stewards and business administrators. The strength of a 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... We are the progenitors of the monasteries here; we are the corner-stones.²⁰

Again in his Testament he wrote:

The significant mark of a true religious is total renunciation of his self-will and perfect obedience as though he had no eyes nor ears of his own. One who possesses such a virtue is a true religious...Let the Vicars of each of our monasteries foster real charity among themselves and maintain a true bond. However numerous the monasteries be, all must be like the members of one family, children born to, nursed and brought up by the same mother. Never let this love weaken; but let it grow stronger from day to day. Bear this in mind as an important piece of advice...²¹

3.2. In the Line of the Carmelite Mystics

Among the Carmelite mystics, perhaps the one with whose ideals and teachings Chavara was most familiar is St. Teresa of Avila. It is rather surprising that nowhere in his writings or instructions is St. John of the Cross explicitly mentioned. However, his mystical theology is essentially the same as that of the latter-one's complete detachment from all that is not God on the one hand, and the consummate union of one's spirit with God on the other. This understanding of spiritual life is unambiguously described by Chavara, not in the characteristically Johannine language of the *Dark Nights*, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, *Living Flame of Love*, and the *Spiritual Canticle*, but in his own simple but convincing terms and style.

Welcomed her into bliss with Him.
Jewels of marvel, pearls of price,
All heaped on her by the Lord divine
He held her in His close embrace,
She loved Him deep with warmth sublime.²³

In the letters to the nuns in the convent at Koonammavu too he speaks in terms of spousal mysticism:

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 at first. In course of time you will begin understand the language. When your spouse sees that you understand his speech, He will speak more and more directly and 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. Then on there will be nothing to fear.²⁴

May Jesus Christ bless you. Remain with Him in your cell which is His royal chamber, with joy and peace of mind.²⁵

Is there anyone in the world more fortunate than you?... Consider how sweet is the voice of your loving spouse. He is vigilantly watching in your hearts jealously, lest you love anyone more than Him, lovingly looking into all your needs.²⁶ ...the adoration you give to your divine spouse Jesus Christ from the corner of your convent is most pleasing to Him. I have seen with mine own eyes that the palanquin in which the queen was travel-ling was covered on all sides with a thick curtain to hide her from human gaze. If so, how much more demanding would be your divine spouse...²⁷ ... I feel a holy envy at your immense good fortune! It is very true. O ! Queens and spouses of your Lord and King, Jesus Christ, the state of life you have embraced is indeed great

and praiseworthy. The terrestrial empresses will be jealous of you...²⁸

Chavara was, however, quite familiar not only with the teachings, but also the language of St. Teresa of Avila. Even his understanding of meditation is identical with hers; and indeed he acknowledges that he learned it from her:

Meditation is a free and friendly colloquy with God. O! My mother, St. Teresa of Avila, I have read it in your life history that during the tepidity, in the beginning of your religious life, while indulging in the way of the world you found it a foil to make friends with God and that you kept away from meditation. Of this, O mother, I am convinced. For, if meditation is conversation with God, it presupposes a friendship with God. For when friends sit close to each other, they find enough topics to talk about without ceasing. No one need teach either of two friends how to go on talking. For, the heart has a language of its own. The very close presence of the friend with no utterance of words is quite gratifying and heart-warming.²⁹

Chavara also endorses the Teresian position that the essential mark of the Carmelite charism is incessant prayer. Referring to the Primitive Rule of the Carmelites, St. Teresa says: "We must pray without ceasing... For, unceasing prayer is the most important aspect of the rule..."³⁰ In a similar manner Chavara advises: "Above all learn the art of loving Jesus Christ. Stay constantly in His presence. Walk along with Him. Converse with him continuously."³¹ He even recognized the Teresian style of speaking in terms of the grades of prayer experience: "1. Reading; 2. Solitude; 3. Meditative prayer and 4. Meditation. It is enough for the time being to aspire to this fourth degree of prayer. Our Mother Teresa attained to the

seventh stage. Some of her sisters reached up to the fifth and sixth. We must reach at least the fourth."³²

Another point on which there is a striking similarity between St. Teresa and Chavara is the concentration on the fatherhood of God. The Carmelite Mother writes:

Therefore, sisters out of love for the Lord, get used to pray the 'Our Father' with this recollection and you will see the benefit before long. This is a manner of praying that the soul gets so quickly used to that it does not go astray, nor do the faculties become restless, as time will tell.³³

It is true that St. Teresa never lost sight of the difference between God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. But for Chavara, even God the Son is his Father! Especially in his *Meditation Colloquies*, he addresses Jesus Christ as "My dear Father", and as the prodigal son places himself at his pierced feet. "O my Father dear, I cast myself on my knees before your throne of mercy. I am bent on clinging to your pierced but live fact until you speak to me words of forgiveness..."³⁴ Even so in his *Compunction of the Soul*, Chavara is ever conscious of the ugliness of sin that pains the heart of the heavenly Father. "Father, loving father, I regret my offences" is the loving dream sight that through the whole poem.

The reference to Chavara's spirit of repentance reminds us of yet another one of his affinities with St. Teresa, namely, an abiding compunction of heart. Neither of them had ever been a sinner, but both of them were deeply aware of the minor failures and imperfections they have had once in the past and were continuously sorry for them. St. Teresa, in the early part of her autobiography, recalls in detail the little imperfections and carelessness in her early life. Regarding Chavara, his *Compunction of the Soul*, especially its earlier part,

is comparable to St. Augustine's Confessions. For the most part, it is a meditation on the life of Jesus and his blessed Mother. As an integral part of it, he looks into himself with deep sentiments of repentance for his childhood follies on the one hand, and on the other those of gratitude for the many blessings of God. In fact, the abiding compunction of heart is characteristic of Chavara's spirituality, which became ever deeper and deeper as he advanced in age and is consistently expressed in all his spiritual writings, including the letters of the last years. In a letter written probably in 1869 to the nuns he says:

I am afraid, my days are coming to an end. So I request you to pray for me to the Father and especially during the 40 hours adoration. Pray for me in a special way, that I may be forgiven the scandal, which I have caused you by my way of life, my unwholesome manner, disorderly words and careless behaviour, that I may be spared the punishment I deserve for my carelessness in looking after the innocent little ones entrusted to my care, and you His dear spouses, by my scandalous way of life and also for the defects in administration I have committed. Pray for me that I may spend the rest of my life accomplishing His will in all things and finally die a happy death.³⁵

Again, concluding his *Testament*, written in 1870, to the members of his congregation, he says:

...to all the members of the congregation I beg pardon. I beg of them before God, to pardon me all my shortcomings and lapses in the performance of my duties. Again, I pray my brother religious, pray for me. I took my vows as the first member and I was made the first Prior. But, I have not fulfilled to satisfaction my obligation in observing the Constitutions and enforcing the same. I did not give you good example. You must forgive me the scandal I have given

you and pray for me that I may make reparation for them and that you may become more fervent...³⁶

This comparative analysis of the spiritual visions of St. Teresa could be carried on further with reference to the devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and the meditation on the passion of Christ, the devotion to St. Joseph and the love for the Church. I would like to conclude the present study by briefly pointing out the points specific to what we may call, Chavara spirituality.

6. Chavara Spirituality

The end result of the life-experience of Chavara and the various influences on him, was the development of his personal spirituality with its own characteristics. Let us call it the *Chavara Spirituality*. We get a comprehensive picture of it in his works: *Anastasia's Martyrdom* (1862), *Meditation Colloquies* (1866-68), *Compunction of the Soul* (1870-71), *Dirge and the Letters*. All of them, with the exception of a few of his letters, were written during the last decade (1861-1871) of the author's life, and therefore present and reflect the final phase of his life and spirituality. Obviously, after the departure of the schismatic Bishop Roccas in March 1862, Chavara was immediately concerned about repairing the harm done by the former to the Church of Malabar at large. Along with that, he also turned to matters related to the progress and spiritual well-being of his own religious communities. In 1864 he was transferred to Konnamavu where he was also actively involved in the founding and bringing up of the congregation for women. Along with these activities, he also took care to give literary expression to his own spiritual experiences, reflections and insights in the form of the works mentioned above. A careful study of them reveals the nature of what we

have called the *Chavara Spirituality*. Even during the last phase of his life, he was a contemplative in action (*karma-yogi*), and it becomes finally substantiated and definitively established. The point is that he never ceased to be an active person; and while he became more and more contemplative, he also became more and more active and vice versa! Here we see his spirituality reaching maturity and finding expression in selfless acts of charity (*niskama karma*). On the one hand he becomes more and more aware of the approaching end of life, which made him more and more God-oriented; on the other, as it is clear from the letters, his love for others overflows more and more tenderly and touchingly. Finally, three months before death, he lost his eye-sight, as if he closed his bodily eyes in order to see God and creatures alike through contemplative eyes! On the last days of his life, he would not allow himself to be drawn into conversation on worldly things and even put up a notice in the room forbidding visitors with worldly conversation!

One of the distinctive marks of Chavara's spirituality is the intense desire to see God, the longing for the vision of God. Included in the *Compunction of the Soul* is a poetry of 168 lines beautifully describing mostly the incidents of the life of Christ. The beauty of it is that its every other line ends with the words: "I long to see [Jesus]". For example:

The Lord of mercy, 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
Borne in her womb, to Bethlehem He came
To obey mighty Caesar, I long to see...
How Jesus, Anna's grandson
Was hunger-smitten, I long to see,
And with the Pharisees discussed law

In his twelfth year, I long to see...
The Good Shepherd, seeking His flock
That had gone astray, I long to see,
The Lord of goodness, proclaiming Himself
As our loving friend, I long to see...³⁷

Another feature of the Chavara spirituality is the familial picture so that in it one feels being in the family of God. Already from childhood the picture of the Holy Family had impressed on him. And on the day of his religious profession, to his new name he added the phrase "of the Holy Family", so that his full name was Kuriakose Elias of the Holy Family. In his advice to the members of the Congregation gathered round his death-bed, he said:

My parents always kept me mindful of the Holy Family, which was ever my protection and in my imagination. Mercifully they protected me. I dedicate you all and this humble Congregation to the same Holy Family. Rely on it. Let the Holy Family reign over your hearts.³⁸ Chavara's love for the paternal figure is displayed, when in the context of the Holy Family, he addresses its head St. Joseph, as 'my Father'. His devotion to St. Joseph, which must have been one of the Teresian influences on him, especially as the patron of the dying, is worth quoting:

Oh! St. Joseph, my dear Father, your paternity fostered young Jesus... St. Joseph, dear Father, you abided by the honour and sanctity of the Holy Mother... Oh! most kind Father, I know the dangers involved in the feeling of self-assurance... Oh! my gracious Father, I am given to shivers to think of judgment...³⁹

In the spiritual family of Chavara the mother's place was taken first of all by Blessed Virgin Mary, to whom his earthly mother had dedicated him praying: "I offer this fruit of

my impure womb at your feet; accept him and protect him as your servant."⁴⁰ "Tend him with care; know you that he is no more yours but our ladies."⁴¹ True of this dedication to the Mother of God, Chavara developed strong filial feelings towards her. As Fr. Leopold says, 'his love to the Virgin Mother was filial.'⁴² As his mother died, he prayed to the Bl. Virgin Mary:

Therefore, O! my Lady, my mother, now who is there to favour me except you. Certainly I have been your servant. It is my great blessing that you are my Mother and I am your servant.⁴³

Among the other influences in Chavara's spirituality are: St. Teresa of Avila, the Holy Church and his own religious congregation. Calling upon St. Teresa, who was also his guide for prayer, he says:

Oh! Mother, affectionate and generous, you being a well-accomplished mistress in the mysteries of meditation, I again seek your loving intercession in obtaining for me from Jesus the great gift of love... Now that you are in union with Jesus, the Bridegroom in the heavenly bed-chamber your favours with him must be greater now than when you were on earth... Oh! Mother dear, teach me to pray... I must come to my saviour Jesus Christ, my beloved bridegroom to beg pardon for my sins. Mother dear, in your mercy do go before me into the bed-chamber of your beloved heavenly spouse...⁴⁴

His devotion to Holy Mother the Church and to her visible head, the Holy Father, too, was unparalleled, to which Fr. Leopold testifies:

Among his virtues, the most outstanding was his ardent faith in and devotion to the Holy Church and to the Holy

Father. He had an ardent desire to spread the light of the Holy Church in all directions...He was grieved to the point of shedding tears when he heard of the trials and persecution of the Church and eagerly longed to see the days of her triumph. Whenever he happened to hear news of the Pope, he was always moved to tears, either of sorrow or of joy. It was because of this extraordinary faith that he showed great veneration, love and obedience towards the Papal Delegate, who was the representative of the Holy Father and towards the missionaries who were the messengers of the Holy Church.⁴⁵

His love for the religious Congregation was expressed by his commitment to her ideals and discipline and to his own duties as a member and superior of the community:

From the very beginning till the very end Fr. Chavara subjected himself to the Order with the interest and enthusiasm of a novice. He regarded the Order in such an esteem as though it were his own mother. It was to him his paradise in earth, and he encouraged his disciples to hold it in similar high esteem. He would never willingly absolve anyone, including himself of the responsibility of conforming to the Order. Travel, old age, weakness and even infirmity hardly succeeded in making him relax much. He would relax when absolutely necessary, but only after taking permission from the spiritual director. He was ever anxious to have his meals with the community, frugal and ascetic, they were. Even while sick and laid up, he tried to manage with the common meals only.⁴⁶

The rest of humanity is then viewed as his own sisters and brothers, which explains his concern for others, especially the weaker and the less fortunate members of the human family. At the same time, to some members of this family he feels a deeper intimacy for the simple reason that they too had

experiences similar to his. For example, considering himself a repentant prodigal son, he feels a closer affinity with "the great penitents like Mary Magdalene, Mary of Cortona, who have always been helpful to me in evoking repentance for my sins."⁴⁷ He also had strong paternal feelings towards those whom he considered and loved as his spiritual children. They include for instance, the members of his own Congregation, the sisters of the convent he co-founded and his parishioners. In his letters he addresses all of them as 'My Children'. His testament to the members of the congregation reads: Dear children, by the special grace of God we are all called to be members of the congregation. But, my dear children, we, you and I, have not yet become real religious..."⁴⁸

To the sisters, he writes: "Ah! my dear children these days you must meditate on the love of Jesus Christ."⁴⁹ Again, "My dear children, is there anyone in the world more fortunate than you..."⁵⁰ Still again: "Dear little children, see with that care and diligence, our Lord looks after you."⁵¹ Regarding his love for the sisters of the convent at Koonammavu Fr. Kuriakose Porukara writes: "Just as Jacob loved his youngest son Benjamin more than others, so he (Chavara) loved them (the sisters), more than others, and looked after them so tenderly, as a hen takes care of the chicks."⁵²

To his parishioners at Kainakary he wrote a long letter on February 1868, which was later given the title *Testament of a Loving Father*. In it he wrote: "Accept this as a piece of advice coming from one of your ancestors; keep it sacred; practise it faithfully, and make others practise the same."⁵³ In another letter written in December 1869, he wrote: "Beloved children, in the order of flesh I am the son of Kuriakose Chavara of the parish of Chennankari... Since I was born in your family, I

have a special obligation... I give this in my own handwriting... I submit this to you my sons of the parish of Kainkary chapel, to be preserved as a treasure."⁵⁴

Chavara's family feelings were extended in a very special way to the dying and those in the state of purgatory. A sure proof of this is his letter to the parishioners of Kainakary dated October 1869, in which he advises them to start a confraternity for happy death as the first step for the establishment of a house of charity, where the poor and the destitute could be taken care of in their material and spiritual needs. In it he described in detail, his understanding of Christian death, the need to prepare for a happy death, to help others in their old age, sickness and death-bed and a pray for the departed as well as to be devoted to the latter.⁵⁵ It may be added that prayer for and prayer to those in purgatory was very much part of Chavara's spirituality. Along with that he himself lived continuously keeping in mind his own death, and this was particularly so during the last few years of his life. In the *Meditation Colloquies* death is a theme to which he makes frequent references. The awareness of approaching death was expressed from time to time in his letters too.

7. Apostle of the Holy Eucharist

The last, but not the least in any way, of the constituents of the Chavara spirituality is his devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. he is rightly called the apostle of the Holy Eucharist. The liturgical reforms, which he painstakingly effected, included the instruction of the liturgy of the Holy Saturday, the Order of the Holy Mass, the forty hours adoration and the renewal of the spiritual life of the priests.

This invaluable devotion [to the Blessed sacrament] began to make its appearance from his [Chavara's] childhood itself. He was vigilant to go to Communion, as much as was allowed. During the seminary life, this devotion grew to such an extent as to cause wonder in his fellow seminarians. There he was an apostle of this devotion.

Fr. Leopold's testimony in this regard is worth quoting:

He [Chavara] used to celebrate the holy Mass with great care, devotion and order. His respect for and faith in this great sacrament, were deep indeed. All those who attended the holy Mass celebrated by him, were immensely impressed and inspired. Besides making visits to the Blessed Sacrament as provided by the rules, he would spend daily long hours on his knees, lost in adoration before the holy Eucharist.⁵⁶

In fact, the Holy Eucharist was the centre of his spirituality and prayer. To use his own terminology, he preferred to remain locked up in the tabernacle with Jesus. He wrote to the sisters: "I lock up your hearts in the tabernacle of Jesus. For you, I have locked up my heart there. Stay there until the day of resurrection"⁵⁷.

Let us conclude this study in the words of Fr. Marceline, OCD, who received Chavara's religious profession of vows in 1855. In the year after the letter's death in 1871, he published a history of the Church in Kerala, in which he writes:

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. Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara must be considered to have been amply fulfilled...⁵⁸

Endnotes

- 1 Leopold Beccaro, A Short Biography of the Venerable Person... (Mal), Koonammavu, 1871, p. iv.
- 2 Positio, p. 260.
- 3 Positio, p. 465.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Positio, p. 566.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Positio, p. 259.
- 8 Talla-dharavad-avicchinna smrti-santana-viseah / (Sribhasya 1.1.1.).
- 9 Kuriakose Porukara, Short Biography, Mannanam, 1871, p. 33.
- 10 Complete Works of Bl. Chavara, Vol. I, p. 21, Vol. II, p. 70.
- 11 Complete Works, Vol. I, p. 27.
- 12 Ibid., p. 28.
- 13 *Tapasu bhavan* and *Darsana veedu*, are the two words used by Chavara in his Chronicles, referring to the beginnings of the congregation. "Frs. Palackal and Porukara, seeing that, in the absence of a *tapasu bhavan*, even for the priests, much good is left undone, yearned to build a *darsana veedu* at least for the priests" (Ibid., p.1).
- 14 Ibid., p. 28.
- 15 Ibid., p. 29.
- 16 Jacob Kaniyathara, History of the Foundation of Mannanam Monastery (Mal), Mannanam, 1846, p.6.
- 17 Kuriakose Porukara, op.cit., p. 35.
- 18 Complete Works, Vol. IV, p. 70.
- 19 Positio, p. 561.
- 20 Complete Works, Vol. I, pp. 61-65.
- 21 Ibid., p. 70-71.
- 22 Complete Works, Vol. IV, p. 82.
- 23 Complete Works, Vol. IV, pp. 82-85.

- 24 Ibid., p. 85.
- 25 Ibid., p. 78.
- 26 Ibid., p. 82.
- 27 Ibid., p. 77.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Complete Works, Vol. II, p. 2.
- 30 The Way of Perfection, Chapter 4, no. 2.
- 31 Complete Works, Vol. IV, p. 82.
- 32 Ibid., p. 85.
- 33 The Way of Perfection, chapter 29, no. 6.
- 34 Complete Works, Vol. III, p. 5.
- 35 Positio, p. 336.
- 36 Complete Works, Vol. IV, p. 74.
- 37 Complete Works, Vol. II, p. 17ff.
- 38 Positio, p. 548.
- 39 Complete Works, Vol. III, pp. 13ff.
- 40 Complete Works, Vol. II, p. 6.
- 41 Complete Works, Vol. II, p. 6.
- 42 Leopold B., A Short Biography, p. 15.
- 43 Atmanuthapam, p. 15.
- 44 Complete Works, Vol. III, pp. 2-3.
- 45 Leopold B., A short Biography, p. ii
- 46 Fr. Valerian, The Servant of God, p. 51.
- 47 Complete Works, vol III, p. 3.
- 48 Ibid., Vol. I, p. 70.
- 49 Ibid., p. 82.
- 50 Ibid., p. 83.
- 51 Ibid., p. 86.
- 52 Kuriakose Porukara, A Short Biography, p. 86.
- 53 Complete Works, Vol. IV, p. 103.
- 54 Complete Works, Vol. I, p. 116.
- 55 Complete Works, Vol. IV, pp. 118ff.
- 56 Ibid.
- 57 Complete Works, Vol. I, p. 85.
- 58 Positio, p. 576.

CHAPTER XVIII

Dedicated to the Cause of the Sick and Poor

THOMAS FELIX, CMI

Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara popularly known as the great Prior or simply Fr. Chavara shines as a bright star in the Church history of Kerala. During the 19th century, he was a special envoy of God, a man of never-ending hope, a man of action. There was hardly any aspect of Christian life which he left untouched. The envetful life of Fr. Chavara is also the history of Kerala Church during the period. He was an ideal priest, a social reformer, an eminent writer, a champion of the faith, as well as a protector of the destitute and the poor.

Fr. Chavara represented the first glimmerings of the rise of social consciousness in Kerala before the advent of Sree Narayana Guru, or Ayyankali. He was also a predecessor of the Gandhian ideology, that service to God is though service to humanity. Unfortunately historians seem to have left out the name of Fr. Chavara from the list of social reformers of Kerala. Being a priest, he had certain limitations. He fought silently against the social inequalities of the period. He did not wear the mask of a political agitator or a revolutionary leader.

Chavara believed that every person had the right of direct access to God. He is remembered gratefully for his

contribution to the uplift of the downtrodden in both the material and spiritual aspects. He strove silently to eradicate untouchability and such other social customs and practices. He thus advocated social solidarity and consolidation. He also inculcated a spirit of self-respect and self-reliance among the people. Through his life, Fr. Chavara enkindled piety and concern for the poor and sick.

1. Concern for Others

Chavara joined the seminary at Pallipuram in 1818, at the age of 13. Chavara showed his concern for others even at this young age. There was among his seminary companions a forty-year old man, Philip, from the parish of Kaduthuruthy. He was very slow to learn languages. Chavara spent a lot of time over him to initiate him into the Syriac language. Fr. Leopold, his first biographer writes: "he (Cleric Chavara) never harboured any petty jealousy or narrow mindedness against his companions, as was usual among the young, but always kind and charitable towards them."¹ This service mentality and large-heartedness was an integral factor of his life.

2. Concern for the Sick and the Poor

After starting a religious congregation and having settled at Mannanam, one of the first things he did was to start the confraternity of St. Joseph for a happy death. The members of the confraternity were advised to visit the sick and the dying either in the hospital or at home. The duty of the members was to help them, to nurse them and to prepare them for happy death. In the letter to the parishioners of Kainakary, he gives more precise norms regarding the duties of the members. He writes: "*Every member should go alone, or in*

*company with others to the sick person who is reported to be nearing his or her death, and see that the last sacraments are administered to him or her and designate persons to nurse him or her, taking turns and setting a time-table for them to change their duty time. The information and his helpers will be responsible for this and all the members are bound to obey him. This act of mercy is the primary duty of the members."*²

He also advised the members to adopt a poor family in the neighbourhood and to provide them with food and clothes on the feast day of St. Joseph. All the poor people in the locality were invited to the Mannanam monastery and they were given food and clothes on the day.

3. Bold Venture

In the 19th century the condition of the low-castes (*Avarnas*) was very pitiable. Social customs like untouchability, etc. existed in Kerala. People of the low castes (*Pulays Parayas* etc) were forbidden to be anywhere near the people of the high castes who were passing by. They had to be 100 feet beyond sight. They were looked down upon by the high caste Hindus and even by the Catholics. Even Catholics did not like to admit those converted from the above group of people into their community. They were denied several human rights which the high caste people enjoyed. Schools, places of worship, and even other public places were prohibited areas for them. Referring to this situation Swami Vivekananda, the founder of the Ramakrishna Mission had remarked that Kerala is a "lunatic asylum." It is in such a society that Chavara launched his social welfare programmes, uniting all people into one.

4. Apostolate among the People of the Low Castes

Chavara's zeal for the apostolate was not restricted to his own community. He tried to evangelize even the out-castes, like the *Pulayas* and the *Parayas*.³ In the light of the peculiar social condition prevailing during the period, Chavara's attempt was really a bold venture. He started a catechumenate school at Mannanam, where the *Pulayas* and the *Parayas* used to come on Sundays and on other holidays. They remained there the whole day. He used to serve them a midday meal. He also gave them cloths.

In order to meet their expenses Chavara innovated a system of collection known as *Pidiyari*. Every time when rice was measured out for cooking, Catholic families were advised to take out a hand-full (*pidi*) from the measured pot and keep it in a special vessel labelled "*to infant Jesus*." This was collected by the deputies at the end of the week / month. This was an astonishing venture, because this simple collection helped to finance even the construction of monasteries.

Fr. Chavara would also freely approach the rich. He believed in the people and the people, in turn, had great confidence in Chavara. They used to contribute generously to his just demands. Fr. Kuriakose Eliseus Porukara remembers that Chavara, even when he was sick, was helping the poor with the donations he received from the rich.

Chavara also started a school for the catechumens at Arpookara and established a parish church at Kaipuzha near Mannanam for them. This facilitated instruction and catechism in the church itself.⁴

People of the low castes were also given job facilities in the services of the monasteries.

5. Concern for the Labourers

In the family code which he gave to the parishioners of Kainakary, he has laid down several rules to safeguard the claims of the poor and the needy, for example: Do not allow beggars to leave your house empty-handed; do not fail to give as much as you can, by way of charity; never withhold just wages to the labourers or make undue delay in paying them, because that is an offence that cries out to God for justice; do not insult the poor, neither vex them, because, if God sees them weeping, He will surely wreak vengeance on you...⁵

6. Home of Charity

Having started the confraternity of St. Joseph among the parishioners in Kainakary, he asked them to establish in the parish a home of charity, and adds: *"Let the poor and the destitute, who have no one to take care of be taken here, as also women or beggars in the street who are sick. Help them stay here peacefully and this will be the first home of charity in Malabar..."* He continues: *"People may call you 'mad men' and 'shameless creatures.' Accept this for the sake of Christ... This should be run exclusively with the amount obtained from your contribution and from the coconut tree set apart for the church (and also from the alms you collect from the church and from the market place, etc.)"*⁶

It may be noted in this context, that the written testament he has left to the members of the Congregation, expresses his wish that the sacred relics of the saints, which were under his care be given to the home of charity for their protection and consolation.

As instructed by Fr. Chavara the proposed home of charity was begun and functions even today giving shelter to the sick, the poor, and the destitute, irrespective of caste and creed.

Following the footprints of Fr. Chavara, his Congregation conducts today terminal hospitals where the dying are received, treated and nursed; home of charity where the street boys and wandering children are accepted and educated / trained to find suitable jobs, schools for the mentally retarded; home of charity for the physically handicapped; orphanages where the orphaned children are received and educated.

7. Efforts for the Uplift of Women

In the particular social set up of Kerala, women too had a very meagre position in society at that time. One of the principal aims of Chavara in founding a religious congregation for women was to uplift the social status of women. The members of the Congregation were to give education and training to girls so that future mothers would be enlightened to instruct and guide their children.

End Notes

¹*Introduction to Atmanuthapam*, Mannanam, 1871, p. 2.

²*Complete Works of Bl. Chavara*, vol. IV, p. 123.

³*Pulayas and Parayas* were considered of the lowest sector among the low castes.

⁴Though Catholics did not practice untouchability, many did not tolerate the presence of the low castes even in church at that time.

⁵*Complete Works of Chavara*, pp. 109 ff.

⁶*Ibid.* p.131.

CHAPTER XIX

Chavara's Vision on Education

MATHEW CHALIL, CMI

Introduction

Since the dawn of human history, education has continued to evolve, diversity and extend its reach and coverage. Every country develops its system of education to express and promote its unique socio-cultural identity and also to meet the challenges of the times. There are moments in history when a new direction has to be given to an age-old process.

All worry about their kids, and nations worry about the next generation. The United States wants its children to be well read and to be able to hold high-tech jobs. The East European countries want to prepare students for life in a strange new market place. Japan wants to stop elaborating on the research of others and to train scientists who can make their own breakthroughs. And India wants her people at least to sign their names. In all there is a fear of the future, and there is no country right now that is complacent about their educational system. Besides, there is a widespread consensus that a lack of a good education is the foundation of many social and economic problems. A good education should integrate us into the whole pattern of human life in all its aspects and it should not isolate us from the world. We cannot

forget this background, when we step into the field of education in our country.

1. Blessed Chavara Starts Schools in Kerala

There is a long history in the involvement of the Christian Churches in the field of education in India. The Christian educational work in this country began in a major way in the second half of the 19th century when the then British Government made it known that it would encourage and assist private agencies to open schools and colleges in India. But even before that the need for educating our young generation was visualized by the great leaders and visionaries of our country. It is here we find the greatness of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara. In the year 1841 he showed an extraordinary courage to start at Mannanam the first Catholic Sanskrit School in Kerala. Later in 1864 he started the first Catholic Primary School in Mannanam and gave directives to attach schools to all Catholic Churches and Monasteries in Kerala. The first Catholic English School was started in the year 1885, at a time when English education was forbidden to the Catholics.

Though Christianity had a long past in India, longer than that of the Muslims and of many prominent Hindu communities, still it never took an active part or dominant role in the cultural evolution of the country. Traditional Indian literature, perhaps one of the richest and most voluminous literary heritages in the world, is mostly religious in character. Christianity can never afford to keep herself aloof from such a rich tradition. She has to profit from its past and also to contribute her share to its future. Some of the missionaries of the 18th and 19th centuries realized the importance of Indian languages for their preaching and did some very important

pioneer work, especially in writing the grammar. But those were rare exceptions.

Our faith has to provide a vision for involvement in education. Faith has two aspects. It is a commitment for surrender to God who reaches out to us in the act of revelation. It is also a world-view based on the content or revelation. This latter aspect is what provides a faith-vision of education. This vision then reinforces our commitment to God as it makes education an integral part of the commitment. This faith vision gives us a new dynamism for our work as educators by making this work an expression of our faith.

Education is also essential for the proclamation of the Good News. To proclaim is to communicate. Apart from the appealing example of one's own life, all communication, whether spoken or in writing, in images or in symbolic gestures, is an art nurtured by education. Furthermore, a message originates in a definite culture and is proclaimed both in the culture of origin as well as in different other cultures. Proclamation calls for inculturation and appreciation of cultures different from one's own. It is education that can build such a cultural bridge.

The acquisition of knowledge and skills and the building up of personality and character that take place in schools will lead to the renewal of the universe and its integration under Christ as Head, giving a final restoration, the restructuring of a new society and the emergence of a healthy, beneficial and supportive environment, all of which are the definitive and hoped-for coming of God's Kingdom.

Blessed Chavara was a man, who one hundred years before the independence of India integrated his faith

dimension with the cultural heritage of Kerala and acted according to the needs of his time to ensure the equality of all irrespective of cast, creed or sex. At a time when the vast majority of the people in Kerala were excluded from access to any kind of education, he emphasized the need of having a Catholic Sanskrit School, where children from all religions were admitted. Further by giving directives that schools be attached to all Catholic Churches and Monasteries in Kerala, he made education an integral part of his commitment to the Christian faith.

2. The CMI and the Educational Apostolate

The CMI Congregation, a religious institute in the Catholic Churches, had its origin in Kerala in 1831, from the pioneering spirit of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara (1805-'71) and his companions. Blessed Chavara was a great seer of the 19th century who reformed and renovated every aspect of life in society. If today Kerala is the most literate and educated state in India, Blessed Chavara was a moving spirit behind this development. It is with his inspiration and vision that the CMI Congregation has established educational institutions since 1846.

In tune with the spirit of its founder, the Congregation of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI), the first indigenous Religious Congregation in India, is today running 287 educational institutions in this country from Kanyakumari in the South to Poonch of Jammu & Kashmir in the North. Among these various educational institutions there are university colleges, technical institutions, high schools, and other schools of various lower levels, nursing schools and teacher training institutions. Again at the beginning of this 21st century the Congregation is stepping into the field of

engineering colleges, medical colleges and a Catholic University. In short, today the CMI Education Agency has a network of educational institutions all over India. At present the CMI Congregation is generally accepted as a powerful educational agency, at least in South India.

3. The Christian Educational Apostolate in India

By giving directives that schools be attached to all Catholic Churches and Monasteries in Kerala, Blessed Chavara was making education an integral part of our Christian faith. Today the record of educational institutions run by Christian missionaries in India, in general, is more than 40 times than that of the institutions run by the CMI Congregation. Thus there is hardly any need here to stress the massive involvement of the Church in Indian education. With nearly ten thousand institutions ranging from the elementary to the university, and with one quarter of her priests, 70% of her brothers and 40% her nuns engaged full-time in this task, it is true to say that in no other country of the world has the Church committed such a large proportion of her human and material resources to the task of education.

Another fact that needs to be stressed is the massive increase in Catholic involvement in education since the independence of the country in 1947. The number of Catholic Colleges and schools has more than doubled in number. The number of religious personnel engaged in these institutions has, of course, gone up proportionally. It is to be noted that more than 60 percent of the personnel engaged in the task of Christian education are religious men and women from the state of Kerala.

In the last fifty years, however, and chiefly during the post-Vatican Council era, a new view of Catholic education has gained ground together with a new theological understanding of the role of the Church in the modern world. The church now views herself not merely as the guardian of faith and morals and the teacher of the gospel to humanity, but also as the servant of the world.

Catholic schools and colleges eventually turned out to be the main source of encouragement to their students in arts, games, and sports. As in the case of academic facilities, Catholic educational institutions are provided with the necessary physical facilities for cultural programmes for sports and games. The proficiency of Catholic educational institutions in the field of sports at school and college levels is today an accepted fact.

It is true that in the field of athletics and sports we have very few Catholic boys and girls who are outstanding or have reached national international fame. This is not because sufficient emphasis has not been placed on this important aspect of the Catholic students' career, and potential Catholic candidates are not being encouraged to bring their talents into full play, but mainly because a Christian institution in India is not merely an institution only for Christian students. In fact the majority of the students and the faculty of a Christian institution are not Christians.

Catholic schools and colleges are also the main source of encouragement to their students in the field of arts. Today many of our Catholic educational institutions are places where students are trained in music, dance, drama, painting, poetry writing and other items of fine arts. This is evident from the

fact that the performance of our educational institutions in the schools and university youth festivals is outstanding.

The contribution of the Catholic Church in the field of Indian art and culture is not limited to educational institutions alone. For the cultural development of the people in India, the Catholic Church has initiated several Cultural Academies and centres in the country. Kala Bhavan at Kochi, Chavara Cultural Centres at Ernakulam and Calicut, Darsna Cultural Centre at Kottayam, Upasana at Thodupuzha, Divyodaya at Coimbatore, Navachetana at Bhopal are few among them.

4. An Indian Scenario

Formerly in India education was accessible only to a few and the masses were excluded. But by the end of the 20th century there was an enormous expansion in the number of educational institutions in India. During the period after independence the number of the educational institutions has increased from 2.3 lakhs to 7.6 lakhs. Enrolment has increased at an over all rate of 9.7% per annum. In the 50's and 60's the growth of enrollment was 12.4 and 13.4 respectively. But an equal growth is not seen in the quality of education. Even then rural areas are touched only marginally. Disparity in the quality of education is clearly visible. The better schools are accessible only to the socio-economic elite group. Even in such schools the teaching method is still primitive, the syllabus continues to be substandard. In certain states in India the educational policy is not in the interest of the students. Education often becomes an enormous wastage of resources, which no other nation can afford.

Our classrooms always reflect the face of our society. Everyday we hear that mis-behaviour is being rewarded, that

criminals are being empowered in our society. We experience a total erosion of values in an around us and there is a real conflict between values that are taught and practiced. Poverty, illiteracy, under-development, unemployment, oppression of the poor, linguistic pluralism, cultural pluralism, religious pluralism are all in the fray. Children come to the classrooms from the society in which we are. All this makes us think whether good education is possible in our country. This question becomes more serious when we see how the New World trend of knowledge explosion, electric media of information, technological sophistication, urbanization etc. enters into the classroom with its racial strife, economic and cultural domination, threats of peace and denial of human rights.

The Indian socio-cultural-religious pluralism demands an education committed to social justice and an education which prepares the young generation for healthy dialogue with other fellow men. All this requires that the Indian Catholic educational institutions define their own specific Catholic identity.

Catholic educational institutions form an integral part of the Indian system of education. But in the present scenario our institutions are faced, more than even before, with the challenge of providing educational leadership. It is not enough for them to be islands of excellence, but by inserting themselves into the main stream, they to become agents of educational change to improve drastically the quality of flow of the stream.

Our Catholic Schools and colleges are highly esteemed for academic excellence, extra-curricular activities and the all-round formation given. Because of their reputation, many of

our institutions attract students from the wealthier and more affluent sections of the society.

5. A Search for Modalities

The fears and threats of the changing world trend and the demands of our society, lead our people often to experiment with the new generation in the field of education. Some times it crosses the limit of the freedom, parents should have in deciding what kind of education their children should get. It is true that each country should develop its own modality and there is not a single type in this world that can be imitated. Each country has its own aspirations, its own needs depending on the culture and problems specific to that country. But there are pockets of inspiration evolved in various parts of the globe. New Zealand in reading, the Netherlands in mathematics and foreign languages. Japan in science, Germany in high-school education and teacher training, Sweden in adult education, America in postgraduate studies and Italy in elementary school. If Italy has found a way to teach its children in elementary school, surely we can benefit from it. Like-wise Germany's excellent teacher training programmes should afford valuable information to our teacher training institutions.

After World War II, Japan, Germany and the Netherlands rebuilt their school systems as they rebuilt their societies. Today, students in those countries lead the world in advanced mathematics, science and other technical subjects. If the state of Andhra Pradesh can create the best quality of computer programmers for the world today, we too can accomplish much, if we have the will. Of course even the most successful schools have their shortcomings.

6. The world Tend Today

What happens in some part of the world affects all parts of it today. As we move through the 21st century, the world will enter more and more into the classroom. positive and negative world trends, to be faced by the Catholic Schools and Colleges can be summed us as: knowledge explosion, electronic media of information diffusion, technological and bioengineering sophistication, urbanization, racial strife, economic and cultural domination, threats of peace, poverty of the millions, injustice and denial of human rights, victimization for political views, indifference towards religion.

Knowledge is increasing with an accelerating pace. Today it is no longer a matter of knowing new facts and figures but of learning how and where to find them through a network of information services. The electronic media of communication and the communication satellites make simultaneous transmission possible so that every part of the globe can watch the events actually occurring in any part of it. Also there is untold human suffering caused by communal strife, displacement of whole peoples from their homelands, and the cruel oppression of races just because of the colour of their skin. religion is fast becoming a great divider. All these are notable world trends affecting the whole world and posing a challenge to classrooms and campuses.

7. A Vision for the 21st Century Catholic Education

What makes a school successful? Spending huge sums of money on schools is not necessarily the answer. Experts say it is the way the money is spent that matters. In certain states in India, the state government is spending a huge share of income to maintain its schools systems. But often

government schools come out with shameful performance. Whereas certain private schools with less expediter have a better performance.

A school must mainly concentrate on the fact that all children are different. It should also have in mind that our Indian scenario is different from other countries. Where there is illiteracy our schools should stand for enlightenment. Our poverty should lead us to think of an education for life. Our education should job oriented, because of so much unemployment. It should stand for development where there is under-development. Where there is oppression ours should be an education for justice. As long as we have linguistic, cultural and religious pluralism we should have educate for integration.

Our educators should energetically and sincerely, strive to see that the students coming out of our schools are spiritually deep, psychologically sound and practically efficient. We should produce for our country, leaders who are intellectually competent, spiritually mature, morally upright, psychologically integrated, physically healthy, and socially acceptable; who will champion the cause of justice, love, truth and peace and who are open to further growth. We should aspire towards creating a just human society where the dignity of the human person is respected, where unjust social structures are challenged, where our cultural heritage of ahimsa, religious harmony and national integration is upheld, and where the poor and the marginalized are specially taken care of.

Even though our Catholic educational institutions are highly esteemed, the teaching method and mode of instruction is still primitive. Often the educational policy itself is directed

to the interest of the teachers rather than that of the students. The case of government institutions is far more deplorable. Our state average of pass in public examinations is not above 50%. The enormous sum of money and energy spent in the educational system becomes a waste if it is to allow half the students to fail in the examination. This mass failure is disheartening but it seems to be an accepted norm. we cannot believe that these students are all dull.

Our politicians show the face of our society. We see that misbehaviour is rewarded with political power and criminals are often getting this reward. But the dignity of democracy is the freedom we get to educate our children in the way we like, in the way we like them to grow.

A Catholic educational institution in India has to provide sound education, fully Christian and genuinely Indian. Soundly educative implies and integral formation in a community atmosphere. Fully Christian refers to the value system, to faith and campus ministry. Genuinely Indian includes culture and true national development. Christian faith, values and ministry and relevance to the country are the great principles of any Catholic educational institution in the world. Our institutions in India should give authentic expression to these principles.

In the teaching - learning process, the Catholic institution is animated by the spirit of renewal, of "making all things new." It keeps constantly updating the content of its teaching and renewing its method of learning. The learning process involves and develops the whole human being so that the student grows "both in body and in wisdom, gaining favour with God and men." As far as knowledge is concerned, it is growing at an accelerating rate, so that

memory as a learning skill is fast becoming less important than the skills of discovering, evaluating, relating and applying different kinds and sources of knowledge. This leads to wisdom, which is the power of critical discernment and creative thinking. Wisdom implies a mature personality. But maturity means more than intellectual discernment. It includes emotional maturity and a sensitivity of feeling. An all-round development, besides the intellectual, physical and emotional, includes also communication skills.

However, our schools and colleges can fall and have fallen into the temptation of over-emphasizing the so-called academic excellence which in practice means nothing more than high percentages of passes and first classes secured in public exams. Catholic institutions, while taking pains to prepare students for these exams, should never lose sight of its wider objective of an all-round human excellence.

An essential characteristic of a Catholic school/college is its value system. Today there seems to be a serious crisis of values due to rapid changes in society. Students, teachers, lay people and even priests and religious fall victims to the onslaught of the distorted value system of society. A continued battle needs to be waged against the values, which are diametrically opposed to those of Jesus Christ. Value education should form part of the teaching of all disciplines.

Among the highest values is responsible freedom. Right conduct has to flow from an inner self-discipline from one's own enlightened judgment and power of will, rather than from external imposition, fear of punishment or lure of rewards. Further Gospel values should figure prominently in the public image of a Catholic institution particularly by its taking of a spirited and principled stand as a school/college

on public issues. Witness to the values of Christ in the classroom, in the management, in the conduct of the members of the institution and in the public image is an essential part of our mission.

Catholic institutions in India are surrounded by other Indian cultures. These Indian cultures have a strong religious dimension. A dialogue is essential and there is no better place for such a dialogue than the Catholic school or college. It is in the atmosphere of such a dialogue that the Christian members of the educational community will be enabled to present Jesus Christ as a model human being to all. Christ was a model student as well as a model teacher.

Many Catholic schools and colleges are accused of being pockets of western culture. It is for our institutions, given the universal outlook of Christianity, to change this accusation into praise by promoting an appreciation of national culture, an Indian inculturation of the Christian faith and an evangelization of indigenous culture. Catholic educational institutions in India today cannot dissociate themselves from the cultural and religious reality in their environment. It is now being insisted that they cannot remain Catholic and dissociate themselves from the socio-economic reality, particularly from issues of justice.

Our Catholic educational institutions should primarily be focused on the youth of today. A clear understanding of today's youth is necessary for this. Now we have a generation of children free with their parents, with society and at home; children of equality with their parents and elders. Today they have various sources of knowledge and information other than the classrooms and in several fields they are more

informed than we are. They have a better sense of justice and will never tolerate injustice or partiality.

Campus ministry is of vital importance to the Church, society and the campus itself. It will bring the faithful on the campus to shed the light of the Gospel on the academic world. The spiritual life on the campus will be renewed so that it becomes a force enabling the academic community to live up to its own ideals. More than anything else, it will give a Catholic identity to Catholic schools.

Conclusion

Approximately one hundred and sixty years ago Blessed Chavara had a great vision on education in India. He acted with extraordinary courage to meet the challenges of his time. While founding a religious congregation - The Carmelites of Mary Immaculate - and insisting on starting schools attached to every Catholic Church he was perpetuating his vision to the end of the world, and was entrusting to the Catholic Church in India the responsibility of building it up to meet the needs of the time. Through an integral person-oriented education the Church has to lay a solid foundation for a life-long process of growth in every human being towards a fully human and fully mature individual.

A Catholic educational institution in India should be fully Christian fostering the transcendental dimension of the human being. Thus it should foster the relationship with God in faith and the promotion of a sound value system. It should support the younger generation in its continuous struggle against the forces of evil. Together with the campus ministry, faith the values a Catholic school should be a vibrant

institution. It should be Indian in outlook fostering appreciation for Indian cultures and at the same time making national development the prime objective of its educational thrust: a development that transforms the prevailing social conditions, making justice prevailing and enabling all people to live in keeping with their human dignity and with mutual respect.

It is the vision of Blessed Chavara that a Catholic educational institution in India should prove to be not just a guide but an inspiration and a challenge to other schools and colleges in India, to their staff, students and management. By fulfilling their mission as Catholic educational institutions, they will achieve a universal presence of the Christian mind in the whole enterprise of advancing higher culture and their students will become men and women truly outstanding in learning, ready to shoulder society's heavier burdens and witness the faith to the world.

The Ecclesial Dimension in Chavara's Endeavours

THOMAS PANTHAPLACKAL, CMI

1. A Visionary in the Field

The greatest contribution of the church to the modern world can be found in the Decrees of Vatican II, giving valuable directives to every individual for relating his or her life with God, with the religion one believes in, and with members of the world community at large, with whom one has to interact. History has recorded that Blessed Chavara, a man of God, and a prophet of his time, even 125 years before Vatican II, had carved in niche in the temple of flame, because of his vision, by dedicating his life to the cause of the Church and whatever he had practiced, was enunciated in the decrees of Vatican II, later. The council Decrees testify to the fact that the one spirit that guides the Church illumines the face of the Church through the revealed truths understood more clearly against the signs of the times. Bl. Chavara, guided by the same spirit, was able to understand and to respond more to the revelation in the context of his times. His sensitivity to the actual plight of his ecclesial community, his reactions and responses to improve the situation and the recorded results as testified by his contemporaries through much light on his dynamic personality and ecclesial vision. In reviving the life of the particular Church to which he belonged, his efforts were

comprehensively extended to all sections of the Church, the clergy, the laity, the religious, and society at large.

2. The Church as Mother

In the letter of advice to the sisters of his newly founded Congregation, he wrote: "God is like a Mother who nourishes the child with her milk, waking him up from sleep although the child itself cannot express its needs in words."¹

Seeing God, as a mother figure Bl. Chavara looked at the Church as a mother with love and reverence. Fr. Leopold Beccaro, his spiritual Director and his first biographer says: "He was solicitous for propagating the truth and light of the Church on the whole earth. He was sad to the point of crying when he heard about persecutions and desired to see the triumph of the Church."²

This ecclesial vision prompted him to love Pope with his whole heart. His devotion to the Holy Father and the Church was explicitly seen when he sent a sum of Rs. 32,000, a very large sum for Kerala at that time, which he collected from the faithful, to the Holy Father for the expenses of Vatican Council I of 1870.³

The Administrative Set-up of the Church affects its Spirituality. Bl. Chavara realized that the greatest catastrophe of the Kerala Church in its spiritual life was the lack of spiritual leaders, especially bishops of its own land and rite. He believed that obedience is essential to attaining sanctity and a half-hearted submission will not take us anywhere near genuine holiness. In many cases the faithful obeyed the foreign authorities for namesake but resisted in their heart. In such a situation many welcomed the old order of control from

the Persian Church in India as before the 16th century, than the present rule. So the priests and people of Kerala looked for an opportunity to get a bishop of their own with a 'Thomistic Affinity', from Baghdad. That is why Bl. Chavara pointed out:

As the magnetic needle always points towards the North, the brethren of my own flesh and blood, called the 'Nazaranis of Malankara' had their heart set, from the earliest times, on getting Syrian bishops. This had often endangered their spiritual life and led them to split from the Communion of the Holy Church. Even today, any close observer can perceive, that the holy way of life and exemplary conduct as not yet taken root in Malabar.⁴

This is also the root cause to which he attributes the reason for not having a canonized saint in an Apostolic Church like the Syro-Malabar Church.⁵

Sensitive to this situation, Bl. Chavara utilized every occasion that offered itself to demand or request for a bishop of the land and rite. In almost all letters he wrote to Rome during the turbulent period of the Roccisian Schism, he used to specially mention this matter. His continued requests for a bishop of the land or at least one who knew the Syriac language were motivated by his sincere desire to eliminate dissension and discord among the people, to protect their faith, to keep them away from Schism by their dependence on Baghdad.

The letter he sent to cardinal Alexander Bernaba, prefect of the Congregation for the Propagation of faith, in 1869, paved the way for the appointment of a bishop of their own for the Syro-Malabar Christians later in 1887, eighteen years after his death, not a very long period for Rome to act.

The main part of the letter reads as follows, giving reasonable suggestions:

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, and gradually their relationship with Babylon will end.

This would be very opportune and useful. There are also many non-Catholics in our midst, who are our own kith and kin, now known as Jacobites. The above solution will help them renounce the schism and return to the unity of the Catholic fold.⁶

From the 16th century onwards the Church administration was fully controlled by 'Propaganda' and 'Padroado' through the Latin Bishop.⁷ They did not pay much attention to understand the Syrian Rite of Malabar or its age-old customs and traditions. The Syrian Christians were waiting for a change in the situation. In 1861, news spread that a Bishop of their own rite had come from Babylon, to liberate them from the Latin rule. The people thronged around the new bishop, Thomas Roccas, paying allegiance to him⁸ of the 155 Syrian churches then existing, 86 unconditionally accepted Roccas, 30 gave him partial recognition and the other few were wavering in their decision.⁹ But Roccas was neither posted as a bishop of Malabar nor was the commission he held from the Patriarch given with the sanction of the Holy See.¹⁰

The only alternative to prevent the dangerous situation created by the arrival of Roccas was to give a legitimate Syrian bishop to the Malabarians. But the Latin Bishop was not willing to take such a drastic step. He appointed Fr. Chavara

as Vicar General of the Syro-Malabar Church, to control the church and to stop the spread of the schism. When Bl. Chavara become the Vicar General, he played his role with great sagacity, deep spirituality, perfect Christian charity, and forgiveness and inspiring leadership.

His ardent desire to bring back the separated brethren into the unity of the Church is very clear from the letter addressed to the Jacobite bishops to participate in the Vatican Council I of 1870. His ecumenical mind is also exposed here.¹¹

Bl. Chavara's Vision for a particular Church to have its own administrative set-up to keep up its identity, to promote unity and growth and to deepen its spirituality, corresponded very much with the principles the II Vatican Council, laid down a century later.

By raising Bl. Chavara to the altars of the Church, Pope John Paul II, recalled with love and gratitude all the efforts of Chavara for the Church, ...But no apostolic cause was dearer to his heart of this great man of faith than that of the unity and harmony within 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 Peter and the Universal Church... With great generosity he collaborated with others, especially brother priests and religious in the work of salvation.¹²

3. Liturgical Life, the Source of Spiritual Life

It was Bl. Chavara's conviction that Christian life begins, grows and reaches its perfection through the liturgical life of the Church.

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of Vatican Council II says: It is through the liturgy, especially, that the faithful are enabled to express in their lives and manifest to others the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church.

As a man deeply involved in the spiritual life of his people, he could identify the cause of their spiritual barrenness. Genuine liturgical life, he realized, could revive the spiritual susceptibilities of the people. Accordingly he undertook the great task of re-structuring the Mass, the Divine Office and all other aspects of the Liturgical life of the people.

At the time of Bl. Chavara, priests in different places were following different rubrics in celebrating Holy Mass and there was no uniformity. He prepared the order of the Mass with great care and printed it at Mannanam in 1868, under the title 'Tukkasa' (order). And wherever necessary, he did not hesitate to adopt the salient rituals from other rites, in keeping with spiritual growth of the people. When he wrote to the Holy See for the approval of the Holy Saturday ritual, it is evident what his intention was:

We are sending along with this letter, the liturgy for Holy Saturday, translated from the Latin ritual, for your approval. In the Syrian rite there are no special liturgical services for Holy Saturday. Our Churches remain closed on that day like the Jewish Synagogue.¹³

He also realized that the spiritual expression of the individual Church is identified by the prayers and functions of the liturgy. So he requested the Holy See to add the traditional readings, which are not found in the present liturgy. ...Besides, the custom of reading a few verses commencing with 'In the beginning was the Word...' from St.

John's Gospel at the close of the Holy Mass, is not in Vogue now... we pray that these requests may be granted as early as possible to promote our spiritual progress.¹⁴

In the same letter he mentions that: "the elderly members of the congregation, in particular are anxiously waiting to see the approved book of the Divine office."¹⁵ Which was prepared by himself from different sources of the Malabar Church.¹⁶ Here again we notice his honesty to his own Rite, adherence to the Holy See, and concern for the spiritual progress of others.

The presence of Christ in the Eucharist is the basic belief of every Catholic. So he introduced the 40 hours adoration in the Church of Malabar for the spiritual growth of the people.¹⁷ In introducing all this he held on to the basic principle of Jesus that 'the Sabbath is for the man and not man for the Sabbath'. The only intention was the good of the people and to preserve the unity of the Church. Chavara the great devotee of the Blessed Sacrament, exhorted that the family, at least in turn, should participate in the Divine Liturgy every day.¹⁸

In the days of Bl. Chavara, the practice of proclaiming the Word of God during the Divine Liturgy was not in practice. It was Bl. Chavara and his confreres who introduced this practice in the Church by giving proper importance to the Word of God. Bl. Chavara's contemporary, Father Kuriakose Eliseus says: "By his homilies and counseling on Sundays and feast days everywhere people were moved the shed their spiritual blindness and to embrace divine enlightenment."¹⁹

It was as if the Vatican Council II, was paraphrasing his conviction when it said. The people of God is formed into

one in the first place by the word of the living God, which is quite rightly sought from the mouth of priests.²⁰

Besides the above, he had been instrumental in restructuring and compiling the prayers and the Office of the dead, other sacramental and pious practices. For all these his first attempt was always to trace out the tradition from his own rite and then only he turned to the other rites, which could be adapted to his own. The final argument for adaptation was always the spiritual good of the people, in conformity with the mind of the Holy See.

4. Priest, the Pulse of the Church

Vatican Council II says, "By sacred ordination and by the mission they receive from their Bishops, priests are promoted to the service of Christ, the teacher, the priest, and the King. They share in 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."²¹

The young cleric, Chavara, was divinely enlightened to understand as Fr. Leopold, his spiritual director writes: "That an uneducated priest is not only inefficient to do anything worthwhile in his pastoral work, but might even be detrimental to the salvation of souls. Therefore, after receiving tonsure, he (Bl. Chavara) devoted himself all the more earnestly to his studies so that he might become a knowledgeable minister of God."²²

Motivated by such high principles already during the formation period, as a priest, he wanted to bring in a spiritual renewal for the whole Church of Malabar. It was surely his life vision.

In his attempt to bring in the proposed spiritual renewal of the Church, the first thing that struck Fr. Chavara was a well-conducted seminary. He was convinced of the principle, "Qualis Sacerdos, talis populus." Thus in 1833, i.e., two years after the foundation stone was laid for the monastery, the seminary was started at Mannanam.²³ It also became the first-organized seminary for the Syro-Malabar Church, which started with two members but later had to accommodate between 100 and 150 students at a time.

Monsignor Bernardin, the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly, was so much impressed with the formation of the priest that came out from the seminary, that he ordered later, that such seminaries be started attached to all CMI monasteries. Thus in the course of years seminaries were started at Vazhakulam in 1866, at Elthuruth in 1868, and the Pulinkunnu in 1872. Bishop Bernardin also suppressed all other centers of formation for the priesthood, especially the parochial seminaries and joined them to Mannanam. It was also notable that most of the priests out of the Mannanam seminary withstood against the great blow of the schism of 1861.

Envisaging and drafting a circular to the parish priests and other benefactors, calling their attention for a major seminary, in 1850, Bl. Chavara anticipated what Vatican Council II, later said on priestly formation the main part of the circular is as follows:

In the first part of the seminary scholars are to be appointed to teach the languages – Malayalam, Tamil, Latin, Syriac, etc. After completing it, those students who feel themselves called by God to study for priesthood, shall be taught there, sacred science and ordained priests in the course of time.²⁴

Even Bl. Chavara was ready to sacrifice, for the great love of the Church, his long entertained desire and to discontinue the construction work begun for a convent at Puthenpaly, which was to become the mother house of the first indigenous congregation for women, and to build a seminary instead, when it was found more urgently needed than a convent in order to stop the fast spreading schism and its evil consequences. Bl. Chavara himself writes about this:

That is, because of the reasons written above, the work begun for a large enclosure for a convent had to be discontinued and it was converted into a seminary, as it was found that priests were more necessary than the sisters.²⁵

The Archbishop gave Bl. Chavara the title '*Malpan*' (equivalent to the modern degree of doctorate in Sacred Science) and appointed him as the examiner for all the priests of the Syro-Malabar Rite in the apostolic vicariate.

Bl. Chavara, who was a part-time teacher in the parochial seminary at Pallipuram from 1829, was the main professor at the seminary at Mannanam till 1864. It was his great conviction that priests are the pulse of the Church and so he spent all his life after his ordination for the priestly formation. He realized that a priest is the mediator between God and men. He admonished the priests to sanctify the world by their prayers and the holy sacrifices at the altar.

5. The Religious Community, An Integral Part in the Integral Growth of the Church

It is historical fact that religious institutes have substantially contributed to the growth of the Church. The faithful have been led to holiness of life by the presence, prayers and apostolic activities of religious. So also in the

service of the Word of God, especially in evangelization, the contribution of consecrated souls has always been immense.

Bl. Chavara together with the venerable priests Palackal and Porukara started the first indigenous Religious Congregation. He wanted to combine the Eastern prophetic and Indian ideal. When he looked at the Indian Sanyasis, he understood from the Buddhists that the monastery should be a community of people whose holiness penetrated and changed the hearts of the people around. According to Indian tradition the dwelling place of the sage or Yogi is a place of peace and God experience. From the religious missionaries of the West, he also realized the good the Christian religious community accomplished for the growth of the Church and salvation of souls.

This awareness made Chavara and others think of a spiritual transformation to renew the Church and society with a collective force. Spiritual transformation and the consequent participation in the ultimate reality is only possible with a *darsana* (vision) according to the Indian mind. The attainment of such a *darsana* is the result of *tapas* (austerity) and *nishkama-karama*, action without a selfish motive useful. Chavara and the first fathers started religious life forming a *darsana veedu* (house of vision) in the Malabar Church. Chavara writes in the first page of the Chronicle of the Motherhouse about the motive of starting religious life in Kerala:

Seeing that considerable good had not been done in Kerala due to the absence of a *tapas bhavan* (house of penance) even for the priests, he desired to start a *darsana veedu* at least for priests.²⁶

It was here that the idea for a religious life in community sprang up with a great vision for the good of the

Church. Chavara integrated Eastern and Indian monastic principles of prayer, solitude, silence, austerities, reading and meditating on the Word of God. It was a life centred around the Eucharistic Lord and the liturgical celebrations.

That Bl. Chavara's vision of a religious community in the Church was also a type and replica of the early Christian community of Apostolic times, is clear from his own words. He wrote about the life of the new religious life on 18th June, 1840.

As there existed a deep spiritual brotherhood among them, and because they wanted to have fellowship also in the things of the body similar to spiritual fellowship, they decided to put together all their material earnings and the fruits thereof belonging to them, following the example showed by St. Peter.²⁷

It is also interesting to note that the first religious house at Mannanam, on a hillock was named '*Bes Raumma*' which in Syriac means 'House above' or 'heavens'. In choosing of a high place they thought that geographically also it should remain a 'House above'- a *darsana veedu* as a lighthouse, easily approachable to all people. And they always tried to select sites to start new houses with the same motive. Thus all the efforts of Bl. Chavara in founding and fostering two religious congregations in the Indian culture were with the same unheard of ideals, which the Vatican Council II propounded a century later.

6. Christian Family as the Image of Heaven

It is in the salvific and liberating fear of God and by the unending bond of love and devotion towards God and men that Chavara sees the foundation of a Christian family. From

his childhood experience in his own home and from his impeccable devotion towards the Holy Family, he visualized the family as an image of heaven, an abode of affection, peace, charity and order on earth. Out of this experience he derives a definition for a Christian family: "A good Christian family is the image of heaven, where persons are living together, by the bond of blood and affection, duly respecting and obeying their parents, and walking peacefully before the Lord and people, which ensures their salvation, according to each one's state of life."²⁸

As in the family of God in Trinity, the members of the family are bound by the bonds of love. And as the Trinity of Persons fulfill their mission by respecting each other, the members of the family, by living together and respecting each other, ensure their salvation and fulfill their mission in this sense a Christian family, as Bl. Chavara thinks, in an image of heaven, which is the family of God on earth.

In order to make the Christian family, a family of God immediately after the community life was started in Mannanam, Chavara and others laid the main stress on the spiritual renewal of the Church of Kerala, and proposed the preaching of retreats in the parishes as their first external activity.

When Bl. Chavara became the Vicar General, he divided all the Syrian churches into four districts, each being entrusted to one of the fathers of the congregation as deputies of the Vicar Apostolic. They supervised schools, conducted retreats and catechism classes, settled disputes and quarrels in the parishes.

Realizing that his life was coming to a close, Bl. Chavara prepared an instruction manual for families in 1868, given in the form of an epistle, to the families of his own parish, as a 'Testament of Good Father'. It is a well-meditated, practical theology on the family with spiritual, moral, psychological and sociological characteristics, very valid even today. Here he covers all areas of life in the family from birth to death, where he explains the possible dangers to the family where affection, peace, justice, charity, and order are not maintained.

With an out-pouring of his heart, he addressed his relatives and other members of his parish giving them the instruction manual as a Patrimony, to preserve it in a box in the chapel of Kainakary and asked those who can copy it to do it and keep it in their home. All were also instructed to assemble in the chapel on the first Saturday of every month and read it. Nothing more could be expected from them to keep his memory alive.²⁹

In the book of Deuteronomy we can see almost a parallel presentation, where Moses entrusted the Book of Law to Israel for their faithful observance, just before his death (Deut. 31: 12, 13: 24-26).

All the endeavours of Chavara in renewing the families, which are the basic units of the society, are fraught with high Christian principles. Thus what was explained on families in the documents of Vatican Council II, especially in A. II, were, somehow, represented through the epistle of Chavara for families a century earlier.

7. The Role of Women in Church and Society

The institution of religious communities for women in the Church is one of the greatest contributions of the Catholic Church to the world for dedicated life and service.

In the 19th century social life of Kerala, women were expected to do house work and fulfill their duty as wife and mother. They had practically no voice either in the family or in the society. Women did not participate even in the retreats that were conducted in the Church for the people.

It was Bl. Chavara, the first one among the Christians of India who realized the need of empowering women for the social uplift of the families and for the dedicated service of the Church. It is in this context that Chavara's vision on women becomes novel, revolutionary and far ahead of his times.

There may be four reasons, which influenced Chavara's thinking of bringing woman to the forefront. 1) The influence of his own mother in his life. 2) His reverence towards St. Teresa of Jesus, who was the cause for the spiritual awakening of Carmelite Order, especially in prayer life, and in her initiative in the new foundations. 3) The contributions of the women congregations in Europe for the social uplift of the poor, and the spiritual and educational care of the women folk. 4) The felt need of educating the women of Kerala for the spiritual formation of families and society and to engage them in some kind of trade to support the welfare of the family, and thereby recognition and influence in the family.

After undergoing many crisis and difficulties, he finally succeeded in starting a religious house for women at Koonammavu in 1866 the intention of starting the

congregation for women was very clear from his own words: "...They (those who join) could themselves take care of their spiritual life, lead the other girls in a virtuous life, teaching them prayers and training them in certain handicrafts."³⁰

For him, a religious community life for women, was first of all, for self sanctification, then education for value formation, and thirdly to empower the women for social action.

In a society where property rights always remained with the male heir, Bl. Chavara dared to give his own share to his elder brother's only daughter to continue his family line, as his brother died and he himself wished to continue priestly life. Here Chavara was upholding a noble ideal that women too can continue the family line, an ideal that has not been fully assimilated by Kerala Society even today.

Thus empowering the women folk in society to renew and strengthen the Church and society was a revolutionary vision of Chavara far ahead of his time.

8. Social Action for the Integral development of the Person

The dignity of man, who is endowed with both body and soul, was the basis for all his social activities and humanitarian services. In this he looked at the intellectual, corporal, social and religious values of the person beyond the limits of caste, colour, and creed. With the support and co-operation of his religious band, he initiated schools at Mannanam and Arpookara, for the socially weaker section, Sanskrit school at Mannanam, to cope with the upper classes of the society, 'a school for a church' to have general education for all, a catholic press to keep up faith and morals in society,

Catechumanates for faith formation, and reunion movements to bring back the scattered. He took leadership in all these activities for the spiritual renewal and building up of the church and society.

9. Charity with an Eschatological Dimension

Bl. Chavara's zeal for souls, found an eschatological dimension, and so preparing souls for the everlasting communion with God, was his main interest. This interest was expressed differently when he started confraternities, a home of charity, and a poem to be sung in the houses of the bereaved. With these efforts, he also wanted to have the involvement of the faithful to work for the kingdom of God by participating in various apostolate. He reminded the people that "A day that was passed without doing something good for others never be counted in the book of life."³¹

10. Blessed Virgin Mary, A Model and Intercessor

Bl. Chavara could view everything only through the Church. Our onward journey towards the Father is through the Church, participating in the mystery of Christ in the Church. The Bl. Virgin Mary is the best model for us in our homeward journey. Marian devotion came next in his spiritual makeup. From the day he was offered to the protection of Mary by his mother at the Marian shrine of Vechoor, throughout his life he surrendered himself to her protection, according to the words of his mother, as she said to him at the shrine that hereafter the Bl. Virgin Mary is his mother.³²

Bl. Chavara faithfully followed all the teachings and dogmas proclaimed on Mary. A good part of his poetic work

Athmanuthampam, he devotes to speaking of the glories of Mary and of devotion to her, presenting all the teaching on her,³³ namely, her immaculate Conception,³⁴ as she is the Mother of God and of the Church³⁵, pre-eminent member of the Church,³⁶ her place in the mystery of the Church.³⁷ Her glorious assumption,³⁸ first model in the creation.³⁹ It is interesting to note that Chavara presents in his writing, Mary obedient to St. Peter, in order to show the supremacy of the Pope, and to show that Bl. Virgin Mary is also a member of the Church in the New Order of membership in Christ and Church.⁴⁰ As co-redemptrix,⁴¹ Mary is the best intercessor for us. This consciousness made Chavara devote himself fully to Mary. It is due to his devotion to Mary that placed his congregation, when founded, under her name and entrusted all the members to her special care. Fr. Leopold wrote on Chavara's Marian devotion:

His devotion to the Bl. Virgin Mary was characterized by a genuine filial love. He spoke eloquently of her glories to others and tried to inculcate in them devotion to her. Very often when the thought of death came to his mind, he would recall the kindness and mercy of the Bl. Virgin, whom he used to call his "Mother" to overcome the terrible fears and temptations associated with the fateful moment.⁴²

11. Triple Roots in Bl. Chavara's Spirituality

The life of a person in the Church is manifested in a spirituality centered around one's own culture and rooted in the Eastern or Western tradition of the Church. When we analyse the life and spirituality of Bl. Chavara, it is very clear that his spirituality is a combination of the Indian, Eastern (Syrian/Oriental), and Carmelite.

11. 1. The Indian Influence

Participation in the ultimate reality and the aim of spiritual transformation of human existence have guided most Indian philosophy and religious thought. This participation and spiritual transformation is only possible with a 'darsana' or profound vision according to the Indian mind, and the attainment of this 'darsana' is through, 'tapas' and 'nishkama-karma.'

India had an organized monastic system of withdrawing from the world, from the ancient times in order to attain 'darsana'. There the monks were not fully withdrawn from the world into the monasteries but also carried out useful and charitable works in building up the society.

Rooted in these age-old traditions of India Bl. Chavara and the founding fathers took a life style of contemplation leading to the apostolate, an Indian asceticism adorned by Christian spirituality.

The Bhagavad Gita, suggests three possible routes to liberation or salvation one is '*jnanayoga*' (discipline or exercise of wisdom or knowledge), the way of wisdom based on an understanding of the ancient texts and teaching handed down by 'Gurus.' Another is '*karma yoga*' (discipline or exercise of works), the way of action in which a person does what is right without fear of consequences or expectation of reward. Such disinterested action is known as '*nishkama karma*'. The third route to salvation is '*bhakti yoga*' (discipline or exercise of love and devotion), or loving devotion to a personal god. This in the end is presented as the most effective means of spiritual progress.

Bl. Chavara, a man of God, who strained every nerve to build a community for God, also followed these three routes, '*jnana yoga*', '*karma yoga*', and '*bhaktiyoga*', in liberating himself and others for God. '*Darsana*', '*Tapas*', '*Rshi*', *Guru*, *Sannyasa*, etc., are some of the key words in Indian spirituality. The use of such terms in particular contexts also reveals that Chavara's spirituality and religious practices were rooted in the Indian soil.

11. 2. The Eastern influence

The Spirituality of Bl. Chavara is greatly influenced by the Syrian spirituality, which has some affinity to the Indian mind especially to the Malabar Church. In spite of its extreme asceticism, there is in the Syrian Church an evangelical tradition, which takes one very close to the Gospel itself. One never loses the sense that the Syrian Church grew up on the very soil of the Gospel and in all its life and thought kept very close to the Biblical tradition. The real basis of Syrian spirituality is not asceticism but the much more deeply Biblical concept of 'repentance.' Repentance accompanied by 'tears of compunction', is for the Syrian Church the very basis of monasticism and Christian life. They spoke of it as a 'second baptism.' While for the Buddhist it is the 'sorrow' of the world, and for the Hindu the illusory nature of reality which is the starting point for the renunciation of the world, for the Christian it is the awareness of sin: not merely of sins, but of the fundamental barrier of original sin which separates man from God, which can only be removed by repentance.⁴³

Bl. Chavara also built up a spirituality more deeply in the biblical concept of repentance. This is very clear from the two most important of his writings: the 'Lamentation of a repentant soul' and 'Colloquies in Meditations'. The

characteristic note throughout the 'Lamentations' and 'Meditations' is the continuous remembrance of the innumerable gifts received from God and the mercy of God upon the individual; the deep sorrow of his souls for not responding fully to the gifts of God, the ardent desire to love God to the best of his ability and the earnest prayer for God's grace. In the first two chapters he enumerates the many gifts he received from God and laments over the mistakes of his childhood. Then he speaks about the life and death of our Lord, each detail makes him think of the great mercy and goodness of God and this thought arouses in him deep sorrow for his ungratefulness.

The other pole of Syrian spirituality is 'Perpetual prayer.' Repentance with its baptism of tears needs 'purity of heart', and with this comes the descent of the Holy Spirit and the consequent state of 'Perpetual prayer'... it is a genuine mystical prayer, a 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.⁴⁴

The Desert Fathers, Origen, Ephrem, The Capadocian Fathers, Basil, Gregory, Nazianzen, Nyssaa and several others maintained that an abiding sorrow for our sins, a compunction of heart or *penthos*, was essential to any spirituality.

For Chavara, sin is the cause of division and separation while meditation or prayer is a process of love and union. He says: "God does not abide in a sinful heart."⁴⁵ He enters the oratory for meditation with a request for forgiveness of sins: "Repenting on my sins behold, I come into the presence of my Father in order to obtain forgiveness of my sins and peace of the soul."⁴⁶ So spirituality of him is a steadfast disposition of the heart, it is the discovery of God within the heart, where

God dwells as in a temple and an affective union with Him. It is the 'Prayer of the Heart' according to Eastern Spirituality.

Another important point of Chavara's convergence with the Syrian spirituality is his scripture-centred-spirituality. As for the Syrian Fathers, all his writings and messages are filled with biblical allusions or references. In his writings, even in the letters he wrote to his conferrers and sisters, we see many biblical references. Like the Syrian Fathers, he also, in his writings, does not often quote from the Bible but gives similar references or allusions.

Above all the Eastern spirituality is the appropriation and personalization of the Paschal mystery of Christ. It is a mystery that begins in God, manifested in the world, to be experienced by men and finally ends in God. It is a mystical experience. Liturgy is the celebration and re-enactment of the paschal mystery of Christ, through the liturgical celebration, sanctification of man and there by union with God is effected. Bl. Chavara in his liturgical life experienced the same.

11. 3. Carmelite Influence

The great devotion to the Mother of Carmel is a characteristic mark of the Carmelites. St. Theresa of Avila's desire to drink in deeply the refreshing experience of God's personal loving-kindness in prayer is the fundamental desire of all Carmelites.

Bl. Chavara's great devotion to St. Theresa of Avila and St. Joseph, and the training he and the first fathers had from the contemplative Carmelite Order in the beginning, surely have helped them to progress their Carmelite way of prayer life.

That he learned the ways of prayer from Theresa of Avila is evident from his mystical work, *Dhyanasallapangal*, where he speaks 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 by 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.⁴⁷

Bl. Chavara was the new prophet Elijah. In his action oriented contemplative life, he took prophet Elijah as a great model and inspirer, attaching his name to his own. As the Elijah of the old who, burned with zeal for God in the cave of Mount Carmel, so the new Elijah burning with zeal for God spent hours before the Eucharistic Lord in the monastery chapel of *Bes Raumma* at Mannanam. Both of them were not lost in contemplation but came out to fight against the enemies of the Lord. Prophet Elijah fought against Baal, the enemy of the people of God, Israel (1 King. 19: 9-18), and Bl. Chavara, against the schism of Bishop Roccas and the devil of disunity, the enemies of the Church of Malabar.

Divine providence in history had led Bl. Chavara to follow the characteristics of the reformed Carmelite in his life pattern as a contemplative. But his active life and spirituality was characterized mainly by the preaching and teaching apostolate of St. Dominic and from the Indian spiritual tradition and monastic context empowered by Eastern Biblical heritage.

Thus Bl. Chavara's life and spirituality were characterized by the Triple Roots, Indian, Eastern and Carmelite. It is an amalgamation of different visions, ways of

life, cultures, prayer forms and traditions. It is also a combination of the East and the West. His life reflects his faith celebration in contemplation and action from a universality of outlook, as the Church is universal. The spiritual charism of Chavara has two roots in his filial devotion to, and trust in the Holy Family, especially in the Immaculate Mother of Carmel and the Holy Catholic Church.

Conclusion

In the history and life of the Church we see that there were men like Saints Benedict, Dominic, Francis of Assisi, Ignatius of Loyola, Francis Sales, Don Bosco, Vincent De Paul and women like: St. Claire, Catherine of Sienna, Theresa of Avila who were envoys of God, sent for special purpose to revitalize humanity at certain crucial times of the Church and society. Similarly, Bl. Kuriakose Elias Chavara was conceived in the mind of God, as the chief agent, commissioned to preserve the original purity and values of the Christian faith in India and to assume leadership in the social uplift of the country. His chronicles and letters prove that he was a Church historian of the 19th century Kerala Church. Considering his valuable literary and religious contribution to the spiritual and social life of the Church, and for combining an Eastern and Indian spirituality through his life and activities, he deserves to be numbered in the list of the Fathers of the Church, especially as a Father of Indian Church.

Endnotes

¹Letters, p. 117.

²Leopold, B. M., *The Sort Biography of Mannanam*, 1970, p. 1.

³Positio, p. 325.

⁴The Chronicles, p. 146.

⁵The Chronicles, p. 146.

⁶Letter, 1982, p. 29.

- ¹Cf. Xavier Kulangara (ed.), *Church History*, pp. 589-635.
- ²The *Chronicles*, pp. 82ff.
- ³*Positio*, pp 223ff; 492, 626 ff.
- ⁴The *Chronicles*, pp 82f.
- ⁵*Positio*, p. 278.
- ⁶*Herald of the East*, Vol. I, No. 3, 1992, p. 83.
- ⁷*Letters*, 1982, p. 22.
- ⁸*Letters*, 1982, p. 23.
- ⁹*Letters*, 1982, p.22.
- ¹⁰*Positio*, p. 435.
- ¹¹*Positio*, pp. 282, 382, 631.
- ¹²*Positio*, p. 296ff.
- ¹³*Founding Fathers*, p. 31.
- ¹⁴*Vat II*, *Life of Priests*, No. 4.
- ¹⁵*Vat. II*, P.O. No. 1.
- ¹⁶*Biographical Note*, *Athmanuthapam*, Mannanam, 1871, p. 1.
- ¹⁷*Chronicle*, 1981, p. 28.
- ¹⁸*Letters*, pp. 129-130.
- ¹⁹*C.W.C. Chronicles*, 1981, p. 104.
- ²⁰*Chronicles*, 1981, p.1.
- ²¹*Chronicles*, 1981, pp. 175f.
- ²²*C.W.C. Letters*, 1982, p. 137.
- ²³*C.W.C. Letters*, 1982, p. 152.
- ²⁴*C.W.C., Chronicles*, 1981, p. 234.
- ²⁵*C.W.C., Letters*, 1982, p. 142.
- ²⁶*C.W.C., Literary Works*, 1981, p. 6.
- ²⁷*C.W.C., Literary Works*, 1981, pp. 99-127.
- ²⁸*C.W.C., Literary Works*, 1981, pp. 104, 105.
- ²⁹*C.W.C., Literary Works*, 1981, pp. 110, 111.
- ³⁰*C.W.C., Literary Works*, 1981, p. 122.
- ³¹*C.W.C., Literary Works*, 1981, p. 111-112.
- ³²*C.W.C., Literary Works*, 1981, p. 122.
- ³³*C.W.C., Literary Works*, 1981, p.118.
- ³⁴*C.W.C., Literary Works*, 1981, p.116.
- ³⁵*C.W.C., Literary Works*, 1981, pp. 44, 46.
- ³⁶Leopold M. B., *The Short Biography*, Mannanam, 1970, p.1.
- ³⁷Bede Griffith, "Christian Monastic Life in India" in *Journal of Dharma*, 3, (1978), no. 2, p. 125.
- ³⁸Bede Griffith, *op.cit.*, p. 125.
- ³⁹*C.W.C. Spiritual Writings*, 1981, p. 15.
- ⁴⁰*C.W.C. Spiritual Writings*, 1981, p. 16.
- ⁴¹*C.W.C. Spiritual Writings*, 1981, pp. 14-15.

The Christian Family, a Prototype of Heaven on Earth, in the Vision of Bl. Chavara

THOMAS KADANKAVIL, CMI

1. Situational Perspective

The native country, the erstwhile Travancore State, of Bl. Chavara, where the Syrian Christian community had its home, was under the double political dispensation, namely the Hindu Raja and the British Resident from the Anglican Church and it was not at all willing to recognize the possible leadership the Syrian Church could give in the field of much needed social reforms. From this historical perspective it is understandable why Bl. Chavara did not get the prominence and attention he deserved among the pioneer social reformers of the time. It is the view of some that the social vision and social action of Bl. Chavara did not have a broader outlook, that is, it was limited to meeting the needs only of the Syrian Catholic community in Kerala. Although this criticism is valid to some extent, this does not, in any way, lessen the authenticity and depth of his social vision. A thorough analysis of his social action will reveal that his social vision was broad enough to include every member of the society of his time.

As a matter of fact, the so-called 'limited social vision' of Bl. Chavara had its roots, as we have already referred to, in

historical rather than in personal factors. The same historical factors have forced other social reformers also, in the 19th and early 20th centuries, to limit the scope of their social uplift programmes to the needs of their own community. In Kerala, that was riddled with numerous castes and communities and was beset with the problems resulting from inter-religious and inter-caste tensions, it was practically impossible for anyone to overcome the barriers of caste and community and be completely open to all without any special regard to one's own community in his social actions.

The Hindu ruling class was not prepared to recognize different communities as having equal social status and equal social rights. The Hindu kings of Travancore had dedicated their country to Shri Padmanabha and ruled it only as the steward or slave of the Lord. These kings regarded the whole country as their own property. The other ruling power of the time in Kerala was the Protestant group. Naturally, there was no ruling power in Kerala at that time to extend its patronage to the Syrian Catholics. This capricious combination of the Hindu-Protestant ruling power had its adverse effects on the Syrian Catholics as it made life and worship hard for them.

Often they were denied the right to establish Churches at locations of their choice, or to educate their children in the manner and institutions of their choice. Thus, for instance, when the Founding Fathers of the CMI congregation finally located a suitable piece of property for a monastery and a Church near Kumaranelloor, they were forced to abandon it owing to staunch opposition from the local Devaswam authorities. We read in the Chronicle of Bl. Chavara that in order to establish a monastery at Mannanam the Founding Fathers had to appeal to the Diwan of Travancore to get permission from the Thahasildar of the locality. The Christians of that time could live and act only in accordance

with the dictates of the caste Hindus who were not only the rulers of the country but also the occupants of all the key positions in government and society. Obviously, it was impossible for anyone from any community to work for the welfare of all, overcoming the barriers of caste and community created by the caste Hindus. It is true that Bl. Chavara's efforts for social emancipation and social uplift were mostly confined to serving his own Syrian Christian community. In the field of social work and social action Bl. Chavara could only be a product of his times. In this essay, however, we make an attempt to show how deeply spiritual and egalitarian he was in his vision with regard to the family, especially to women, children, labourers and one's neighbours.

2. Guiding Light from the Sources

Bl. Chavara wrote a circular letter to each member of his congregation and to the faithful of his Church as 'his advice and farewell greetings'¹ and as his last testament (p.117) to them. The opening salutation of his letter to the congregation is very touching. "I your servant, brother Kuriakose Elias, address my dear Rev. Brothers, Priests, my dear children the Novices and the lay brothers, swearing my fidelity to Christ and giving you my advice and farewell greetings" (p.70).

The central vision of the circular letter becomes crystal clear when he touches on the bond of charity and obedience:

My dear brethren let the vicars of each of our monasteries foster real charity among themselves and maintain a true bond. However numerous the monasteries are, all must be like the members of one family, children born to, nursed and brought up by the same mother. Never let this love weaken, but let it grow stronger from day to day (p.71).

He continues:

The significant mark of a true religious is total negation of their self-will and perfect obedience... Realize this and make a strenuous effort... We owe the same obedience also to other subordinates and finally to one another. He who practices perfect obedience in all these spheres *will enjoy heavenly peace already in this monastery, which is a mini-heaven.* This is certain (70,71).

As a true monastery is 'a mini-heaven' on earth a true Christian family is also heaven on earth. Bl. Chavara wrote:

In this valley of tears, torn by pains and sufferings *the greatest consolation is to live in a family where there is love, peace, charity and order.* In the same way the greatest sorrow for a man would be to live in a family where there is no peace, no order, and where the members live independent of each other without caring for eternal salvation (p.103).

In the epilogue of his letter to the people of God in his Church he wrote:

This is my testament to you who are my children in two ways, as members belonging to my family and as my spiritual children... In order to remember this fact always... copy this down and preserve this in your homes (p.117)

Elsewhere he wrote:

The father of the family should conscientiously observe this rule of life. Above all read this code of family rules on every Sunday and on the first day of every month in the presence of all the members of the house (p.112).

The style of the epistle reminds us of the farewell discourse of some biblical personalities like Moses (Dt. 33),

David (2 Sam), Paul (Acts 20) and even Jesus (Jn 13-16), which manifested the depth of their love to their children and followers.

3. A Man for Our Times

As a priest of God in the Church he looked upon himself as God's gift to the people. In his mission to the people what is said of the Servant of the Lord, 'a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench, came to be true. This mission involved self-sacrificing service to build up the Church and society as the family of God. The family is the source and strength for a healthy human life. The social upheavals around us is making us amply aware that we need today to focus our option and dedication on empowerment of family and this was exactly the conviction of Bl. Chavara in making religious communities vibrant and Christian families renewed. Social research on contemporary family life confirms our feeling that families are steadily losing their stability especially from the beginning of the second half of the 20th century. The cases of divorce are on increase throwing the parental care of the children in the hired hands. The sacredness of the monogamous marriage is being challenged. We find permanent singleness, and various other questionable forms of cohabitation. Families are losing their power attraction and functions. Family as a cultural value is diminishing its hold and people are less willing to invest time, money and energy in family life but are investing the same for self-satisfaction of self-growth. They forget the truth that though man is a child of earth, he is the heir of heaven and true love never claims but ever gives all that one possesses. Devoid of good and mutually respecting and loving families we can't expect to renew our society at large. It is in this context that the value of Bl. Chavara's efforts to

empower families with Christian ideals has to be seen and appreciated.

In his writings and in his apostolate Bl. Chavara paid special attention to building up the family, which constitutes the basic unit of all society. In addition to this, he laboured tirelessly for the uplift of the Syrian Catholic community in general. As he himself makes it clear, the very aim and purpose of founding a monastery was 'to do good to the people'. Chavara knew that if any community wants to achieve progress, what it needs most is capable leaders. With this view in mind, the farsighted Chavara took the initiative in establishing seminaries at Mannanam, Vazhakulam and Elthuruth to ensure that there were well-trained priests to cater to the spiritual and temporal needs of the people. Since English education was forbidden to the Syrian Catholics at that time, Chavara started a Sanskrit School at Mannanam with a view to enhancing the position of the Syrian Catholics among the caste Hindus. While he was the vicar general of the Syrian Church he directed that every Church should also have a school attached to it. This directive was given in order to raise the educational status of the community, as the Syrian Catholics of that time were educationally very backward. Above all, Chavara knew that for the spiritual and social progress of a community what was most essential was the betterment of the family through the education of the women in the family. We shall briefly outline the salient features of Bl. Chavara's vision about a Christian family and the measures he introduced for the family's renewal and improvement.

4. Family a place for Holy Life

The family is certainly the foundation stone of society. Social progress and improvement is impossible without a spiritually, solid family life. Being aware of this truth Chavara

took keen interest in the family in its spiritual, social and financial dimensions.

a) The Spiritual Dimension of the Family

As an aid to growth in the spiritual dimension of the family Chavara recommended devotion to the Holy Family. That the devotion may take deep roots in oneself one has first to know thoroughly the object of one's devotion and then accept and assimilate what has been known. It was Chavara's earnest desire that every Christian family should become another 'Holy Family'. In his letter to the people of Kainakary he defines the family as follows:²

A family is the community of a few people joined together in blood relation and bound together by a bond of love, where the members exhibit mutual respect and practice obedience to parents and walk in peace before the Lord and the people and each one, according to his proper state of life, seeks to attain eternal salvation and lives peacefully.

The basis of a family could be blood relationship or the closeness one feels in love. The ideal and visible model for Christians in living together and in keeping a peaceful relationship with God and men and striving to achieve one's salvation could be nothing other than the Holy Family. According to Bl. Chavara 'A good Christian family resembles the kingdom of heaven'. The Holy Family of Nazareth is heaven on earth. Fr. John Romeo Pattassery describes the heaven of Chavara's imagination as follows: "God is the 'daddy' of heaven, heaven's 'mommy' is the blessed Virgin Mary, and the other inhabitants of heaven are the 'children'.³ In an article in the volume referred to here⁴ this resemblance has been further highlighted. A Christian family should be a kingdom where God, in the person of Christ, reigns supreme. Chavara's fundamental vision about family was to make every

family an earthly replica of the heavenly kingdom. To remind him of this supreme truth he adopted 'Holy Family' as his second name. Chavara firmly believed that a religious could not attain holiness unless he/she loves, serves and tries to make holy the people of God and their families. Just as in the case of St. Joseph, the foster father, it was a comfort and consolation to Chavara to act as the 'foster father' of every family in the Church.

b) The Social Concerns

Realizing the importance of the social dimension of the family Bl. Chavara urges that all should pay attention to it in their family life in all charity and justice.

In the order of flesh, I am the son of Kuriakose Chavara of the parish of Chennankary. God was gracious enough to create me. Since I was born in your family as a child of your ancestors, I have a special obligation to do some good to you in justice and charity.⁵

In the vision of Chavara the parish, other family and the parents have to be immovable pillars in one's life. As a lasting memorial of his love of his parishioners and relatives, he asked them, fifteen months before his death, to construct a house for the destitute in order to prepare them for a happy death.

Although Chavara loved and respected the family and family relationships, he never let himself be unwholesomely affected by family ties. For instance, Chavara never believed that his family line would become extinct just because there was no male heir in his family. He stood firm in his priestly vocation in the faith that his elder brother's only daughter would continue his family line. Here Chavara was upholding the noble ideal that a woman too can continue the family line -

- an ideal that has not been fully assimilated and honoured by the Syrian community even today.

c) Attitude to Wealth

In letter to the people of Kainakary Bl. Chavara gives a good deal of counsel regarding the financial security of a family, few of which could be briefly touched here:

"Do not borrow money except in special circumstances. If you have borrowed it earlier pay it back at the earliest" (Letters Vol. IV, p.105, no.4). "Do not make a show of your wealth. One who displays his wealth is a person of low status. He who makes false pretensions of wealth will, sooner or later, be compelled to be" (no.5). "Do not spend on festivities beyond what you can afford..." (No.6). "Do not seek connections with families that are disorderly and are not God-fearing. For, it is not rich relatives and friends that will bring you benefit and happiness but those who lead orderly lives and are God-fearing" (no.8). "Endeavour to repair old things rather than buy new ones. A home is rich not because of its numerous possessions, but in the excellence of the few things owned" (no.1). "Do manual work as far is permitted by your social status. A man of honour does not sit idle... Idleness is the mother of all vices, especially of the habit of drinking" (no.12). "Profligacy as well as stinginess are evil. The stingy man's riches will be eaten up by worms and the joy of the profligate will disappear like smoke" (no.15). "Do not allow a stolen article to be retained in your house. Such a house will be burnt down. The spirit exhorts us: 'have nothing to do with any one who steals another person's property...' (No.17).

Chavara thus provides a clear vision on the right attitude that a Christian should have towards wealth in the

family set-up. It is to be noted that Chavara has some reservations regarding trade and commerce and business. Since it is often difficult to keep honestly in business and trade, Chavara advises that one may enter this field only if one can find no other work and even then, with utmost care and precaution.

5. Directives on Family Life

Chavara's first letter to the people of Kainakary, written in February 1868, is known as *Directives of Families* (*Kudumbachattam*). The many exhortations Chavara gives in this letter regarding the care and upbringing of children contain a great deal of modern psychological and spiritual insights. Although he gave shape to many of them in the social and cultural context of his time, even today these counsels have not lost their meaning and relevance in character formation. These counsels also reveal Bl. Chavara's vision of the family and family life. Given below are some of the key ideas of Chavara on the upbringing of children.

a) Child Rearing

As children grow up, they should be taught to recite with devotion the Holy names of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. They should also be taught other important prayers like the Our Father, the Hail Mary and the Glory be and the Angelus (Letters, Vol. IV, pp.111-112, no.2). "Young children should not be allowed to walk about naked, even inside the house" (no.3). "In order that children may respect their parents, they should not be allowed to sleep in their parent's bed room. Boys and girls should not be put in the same room to sleep" (no.4). "As soon as the children reach the age of reason they must be sent to school" (no.6). "Children should not be allowed to stay in the homes of relatives" (no.7). "When they

are eight years of age, they are to be taught all about confession and should be helped to make their confession" (no.8). "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" (no.9). "At dusk, when the bell for the angelus is rung, make it a rule that the children should be at home. After night prayers teach them to say 'praise be to Jesus' to their parents and kiss their hands" (no.11). "To make girls dress up in finery and let them go about on the pretext of human respect, wealth and family prestige and to make wear clothes and ornaments beyond one's ability and status will in a way promote vanity in them... A girl's ornaments are modesty, piety, silence and control of the eyes" (no.12). "When children are old enough to determine their vocation, they should be given full freedom to follow their bent of mind..." (No.14). "Write out the will or partition-deed in time..." (No.16).

What we find in Chavara is the tender loving heart of a true father. Just as a loving father wants to rear his children in the best possible way, so also Chavara wanted to rear every child born in a Christian family in the best possible way, giving it the best of Christian education and training.

b) Love as the Life-Blood of the Family

In the vision of Bl. Chavara, love is the life giving force in the family. He, therefore, endeavours to show that love alone is the force that can enable us to forgive one another and thus enjoy peace in this world and eternal bliss in the world to come. Chavara admonished his people to keep away from all sorts of strife and the tendency to take revenge (*Kudumbachattam*, no.1). He further says that civil lawsuits even if one feels that it is for a just cause.

c) Other Counsels

Sundays and other obligation days are our Lord's days. It is least befitting to hold secular celebrations on such days. It may cause many evils amounting even to the perdition of souls (Letters, p.104, no.3). "Do not wander into other people's houses hunting after news" (no.7). "Do not admit all sorts of people to your house. Accept only those who are good and god-fearing" (no.9). "Make it clear to others that your home is not a place for indulging in profane conversation ill-befitting a Christian family; it should not be a place for speaking ill of others and for gossiping" (no.10). "Do not wish to make many friends. Out of thousands, choose just one. He who does not love God will not love you either" (no.16). "Never without just wages from labourers or make undue delay in paying them, because that is an offence that cries out to God for justice. Do not insult the poor, neither should you vex them, because if God sees them weeping. He will surely wreak vengeance on you" (no.18).

In all illness and sufferings surrender yourself completely to God" (no.20). "Spiritual books and philosophical writings that promote and nurture devotion are treasures to be earned for children. Buy as many books of this sort as your means allow and keep them in store in your house" (no.21). "The employees of your household should be particularly God-fearing and they must be as few as possible" (no.23). "Besides keeping Sundays hold by participating in the holy Mass, spend a large portion of the day listening to sermons, reading good books and in similar other occupations, visiting the sick, especially the poor, and serving them (no.22).

The underlying inspiration of these counsels is his ardent desire for the creation of healthy families with a lifestyle that is based on faith, and with labour relations that

are just. Chavara's counsels may appear to be nothing more than a litany of some traditional practices and counsels that were already known in the community. But if we have a closer look at them we shall find them as deep insights coming from a mature mind. They reveal a loving father's profound concern for the development and welfare of his own beloved children. When one takes a look at the rules and directives that Bl. Chavara prescribed for every member of the family to be observed from the dawn to dusk and at every stage of life, one is forced to think that perhaps Bl. Chavara *envisioned the family also as a small monastery*.

6. His Vision on Women

Though the modern ideas of liberation and empowerment of women were unknown to Chavara and his contemporaries he was well aware that the stability and sanctity of families depended mostly on well-groomed women in society. One of the main reasons for starting a religious congregation for women at Koonammavu was, that besides attaining personal holiness, they could also be instrument in educating girls who would become wives and mothers of Christian families.

In the 19th century social life of Kerala, women did not enjoy equality with men in any area. Their education was limited to that of acquiring basic skills in reading and writing at the single-teacher village school called *Kalari*. The training given to them was mostly focused on cooking, child-rearing and household works. They were given away in marriage at a very tender age too. In Christian families women did not have any right or title to the family property. Only the sons could inherit the property. The tradition among the Syrian Christians was that women could not hold property or other forms of wealth in their own name. What she receives from

her family as the 'girls' share' (dowry) becomes the property of her husband and his family and they handle it the way they wanted. A woman's main duty was to make the family atmosphere homely and enjoyable through the proper exercise of her twin roles as wife and mother. In short, women were expected only to work and do their duty as wife and mother. They had no rights, no voice, either in the family or in the society. Girls belonging to lower castes were not admitted even to the single-teacher village schools. Women were not allowed to go for amusements or other cultural events that took place even in the Church compounds. Father Bernard, the eminent church historian remarks that women did not participate even in the retreats that were conducted for the people at the church. Even Bl. Chavara admonished that girls, twelve years and older, should not be taken to social functions like death anniversary celebrations, feasts and other liturgical celebrations, dinner, weddings etc. They should be rather kept at home and given instruction in some useful trade or craft (*Letters*, p.114, no.11).

We all know that in the Indian society the position and status of women has not improved much at the present time. Even today women are not represented in the parish councils of the Syrian Church. They are excluded from theological studies. Thus Catholic women have been very backward ecclesiastically, socially, economically and educationally. It is in the context of this unfortunate situation that Bl. Chavara's vision on women becomes revolutionary and far ahead of his times.

Chavara's vision on women is lofty. There are those who see him as the pioneer of women's emancipation, as the leader of the women's uplift movement. Many people and the influence of various situations helped Chavara to form a noble vision regarding women, especially housewives. First and

fore most among these factors is his own mother and her lasting influence on him.

a) His own Mother

Some of the earliest memories of Bl. Chavara of his mother are given expression in his work *Compunction of the Soul*. Concerning the dedication his mother made of him to Mary he writes:

And while on nectar mother on earth fed me
 Mary at her feet fondly kept me safe.
 "Accept him as your humble slave
 To your maternal love, I entrust him.
 My humble womb's worthless 'tender fruit' "
 So saying, me her infant child
 At Mary's feet, she humbly laid (p., lines 3-9).

In section 1 from lines 44 to 88 we have a very vivid description of how Chavara's mother taught him devotional prayers:

And, while my infant tongue, 'gan 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 (p. 3, lines 67-70).

Never once did she use the rod to chastise
 Nor with a harsh touch did she smite me
 Her eyes, they wielded the mighty power to hit me
 Or needs be, to fondle me, in approval (p.3, lines 81-84).

b) Mother of God

It was from his mother that Chavara got his devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Holy Family. It is with a heart full of devotion and gratitude that Chavara recalls his being dedicated to Mary. Throughout *Compunction of the Soul*

we see Chavara lost in the ecstatic devotion to the Blessed Mother.

c) Devotion to Teresa of Avila

Bl. Chavara always addressed St. Teresa as 'My Mother'. He was convinced that this mother had accepted him as one of her spiritual sons. To learn the meditation techniques of St. Teresa, Chavara showed interest in learning Spanish. He wished to read the *Interior Castle* in its original language. He writes about this in his *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*:

St. Teresa, as a mother in spirit and mistress of contemplative life, would certainly see to my spiritual need. For she is the author of the *Interior Castle* with its seven mansions. She knows how to teach her children the way taking them through it. So I beseech your help, O mother, in comprehending the language or the sublime inner meaning of the *Interior Castle* or inspiring the same into my heart (p.2)

In his letter addressed to the community of the sisters he again refers to the *Interior Castle* of St. Teresa.

Then the bride will love more and more and the bridegroom will rejoice over it and adorn her with ornaments. Thus commences the divine union from then on there will be no fear. 1. Reading, 2. Solitude, 3. Meditation prayer, 4. Mediation. It is enough for the meditative time being to aspire to this fourth degree of prayer. Our mother Teresa attained the seventh stage. Some of her sisters reached up to the fifth and sixth. We must reach at least the fourth.⁶

d) Devotion to Repentant Holy Women

Extremely humble as he was, Chavara always felt that his compunction was not in proportion to the magnitude of his

sins. He, therefore, cultivated a special devotion to those repentant holy women who, renouncing their old sinful life, became acceptable to the Lord.

As my sorrow bears no proportion to the magnitude of my sins, I take heart to go to my heavenly Father by offering to Him, with my sorrow and grief, the penance and penitence of the great penitents like Mary Magdalene, Mary of Cortona who have always been helpful to me in evoking repentance for my sins:⁷

e) Prayer of a Holy Girl for Happy Death

Bl. Chavara used to say a prayer for a happy death composed by a holy girl who was converted to Catholicism at the age of fifteen and died in the odor of sanctity at the age of eighteen. This prayer, which describes in detail the final stages of death and its agonies, will certainly enable any faithful to face death with a calm and serene mind.⁸ Many Christian families used to recite it during their evening prayer for a happy death.

f) Anasthasia's Martyrdom

Anasthasia's Martyrdom is a poem that Chavara composed with a view to strengthening the faith and unity of the Kerala Syrian Church and Christian families when its foundations were shaken in the storm that the schism raised. Just as he selected the prayer of the holy girl, he also selected, as the role model, a girl from among the many holy martyrs to serve as an edifying example to the faithful.

g) Mothers of Great Men

Bl. Chavara has written the biographies of great men who have had significant influence on his life. In these

biographies he has always made reference to the significant role their mothers have played in their personality development. In the Mannanam Chronicle we read the following about the mother of Father Thomas Palackal:

His father also died in the epidemic. He had one elder brother and two sisters. As the former was too young and incapable, mother suffered a lot to bring her children up. But she did not lose her patience because she was one of the most pious women of the time and had a younger sister to help her.⁹

Similarly, while speaking about the life and circumstances of Anna, one of the first members of the convent at Koonammavu, Chavara remembers Anna's mother and aunt too with great respect and admiration:

Father delegate got down Thomman Varikka, the younger brother of the girl's father who was looking after her properties. The Rev. Father undertook to clear all the debts and asked him to build a small house for them. He and his wife, who were very pious people, took great interest, but as they had no money the work dragged on.¹⁰

The above are some of the examples of Chavara's respect and admiration towards women who were great and honourable in the eyes of God. Chavara held the lofty ideal that all women should be, as that mentored here, honoured and respected in the family, in the society and in the nation. Hence it is clear that he saw women's uplift as a very effective means to improve the quality of life in the families. He then acted with the conviction that the first step towards this should be the formation of a group of consecrated women in the church.

7. Establishment of a Convent and the Renewal of the Family

A woman is the light of the family. She has a unique role to play in giving a good formation to her children. With these convictions Chavara attempted to uplift women by founding a convent for them. These efforts, he believed, would ultimately result in the betterment of the Christian family as a whole. In the Chronicle of the C.M.C. convent at Koonammavu the Foundation Statement regarding the aim of the convent is given as follows:

... to clear the debts and then to have the remaining plot enclosed and to put up a house where the two could be together. They could take care of their spiritual life, teach girls prayers and train them in certain handicrafts.¹¹

There are three elements in this Foundation Statement : 1) meet one's spiritual needs effectively, 2) achieve Christian formation through Christian instruction and studies, 3) learn a trade or craft. 'To teach to pray' means 'to bring up children in the fear of God'. Bl. Chavara knew that when women become capable of leading family prayer, children would get good character formation. When women achieve the capacity to earn, they get recognition and influence in the family. Thus when the convent was furnished, there were not only the facilities for leading a spiritual life but also other tools for crafts, like "...nippers, thin wire, scissors, needles, thread, a penknife, inkpot, quill, paper, nails, hammer, ... fork, knife pitcher and goblet".¹² The aim was to enable them to integrate prayer and manual labour and thus achieve the integral development of the whole person. The learning of the craft was meant merely for the sisters, rather the sisters, having learnt them, were supposed to teach them to other children. This wider concept of the integration of spiritual life and some useful trade was very much in the mind of the Founding

Fathers of the C.M.C. convent right from the time of the founding of the bamboo-mat convent. Later, when they made plans to build a new, solid building for their convent they also had plans to start with it a school and a boarding house.

... that the convent is to be built in two stories and that the boarding house and the school building must be enclosed by a compound wall. With these objectives the foundations of the western and eastern walls of the convent were dug up again and broadened and strengthened so that the foundation may be strong enough for a two-story building.¹³

Here we can see that the boarding house, the school, and the convent are part of an integral plan, a total vision. As early as 1868 a good number of girls had come to live in the boarding house. All these girls were not candidates for religious life. They came there desirous of good training in Christian life and in becoming good housewives. Accordingly they were taught such useful subjects as language, mathematics, cooking, music, Tamil and Latin. Thus Chavara founded the convent with a view to achieving, through the renewal of the family and through the life and work of the sisters, the all-round development of the Kerala Church.

Conclusion

Although it was his own community that received the bulk of the benefits of his services, others also have their share in the fruits of the pioneering labours of this great soul. His God-orientation always started from his own person but it grew through the family and his own community and finally embraced the whole Church and the country at large. Even if some people hold that Bl. Chavara served only his own community, it does not in any way diminish the universal appeal of his services. What keeps a family a true family are the virtues of love, peace, sacrifice prayer and mutual

understanding. The *Family Directives and Regulations* that Chavara prepared for the families and the instructions he gave regarding the upbringing of children are certainly in keeping with the insights of modern psychology. Many of his admonitions still influence our families and serve as bright beacons that guide our lives. His insights regarding women and his efforts for their betterment were certainly real challenges to the thought-pattern and practices of his time. The efforts Bl. Chavara had made for the renewal of family life shine forth brightly even today, keeping their own identity and uniqueness.

Endnotes

¹ *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara*, Mannanam, 1990, Vol. IV, p.70.

² *Ibid.*, p.102.

³ *A Portrait of Bl. Chavara*, Vol. II, p.128.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.77.

⁵ *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p.116.

⁶ *Complete Works* Vol. IV, p.85.

⁷ *Colloquies with the Heavenly Father*, p.2.

⁸ *Complete Works*, Vol. III, pp.38-39

⁹ *Chronicles* p. 53.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.105.

¹¹ *Chronicles*, p.195.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.106.

¹³ *C.M.C. Chronicle*, Vol. , p.44.

The Ethical Legacy of Chavara for Our Times

PAULACHAN KOCHAPPILLY, CMI

Opposing interpretations are quite normal in the historical contributions that one makes to her/his community. Blessed Chavara Kuriakose Elias of the Holy Family has been crowned with such accusations, which are often reserved to great luminaries in history, from different quarters.¹ However, we do not wish to enter into such controversies which lead us to no where.

Rather, we are interested to focus our attention on one of his writings,² *Atmanutapam* (Compunction of the Soul), whereby we could enter into dialogue with the holy man and to have a closer look at the special significance of Chavara for ethical decision-making and moral living, which, we believe, would lead people to the divine milieu and to the holiness of the Godhead.

It is likely that in the minds of some there may remain a doubt regarding the ethical legacy of Chavara from his long poem cast in the epic mould.³ The doubt will be found baseless as one is ready to enter into a story and its power to mould the mind of people to act in a specific manner. If the salvation story of our Lord Jesus could hand over a legacy to posterity for its moral decision-making and community building, beyond any doubt the story that Chavara narrates in *Atmanutapam* could

enkindle in the minds of its readers a thirst and hunger, as the author himself felt, though the intensity of the experience could vary from person to person. In this case, the author narrates his story against the background of the story of the Saviour in a meditative vein.

By this short survey we do not presume that Chavara wished to teach ethical values through his poetry, though one cannot completely rule out the possibility. Nevertheless his intimate experience of the Lord might have undoubtedly helped to mould his perspectives towards life. At least this is the tone that the epic poem presents to its readers. Faced by the holy presence of the Mystery, Chavara could not stand changeless, but let himself be refined and renewed with its power and majesty.

With these words of introduction, we now wish to highlight some of the salient features of Chavara's ethical legacy for our time, especially at a time which is characterized by growing pluralism and secularism.

1. History of Salvation and the Ethical Identity

Chavara begins his poem finding the root of his life in God almighty who is filled with infinite grace and mercy. Absorbed in meditation, he retrieves his beginning in the beginning of creation. Note the genesis of his poem:

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 (I, 1-4).

As it is crystal clear from the above lines, locating the source of his life in God and taking pride in being created as son of Adam by the Creator, Chavara beseeches further revelation to

understand the ground of his being. His pleading does not go in vein. The Lord God reveals to the saint who he is. Confessing his sinfulness, he gets a glimpse of the truth. Our poet composes lines with ease characterized by profoundness:

Omnipotent your will, that me a sinner
You moulded truly great in your likeness
O God, despite my limitless unworthiness
You did show in it, your mercy boundless (I, 9-12).

A sketch of profound theological and anthropological affirmations are available in these lines. In a few words, the author ponders the worthiness and the unworthiness of his being in front of the Almighty. In this experience of Chavara, one can unmistakably identify the quintessence of Christian existence, which is always a synthesis of sinfulness and saintliness. His consciousness of sinfulness does not deter him from the holy countenance of the Lord God. On the contrary, Chavara dives deep into the abyss of the mercifulness of God and sees the wonders the Almighty has done for him (I, 17ff). His question is answered. From now onwards the saint is certain regarding the ground and the goal of his being, that is, the likeness of God. Here is the uniqueness of human beings. Humans are moulded in the likeness of God. They are His likeness. This obliges them to-be-like-Him-in-the world. It is both a great privilege and a lifelong challenge. Herein lies the moral prerogative of a Christian, of which Chavara was thoroughly conscious.

If we were to employ the Pauline usage in expressing the ground and goal of Christian life, to clarify "the likeness of God" about which the poet ponders, it would read as follows, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (*Rom* 12, 2). St. Paul throws light on the newness of our Christian existence in the following fashion, "we have the mind of Christ" (*1 Cor* 2, 16).

His message becomes clearer, "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit" (*Gal 5, 25*). St. Paul articulates the indicative and the imperative dimensions of a Christian – we have the mind of Christ and, therefore, act accordingly – which is simultaneously an ontological and an ethical statement.

The history of salvation and the mystery of Christ is the fundamental source and guiding force of Christian ethics or morality, because every Christian is one who professes Jesus Christ as her/his Saviour and proclaims the truth of it with overflowing joy in decisive and committed action. Christ revealed to us the love of the Father, His face, His image and His likeness. In Christ we have beheld not only grace and truth but also the true image and likeness of the Father. Today this is an imperative for every Christian: to be the likeness of the Father revealed by the Son through the Holy Spirit.

The likeness of God the Father manifested in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, which Chavara realized as the ground and goal of his life, would definitely confer upon every Christian, who takes the trouble to unveil His Likeness hidden in each person and who sincerely cooperates with the grace of God, an indelible character, which, in turn, will disclose their identity as Christians and will be strengthened through constant and continued commitment in particular context proper to the believer.

Subsequent verses disclose a splendid Christian understanding of human beings:

Perfect One, it was your Holy Will
Impeccable, that let me be born on earth
A human being, me, impoverished you raised
To the highest skies, Your Abode (I, 13-16).

The Ethical Legacy of Chavara for Our Times

Recognizing the human birth on earth, which is by Holy Will, the saint believes that human beings are raised to 'highest skies', the abode of God. An integral and biblical view of a human being: *a divinely-willed, earthly-located and heaven-oriented human existence*, according to the Christian faith tradition is available in the above confession by the author. This vision confers upon the faithful a sense of origin and a definite plan of life. In other words, *a believer endowed with a Christian vision enjoys a meaningfulness and purposefulness in one's life*. The life and faith-vision of a Christian cannot any longer stand apart or go on a parallel track, but meet, merge and become one. That means life and faith mutually interact and complement the Christian person to live unto the likeness of God. In every thought, word and deed of the faithful, *her/his faith vision will not only provide a horizon, but also help one to mould the frame of mind and guide one in decision-making*. It is quite normal that if the objective is clear enough to a person, and if the subject really wishes to attain it, definitely the means will be commensurate with the vision and view. In our case, Chavara's belief in the Christian existence, which for him is a gift of the Lord God out of His wonderful mercy and love (see 1,37-38), should have directed his life and activities. *When head and heart are filled with a particular thought, the word and the deed will manifest the inner thought without effort*.

As long as the purpose of human life is clear to somebody, there will exist a hierarchy of values in her or his life. One of the major issues of our modern society, according to many authors, is the lack of a hierarchy of values. There is a tendency in our present time to relativize every value. Until and unless one can order values in life, she/he would not organize her/his life. In order to perceive and to perpetuate an organized system of values, one has to have a glimpse of the purpose in life. Chavara was thoroughly clear regarding his human existence and the divine assistance in growing into the likeness of God through the grace of His love and mercy.

Another facet of *Atmanutapam* is that Chavara inserts his history into the history of salvation. In the first chapters of this poem, our poet leaves a portrait of his life against the background of the Christian story. His imagination and the possible fusion with the Divine begins and grows through his loving mother under the providence of God. Following verses provide a fascinating account:

Mixed in her sweet milk, she regaled me
With thoughts of heaven, and words of grace so pure!
And when reason grew strong, my little mind
Patiently, informed, to lisp holy names (I, 49-52).

Chavara offers his readers through the above description a lively and lasting impression he had from his mother regarding the thoughts of heaven and the holy names. The author demonstrates his unfailing memory about his mother and her assistance to imbibe the thoughts of heaven and the holy names of God together with her milk. He draws the significance of natural and family setting in imparting the faith to the children. These words of the saint give testimony to the fundamental vision of growth, both faith as well as biological, which truly go hand in hand. It emphasizes the experiential dimension of faith formation. Always it is not necessarily true that the rational, logical formulations of faith content enjoys a higher appeal to the human understanding of the truth. In Chavara's own words, he had learned from what he has seen and heard from his mother:

Huddled close to her feet, I learnt aright
Gently, of matters, sublime of my Faith (I, 53-54).

While being nurtured in body and mind
Was I beloved too of God, my Father (I, 85-86).

We will return to this aspect of faith formation, which is identical with the moral formation of a believer, at a later stage of our reflection.

Numerous texts could be cited from *Atmanutapam* to establish the way Chavara found his story in the history of salvation. That is not our concern here. What we were trying to focus on is the way Chavara found ethical foundations and moral principles in the history of salvation. Going back to the beginning of all, Chavara locates his genesis in God the Almighty and loving Father. From the boundless grace and mercy of God, Chavara believes that he is created as a human being, a son of Adam. *Despite his limitless unworthiness, God moulded Chavara in His likeness. Through the Holy Will, the Father of all perfection, the Perfect One, raises Chavara to the highest skies, His Abode.* Along with this theological anthropology of Christian tradition, Chavara underscores the way that enabled him to understand the Mystery of faith as he grew in age. The insertion of his story in the history of salvation and experiential faith formation might have actually helped him grow unto the likeness of God and to enjoy His company, while Chavara was still on earth.

The faith of Chavara – *that he is created by God though the Holy Will; that he being on earth is raised to the heavens; that in spite of his sinfulness, God has moulded him truly in the likeness of God –* endows him with a genuine genesis of life, the purposefulness in life and motivation for moral decision and action. *This belief confers upon him a distinctiveness and a Christian identity, which is every important in a pluralistic society in order to organize the values in the light of faith tradition.*

2. Sacramental Celebration and Ethical Maturity

Another dimension of Chavara's ethical legacy is his emphasis on sacramental life which contributes to one's ethical maturity. This is in connection and in continuation with what we were discussing above. We notice a gradual progress in his self-understanding as Chavara receives sacraments in the

Church. *The more he understands himself as to who he is in the eyes of God, the more Chavara commits himself to the Lord.*

As we have seen, Chavara is convinced of the truth that he is created in the likeness of God. This is his point of departure in his realization. Then comes an important moment or event in his life by which Chavara is made spotless. Recalling the moment of baptism, our saint jots down:

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

It is obvious that Chavara was not capable either to understand or to reflect on these truths which he is narrating in connection with his baptism. Nobody doubts that the poet travels back into the sacramental event and gives a flash back of the great things that happened in his life. Nevertheless he is convinced of the fact that he is made spotless through the sacrament of baptism. All the more he considers the day of baptism as "a day of days." With gratitude he recalls the "boon" he received in and through the sacrament. It is reasonable to think that the saint is advancing to the likeness of God through a spotless life, which is a result of "streams of grace" and the "Fount of Mercy." This supposition is substantiated by the words of Chavara himself:

Through Baptism's grace, you made me your cherished son,
And showed me Heaven's joys to tend me grow (I, 41-42).

Chavara speaks explicitly of another sacrament which leads him to a greater realization of his original identity. That is about the sacrament of Ordination. In connection with his entrance to seminary, our author exclaims:

My Mother's heart leaped with exultation
That God did ear-mark me to be His possession (I, 119-120).

Concerning the sacrament of Ordination Chavara deliberates that he is made the possession of God, has a greater intimacy with and a marvellous identity in God. What is striking in these descriptions of sacramental life is that Chavara finds the link between the original designs of God and the sacramental significance in his life. For him there is a continuity and a growing maturity in discovering the likeness of God through these sacraments.

Through	Creation		likeness of God
the celebration	Baptism	Chavara is made	His cherished son
of sacraments	Ordination		His possession

Reflecting on the significance of the sacraments in his life and its ethical import, it is clear that his growing awareness into the likeness of God compels him from within to commit himself ever more deeply and completely in proportion to the greater realization. This commitment as the fruit of the sacramental celebration of the Mystery could be seen as a practical field of decision-making and moral action, through which one exercises and expresses her/his newness in the Lord. Chavara's poem gives witness to the progressive ontological experience, which in a normal situation, should be adequately reflected in moral realm as well, in concrete thought, word and deed. *As the tree so the fruits. At this level actions flow from and correspond to the being.* There is every reason to believe that Chavara acted according to the significance of the sacramental celebration of the Mystery, for his writings testify the transformation of the person in accordance with the spirit of the celebration. It is, therefore, quite logical to conclude that *the sacramental celebrations were means for Chavara in his personal transformation and consequently more mature moral decision-making and action.*

3. Ways of Holiness as Way of Goodness

Chavara's ethical legacy includes his perception of the ways of holiness. This is again in tune with what we have already outlined above. Probably in the ways of holiness Chavara finds the highest likeness of God. He recalls the events in connection with the seminary formation:

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

To tread the ways of holiness⁴ seems to be the sole desire of our saint, for which, in the first place, he is greatly indebted to his mother and, then, to the priest who taught him at the seminary. It is in his pursuit of holiness Chavara feels the compunction of heart. Or better our poet realizes his sinfulness and unworthiness in his encounter with boundless mercy and holiness of the Lord God. Here is the key to the Chavaran spirituality or morality, which is in full resonance with Christian tradition.

The council of Vatican II rediscovered and underscored the call and the goal of the people of God. According to *Lumen gentium*, holiness is no more restricted to the four walls of religious houses, instead it is restated as the goal of all God's people; all the faithful are on the way to holiness and all share and aspire for the same. Everybody is marching towards the perfection of the Father as revealed by Jesus Christ. And for the pilgrim Church the goal determines the norms.⁵ In this context, the goal, that is, holiness, becomes the norm for life. Though a distinction between the two is possible, they are inseparable. That is to say, to be holy and to become holy, the indicative and the imperative, is the moral norm for Christians. Chavara merits

our respect for he has identified holiness as the aim and the norm for the realization of Christian life.

The following confession of Chavara reveals the inseparability of his life and the faith he has in Jesus Christ:

You my Love, my joy and all my good fortune
If not with you, how could I live my life.
My very breath, my food, my drink
What solace have I save in you! (II, 143-46).

The unity of faith and life are found not only in these verses of Chavara, but also in the key concept of holiness which Chavara wishes to convey. It is highly Christological in essence. For Chavara, to be with Christ⁶ and to be in Him is the principal means to be holy and to become holy. This gives the saint Christian identity to live in holiness everyday.

Chavara does not stop in offering us some tips to be holy and to become holy in our givenness. Giving due importance to the senses of experience, it seems that he builds up a whole pedagogy for holiness. Finding the significance of the sense organs of eyes, ears, feet and hand, Chavara composes the following verses:

The eyes you gave such sights to see and muse
And wisely turn to you my Eternal Good,
With countless ills I hurt you sore my Lord,
I made them tools to insult you, withal (II, 337-40).

The ears you gave me words of wisdom to hear
Yea, with them I myself abused and my mind.
And the feet you gave me to reach your Holy Presence
The hands in devotion to worship you, my God! (II, 341-344).

On the one hand Chavara acclaims the Lord for the gift of the sense organs on different counts, though all unite as far as

the ultimate end is concerned, on the other hand he confesses his weaknesses or failures in taking advantage of them. The above lines show the sensibility and the practicability of the way to holiness. These lines demonstrate the eternal wisdom of transmitting values and visions for life in a sociable, sound and successful manner. Maybe these verses indirectly attack the abstract methods, which fail to carry an experiential content, in instructing the faithful on their way to holiness. Who knows? Beyond doubt, one thing is certain that Chavara believes in an experiential knowledge, *anubhava jñāna*, of God, which is live and lasting.

These verses have some basic similarity with those of the Johannine writings. In his writings, especially in his first epistle, the apostle clearly gives testimony to the veracity of the Good News in the following fashion:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which as with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete (1Jn 1, 1-4).

If we were to compare these two texts, undoubtedly there are a few terms that appear in both. While the former text employs these terms in order to substantiate the truth about the preaching of the Good News, the latter makes use of them to show how these sense organs could help in imparting an experiential knowledge of the Good News.

Another possible source for the formulation of the above verses could be located in the liturgical celebration of the

Qurbana, for in the celebration of the Eucharist we come across with more or less similar expressions in connection with sense organs in the Rite of thanksgiving. A section of the Thanksgiving prayer proper to the people runs as follows:

Strengthen, O Lord, the hands which have been outstretched to receive the most Holy unto the forgiveness of sins. Make them worthy to bring forth fruits everyday for your divinity. Make the lips which have praised you within the sanctuary worthy to sing your glory. Let not the ears which have heard the sound of your promises hear the voice of terror. Let the eyes which have beheld your great mercy also behold the blessed hope which have great mercy also behold your great mercy also behold the blessed hope which is from you. Dispose the tongues which have cried holy, for the speaking of truth. Make the feet which have walked in the churches walk in the region of light (*Syro-Malabar Qurbana, The Order of Raza, 57-58*).

When we consider both these sources, biblical and liturgical, together and examine the verses of Chavara against this light, we get a glimpse of Chavara, whose spiritual and moral pursuit stands out as a high ideal, which surpasses his time. *The path to which he confides himself in his way to holiness is eternally relevant and supremely simple.* Through these verses of experiential elements in the context of celebration, he seems to guide us on the path of holiness through the way of goodness. Because of the *experiential knowledge of the Lord that he has probably gained in the context of the liturgical celebration and through personal reflection on the word of God motivates him from within to act correspondingly.* The verses speak for themselves of how through the gift of sight (eyes), hearing (ears), touch (hands), movement (feet), which are highly verifiable in the celebration of the Qurbana, Chavara grew in holiness.

In Chavara's poem the ways of holiness turns to be the ways of doing good: for he turns his eyes wisely to the Eternal Good, he lends his ears to the words of wisdom, he folds his

hands in worship, and on foot he reaches the Holy Presence. Being close to holiness, that is, by means of seeing the Eternal Good, hearing the words of wisdom, touching Him in worship and moving towards the Holy Presence, one is transformed into the holiness of the Holy and consequently the subject acts in a manner fitting to the new existence.

This is how the Johannine writings communicate the Good News of the Lord as joyful and loving news. His personal experience of the Lord could not but proclaim the happy news. The prayer of the Qurbana, that we have cited above, is also set in a similar vein. Having celebrated the Holy Mysteries and being close to Holiness, the faithful sincerely desire to continue the celebration of the Mysteries and to bring fruits of holiness and goodness even outside the Eucharistic celebration.

Chavara also shares his experience of holiness in a similar fashion. His closeness with Holiness empowered him to live a holy life and enriched him to share it with others joyfully. *This path to holiness through, with, and in Christ conferred on him a specific perspective to look, to hear, to touch and to move around in his everydayness, which is nothing else than doing good.*

4. Ethical Formation in Family Prayer

This is another dimension of the ethical legacy that Chavara endows us with and which is, of course, in alignment with the above discussed features. To be precise, it is the atmosphere of the family prayer of Chavara with his mother, the corner stone of his ethical vision, which he cherishes all through his life. Our poet does not miss any occasion to insert his prayer experience with his mother at home, which taught him the preliminary and fundamental lessons of faith. Note his own words, to what extent the natural and family atmosphere was conducive to the learning of things sublime:

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 petty dullness to the air (I, 53-56).

According to our author, the credit of learning sublime matters of Faith goes to his mother. He is slowly and steadily imbibing the spirit of prayer and the fundamentals of faith from his mother's prayer.⁷ The stanza that follows the above one gives us another charming and common scene of a family gathered in prayer:

Long hours, on her knee in prayer she stayed
Leaning on her then I would seat myself
While devoutly a string of pious words
To Mother of God and the Christ, King of Kings (I, 57-60).

These lines are capable of evoking our childhood memories of family prayer and their lasting impressions on our life. *Chavara gratefully recollects those moments of faith formation in his life and probably demonstrates the capability and the naturality of family prayer in inculcating lasting values in the hearts of all, young and old alike.*

It does not matter for Chavara, whether he goes to sleep or stays awake during the family prayer. What matters to him is the atmosphere of family prayer in which he, as a child, floats! Watch these following lines:

"Light Eternal, Jesus Christ, save us all
Hail earth-born flower, Lord Immortal!"
Thus she'd pray in her melodious voice
And I, listening to the lullaby sweet
Near my gentle mother quietly reposed (I, 62-66).

These words of Chavara coupled with the sweet memory and lasting sway in life convey a great truth of transmitting the values in a more appealing and attractive manner. Here too, *our saint confides to the experiential knowledge of his faith, which spontaneously and according to the age of growth flows into him from the reservoir of family prayer.* Chavara witnesses his integral growth, "While being nurtured in body and mind; Was I beloved too of God, my Father" (I, 85-86). From this personal sharing of Chavara, we may be right in concluding that he grew in Faith as he grew in age. And as he grew in Faith, so he decided and acted. The significant factor is his acknowledgement of the fact that the family prayer gave him a fitting environment to grow in faith and in moral discernment. *This aspect of handing over a lived and living value system that is time tested has more relevance than ever in a growing pluralistic society, in which the Christianity finds herself, though this was nothing new to Chavara, for he lived in a pluralistic religious society of India.*

Concluding Remarks

Moral theology is breaking new grounds to organize Christian principles for life in its biblical, liturgical and theological perspectives. It is trying to get rid off the unnecessary legalistic, rigid, and abstract tendencies that moral theology has acquired in the course of the last centuries. A renewal in moral theology invites us to rediscover the roots of Christian values for life in the faith tradition of the Church. In this approach paramount importance is given to the faith of the community, which is revealed in Jesus Christ, celebrated in her Liturgy, and further enhanced in her theological reflections. This has become something urgent because of the growing pluralistic and secularistic environments of our post-modern age.

The ethical legacy of Chavara merits our appreciation against this current renewal in moral theology. Since he lived in a pluralistic and predominantly non-Christian religious milieu,

he could sense the necessity and urgency of imbued with the mystery of one's faith. In his attempt to be what he is, that is, the likeness of God, Chavara inserts himself into the history of salvation, which confers on him a unique identity to organize his everyday life. Through the celebration of the sacraments our saint matures in his God given identity, which passes from a generic understanding of his call to a very personal awareness of God's possession. Chavara conceives no difference between the way of goodness and the way of holiness, and where he strikes a balanced note on the importance of experiential knowledge of the holiness, which is well founded on the biblical and liturgical traditions of the Church. Finally, we have seen how the family prayer becomes the foundation of faith and moral formation for Chavara.

In short, *Chavara's progression towards the likeness of God, in which He created him on earth, and the baptismal grace through which he was made His cherished son, which was nurtured in the atmosphere of family prayer and matured through the celebration of the sacraments in the Church, is marked by holiness that finds itself expressed in deeds of goodness.* The ethical legacy of Chavara, in the light of our discussion, is simple but profound invitation to live our Christian faith in its fullness.

Chavara challenges us to keep watching closely the Mystery of faith so as to mould and model our Christian Way of life unto the likeness or holiness of God the Father, which was revealed in Jesus Christ and to which the Holy Spirit counsels us from within in our daily lives. It seems that Chavara through his *Atmanutapam*, especially through the first three chapters, wishes to instruct us in the following, *gradually you become what you see* (here seeing stands also for hearing, tasting, and touching, moving, etc.). *So see what you wish to be and to become.* The third chapter is an exclusive treatise on seeing events related to the Mystery of faith. We shall conclude this reflection, aspiring for the things here below and above, in the words of Chavara:

The birth of God in a manger
 "Emmanuel", I long to see (III, 19-20).

To elevate us to the Right Hand of God
 You the Perfect, became man (III cont., 47-48).

End Notes

¹Jesus, our Lord and Master also had to undergo the same experience of opposition from his own people, while He was going around doing good in His hometown.

²Here we limit our scope to the first three chapters of *Atmanutapam*. The ground on which we wish to limit the scope of our present survey to the first three chapters is not to neglect the rest, on the contrary in these sections we shall see how the life of Chavara is deeply embedded in the salvation history of the Bible.

³This is more congenial to the Indian way of thinking and living. Because we see the vast and lasting influence of the two celebrated epics of India, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, on the Indian mind in moulding their way of thinking and living unto this day. In this sense, it is all the more appropriate to enter into the values of the story that Chavara wants to share with as a fruit of his reflection on the mystery of the Lord.

⁴It is not obvious whether our author was intending the ways of holiness as reserved to only a selected few in the Church. There is reason to think both ways. Because of the prominent contemporary religious understanding of holiness, he might have thought that the path to holiness is for the religious and priests in the Church. On the contrary, there is sufficient ground for us to reflect that Chavara thought of the ways to holiness in terms of all the people of God, for in his writing he is underscoring the notion of 'likeness of God' of 'holiness' that he learnt from his mother. The idea of holiness in Chavara in this regard is not quite clear. Nevertheless he brings in this notion for the first time in connection with the seminary training he had.

⁵As far as the *Purushartha* concept of Indian tradition is concerned, while the *Moksha* has a determining function, the *Dharama* has a regulating function in the use of *Artha* and *Kama*.

⁶In this connection it maybe interesting to note how the holy man relates to Jesus in his life. In a certain stanza Chavara brings it out explicitly:

True man and true God you came from above
And on earth sojourned our Elder Brother (II, 171-72).

In proclaiming the theological truth about Jesus Christ, Chavara reveals the special relationship he had with Jesus, that is, *Elder Brother*. This appellation clearly manifests the depth and nearness with Jesus the Lord. Besides, it reveals his belongingness with the Holy Trinitarian Family.

⁷Though the scenes of family prayer are undergoing unforeseen changes with the revolution of the mass media, yet we find the family prayer in practice in Kerala as a source of strength and unity of life and faith. The noble efforts of parents deserve respect for this commendable service in transmitting this age old tradition to their children. It is to be promoted by every means available. Giving due importance to the public celebration of our faith, sufficient attention should be paid to family prayers. This is our cultural patrimony, because both in Kerala culture and in Jewish tradition we notice the prime importance to the prayer in the family, which kept the faith alive and active.

"The Lord is My Portion" (Ps 119:57) A Key to the Spirituality of Bl. Chavara

GEORGE KANIARAKATH, CMI

The word of a genuine and sincere person, written or oral, is a reflection of his personality, understanding and vision of life, especially when it comes at a decisive moment in his or her life. On the occasion of his minor Ordinations in 1817, at the hands of the then Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly, Bishop Petro Alakantra, Chavara pronounced a psalmic verse: "The Lord is my portion" (119:57) which became the motto and driving force of his life and, therefore is to be seen as a key to his whole spiritual life.¹ It is a theme, which has deep roots in the First Testament and has come to fruition and maturation in the Second Testament idea of the Kingdom of God/eternal life. In this short essay we shall see how this idea became a driving force in the spiritual journey of Bl. Chavara.

1. "Portion" and "Inheritance"

The above words are coupled and form a hendiadys in Ps 16:5,6, where the psalmist declares: "The Lord is my chosen portion," (*heleq*) and "I have a goodly inheritance, (*nahala*)."
These words are to be understood in the context of the occupation and distribution of the land promised first to Abraham and then to the other patriarchs (Gen 12:7): "I will bring you into the land I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac and to Jacob; I will give it to you for a possession. I am the Lord" (Dt 6:8).

In Hebrew and Aramaic the word *halaq* means 'to divide' or 'to apportion' and from this we have the noun 'share' or 'portion'. It can mean a share or portion given or received by law or custom; here it is given by God. Sheba who rebelled against king David cried out: "We have no portion in David; no share in the son of Jesse" (2 Sam 20:1; 1 Kings 12:6). The Hebrew word *nahal* means 'to possess' (Ex 12:13; Jer 12:14) or 'to get as patrimony' (Lev 20:24; Dt 16:20). And the nominative form *nahala* can mean inheritance, heritage, share or portion.

Portion is seen in a negative sense in some biblical passages (Ps 49:13; Is 17:14; 57:6; Jer 13:25; Job 20:29; 24:28). In the book of Qohelet it has a positive but rather resigned sense (3:22; 5:18; 9:9). The author here exhorts us to be happy with the ordinary pleasures of a normal life. In some other passages we have a very positive idea on which we concentrate this essay.

2. The Historical Background of "Portion"

The land of Canaan, which the Lord had promised to his people, belonged to him alone as the original and true owner (Dt 12:10); the people to whom he gave it were only tenants who did not have the right to dispose of it in perpetuity (Lev 25:23-28). This is precisely why Naboth refused to give his land to king Ahab to whom he said: "The Lord forbid that I should give you my ancestral inheritance" (1 Kings 21:3). Evidently, he could not batter over a property that was a gift of the Lord, which was to be zealously guarded for posterity; it was a sacred trust. What king Ahab saw as a tradeable commodity under the influence his wife was for the Israelites an inalienable inheritance. The mercantile view of land did not agree with the view of the *torah*. When Joshua apportioned the land among the tribes (Josh 13-20), the Levites were not given any piece of land, had to be satisfied with some towns where they could live; the Lord himself was their

portion (*Josh 14:4; 18:7; Num 18:20; Dt 10:9; 18:20; Ezek 44:28*). The Hebrew personal name Hilqiyah(u), which means 'Yahweh is my portion' underlines the fact that those who have Yahweh as their portion are in his personal possession. "The Levites were given the distinct privilege that the Lord himself became the basis of their life. The Lord was the inheritance (*nahala*) and portion (*heleq*) of the priests."² Here is a full and complete abandonment of one's self to the Lord in faith and trust. Of course, nothing created, but the creator himself is the guarantor and sustainer of those possessed by him, enjoying him as their portion and share in life. It is loving the Lord for his sake alone, a genuine and disinterested love and commitment. Here the covenantal steadfast love (*hesed*) and faithfulness (*emeth*) from the part of the Lord are responded by deep faith and trust in the Lord. It is entirely different from a spirituality based on an attitude that is called in Latin, '*do ut des*' (I give that I may get) which is not in the genuine spirit of the Bible (*Lk 17:10*), though rewards too are promised (*Mt 10:40-42*). One who loves really and profoundly is not attracted by rewards or detracted by pains. Who has known and realised what it means to say, "The Lord is my portion", loves unconditionally. It is the result of a genuine biblical knowledge involving a deep personal relationship that is based on unalloyed love.

3. The Lord is Chavara's Portion

While a student in the seminary, Chavara's beloved father, mother and the only brother died within a short span of time; only an elder sister who was married was alive. The relatives insisted that Chavara be brought home to continue the family line. Though unwillingly, Fr. Thomas Palackal, who was his rector, had to send him home and the seminarian could obey only in tears. However, Chavara remained firm and asserted his commitment to the Lord as his only portion through his determined action. Within a month he managed to

persuade his widowed sister to occupy the Chavara home taking care of her girl child. Chavara gave all his inheritance to her. Thus with determination and tact he proved that his portion was in the Lord alone.

We are again reminded of a piece of meditation that Chavara has written about his own priestly and religious vocation in autobiographical style: "For He (the Lord) blessed you from among many who were more worthy than you. He called you from the beginning giving you his position and portion and set you in his church making you dwell in his house to be with him and to live as his beloved"³. Here Chavara has articulated the real meaning of his priestly vocation in biblical terms. It is the *Lord* himself who *chose him to be with him* (Mk 4:13) and has become his *portion*. This conviction helped him to withstand all that stood on his journey with the Lord.

4. Portion' a Spiritual Concept

At the Joshuan distribution of the land, 'portion' meant a share in the land; the portion of the Levites meant something more than that. They were to live by serving the Lord at the altar. This Levitical 'portion' was later claimed by the poor of Yahweh (*anawim Yahweh*), who were economically and socially poor and marginalised in the society. Their only help and refuge was the Lord; the Lord was their portion as reflected in some of the Psalms (Pss 16, 73, 113).

The Psalmist declares, "The Lord is my chosen portion" (Ps16: 5). Here one may ask, who chose whom. The answer from the biblical point of view is evidently that it is the Lord who chose whom he liked. It was the intention of Yahweh that the levites should have him as their portion. The psalmist thinks of Yahweh as "my chosen portion", which means that the loving kindness of the Lord enabled him to find everything in the Lord. The whole of Ps 16 is an

expression of trust, in the Lord to whom he could say: "You are my Lord, I have no good apart from you" (v.6). Nothing takes the place of God as wealth, pleasure or name and fame. The cup mentioned here is the one in which lots were shaken, which was to show God's will. It can positively mean plenty (Ps 23:5; 116:13) and negatively trouble (Jer 49:12; Ezek 23:31-33). At Ps 16:5 portion, cup and lot are put parallelly and positively. When the other people go after other gods and things (vv.3-4) and worship them (vv.9-10), the psalmist would accept the Lord alone as his God and lot or portion in life. God is the only and absolute value in life in whom everybody and everything is seen and loved.

5. A Torah Spirituality

The Hebrew word *torah* means instruction, guidance or teaching and the first five books of the Bible are known in Hebrew by this name though the famous Greek translation, the LXX called it Law (*nomos*). Of course, there are many laws here and the word could also mean law or statutes, commands, ordinances, decrees, precepts, words, promise, way, truth etc as in Ps 119. But it is not simply a book of laws. In fact, these books contain divine revelation to humans including all that he has done for humankind also with an instruction on human response in actual life. Here humans are told what it means to be human and how to live authentically as human beings. Hence the psalmist prays: "Make me know thy ways, O Lord; teach me thy ways" (Ps 25:4).

Chavara's motto is from Ps 119, which is the longest psalm with 176 verses. At v. 57 we have, "The Lord is my portion; I promise to keep your word". Here having the Lord as portion means keeping his word or *torah*, which is characterised by joy, love, and earnestness, and does not involve any traits of a rigid religiosity, legalistic observance or an absolute and unconditional literal obligation. It is seen as the stream of life which makes human existence fruitful in

wholesome successful activity (*Ps 1:1-3*)⁴ *Torah* piety develops into an intimate personal relationship to the Lord which the Bible calls "knowledge of the Lord" (*Am 3:2; Jn 17:3*). Again it goes with the "fear of the Lord", which is a filial attitude of respect, love and fascination, in which is a reverential fear springing from love. This salvific fear and knowledge of the Lord is concretised in a life in accordance with the *torah* of the Lord. In his Testament to his co-religious, Chavara wrote: "The one sign of a true monk is a complete surrender of self and practice of obedience as if one had no eyes and years"⁵. It is true that on many occasions he was obedient to his superiors even though he could not understand things.

Of course, the above statement of Chavara is to be taken with some salt as he did in actual life at least once. He did not always believe in pure blind obedience, but in responsible obedience that is becoming a free and intelligent human person. Almost always he obeyed his superiors without eyes and ears. However, there is in fact, a telling episode in his life, which gives us a different picture. It was Bp. Maurilius Stabilini who approved the idea of beginning a religious community as proposed by Frs. Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara. Accordingly on the 28th of April 1831 a cross was blessed and planted on the hillock of Mannanam, which they called *Bêth rauma*, which in Syriac meant a 'high house'. On the 11th of March 1931 Fr. Porukara laid the foundation stone for the house of the new community and the supervision of the construction was entrusted to Fr. Chavara. In the meanwhile Bp. Francis succeeded Bp. Stabilini, who was ill informed and was skeptical about the project of the three priests. Therefore he appointed Fr. Chavara as vicar at South Pallipuram in spite of his insistent pleading and clarification of the whole matter. Chavara obeyed the bishop who was very authoritarian and only threatened to punish him even without trying to understand what he was saying. Chavara knew well that the will of God is often given through human agents

though they themselves may not always try to seek the will of God in dialogue and prayer. He was confident that he belonged to the Lord and that he was only an agent in his hands to execute his will. He trusted in the Lord and the Lord favoured his servant at the opportune time by giving him a chance to continue his work. With the author of the book of Lamentations Chavara could say: "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him" (3:24).

6. 'Portion' in an Eschatological Orientation

Ps 16 declares the Lord as the psalmist's chosen portion (v.6) and it ends with a note of great hope (vv.10-11). Here the one who has the Lord as his portion is not afraid of even death. He is sure that the Lord will show him 'the path of life'. About this statement of the psalmist A. Wiser comments: "In view of the context in which this saying stands, the phrase 'path of life' can hardly be understood in any other sense than as a life lived in communion with God which will be carried on even after death; in other words, as the consummation of salvation, the future form of which is at present still hidden from the poet" ⁶. This idea becomes all the more sharp in Ps 73 where a psalmist of deep faith declares the Lord to be his only portion or lot in life. His bitter experiences of life led this man who really wanted to believe into a deep crisis of faith. A meditation on the 'end' of everything enlightened him what it meant to belong to the Lord even when apparently everything was lost. From his lips we have one of the most beautiful confessions of faith, which goes far beyond the general horizon of the Old Testament:

Nevertheless I am continually with you;
you hold my right hand,
you guide me with your counsel,
and afterward you will receive me with honour.
Whom have I in heaven but you?
And there is nothing on earth
that I desire other than you,

My flesh and heart may fail,
But God is the strength of my heart
and portion forever (vv.23-26).

Of course, exegetes interpret the above lines differently. According to H.J. Kraus, "In Ps 73:24 the emphasis is not on a "resurrection event," but on the confession that not even death can separate a person from Yahweh". But Kraus adds that, "We should not read Ps 73:24b in the light of negations of resurrection, but instead ask whether the expressions of assurance found in the Old Testament do not provide an essential key to the interpretation that should be placed alongside the New Testament message of the resurrection from the dead"⁷

7. From the Land and Portion to the Kingdom

The Israelites lost their land to the Assyrians and Babylonians and had to be in exile. Of course, they returned home again to be under the Roman occupation and many of them were scattered in foreign lands. Jesus who came as the *mashiah* or the 'anointed' of the Lord preached the Kingdom of God, which was present and active in his own person. Though it was "not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (*Rom 13:17*), it had its earthly dimensions too. It was the reign or sovereignty of God than an administration with geographical frontiers, but having consequences on human life on earth. Here the land has become the eschatological 'portion', which the Synoptics called the 'kingdom of God', the fourth gospel 'eternal life' and Paul 'inheritance'⁸.

Jesus preached the kingdom with the invitation to be converted, to have a new orientation in life (*Mk 1:14*), which meant a reverse of the accepted values – by denying one's self one is to have life; the poor will inherit the kingdom; those who desire to be the first are to be the servant of all; the meek will inherit the land. The Lord has brought down the powerful

and lifted up the lowly. The turning to Jesus, in fact, goes to the point of denying one's being and having, self and everybody and everything that belongs to one on the earth. This is what Chavara did when he declared the Lord to be his portion. Here is a close and radical following of Jesus, which makes one belong to Jesus/God completely without reserve (Mk 10:28; 1:8; Lk 5:11). More than this, it is becoming like Jesus ever seeking the will of the Father in everything.

Conclusion

What we know about Bl. Chavara tells us that his life and spirituality can be summarised in the biblical statement, "The Lord is my portion". Indeed, his portion forever was the Lord. The proper biblical history begins with the divine promise of land and progeny to Abraham (Gen 12:1-3). But at the distribution of land, the Levites who were to serve the Lord were not given any land, as the Lord himself became their 'portion'. The Lord was also the portion of the have-nots and the neglected. At a time when Israel had no land and kings, Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom (or rather, 'reign') of God to those who were converted to him and were ready to follow his path in life. The reign of God that was present in the world in the person of Jesus was also eternal life and God-given inheritance for humans. Here the land and portion have become clearly eschatological and the early Christians prayed for the coming of the Lord of glory and his reign: "*marana tha*, our Lord Come!", which could also be understood as "*marana tha*, our Lord has come". In his autobiographical poem the *Compunction of the Soul* Chavara expresses his intense desire to see the face of Jesus repeatedly.⁹

The motto of Bl. Kuriakose Chavara is a challenge to every consecrated person who takes her/his life earnestly and seriously. Well, every Christian is called to perfection and the way to it is finding one's portion in life in the Lord God who alone is the source of eternal life. What Jesus said on the

mountain in his famous sermon is true in the life of Chavara and everyone who tries to live one's vocation authentically: "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Mt 5:19-21).

End Notes

¹Fr. Valerian, *Malankara sabha Mathavinte Oru Veerasanthanam* (Malayalam), Mannanam, 1939 p.26; K.C.Chacko, *Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Mannanam, 1959, p.22.

²H. J. Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms*, ET by Keith Crem, Minneapolis, 1986, p.160.

³CMI Psadaka Committee, *Chavarayachante Adhyatmika Krutikal*, Mannanam, 1981, p.52. The important word 'portion' (Malayalam 'bhari') is missing in the English translation *Colloquies With the Heavenly Father in Complete Works of Bl. Chavara*, Vol III, Mannanam 1990.

⁴H.J. Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms*, p. 162

⁵Quoted in .C. Cacko, *Fr.Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, p. 113.

⁶A. Weiser, *The Psalms*, trans. By H. Hartwell, 1962, p. 178, cfr also M.Dahood, *Psalms 1*, New York, 1965, p.91.

⁷H.J. Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms*, p.174

⁸W. Brugemann, *The Land*, Philadelphia, 1977, p. 180.

⁹Atmanuthapam (Malayalam), trans. By Sr. Mary Leo, *Compunction of the Soul*, Mannanam, 1989, Song 3.

CHAPTER XXIV

The God-Experience of Bl. Chavara

SEBASTIAN MULLOOPARAMBIL, CMI

Every child is born with unlimited possibilities. He/she is yet engaged in an incessant struggle for existence from the cradle to the grave, this is a phenomenon universally observed today. Responses to the realities of life vary as each one encounters them with the peculiar attitudes assimilated from one's social living. Some frightened by the tide of events and obstacles ahead, may find a way of ending their lives, while some others lead a brutish life to the end. Since they "are born." Some others, with a great urge for truth pursue the way of knowledge and accomplish their lives. Also there are a few living in a "fool's world" holding fast to the view that 'life is to be enjoyed,' extracting everything out of society for their fulfillment. Still there remains a handful, who tread into the unseen avenues of divine mysteries and find true bliss in being one with the reality, that is True, good and the Beautiful. They are real men of God in whom heaven and the earth rejoice. Bl. Chavara is one such great seer who experienced God in the inner core of his being and found bliss in Him. He is a lovely flower that cast manifold shades of celestial hues upon 19th century Kerala, always clinging to the eternal amidst the transient. It would be worthwhile to have a glimpse at the rich and unique spiritual experience of this great man of God.

History cites many a mystic, who made a tremendous impact on human minds. Very often their mystical experiences were ephemeral and ended up with them. Persons like Bl. Chavara and St. Therese of Avila, who reached the pinnacle of ecstatic divine encounters, are exceptions to this kind. Bl. Chavara carried with him the pulse of the entire universe in his continual search for God. We can trace five phases in his God experience. There are also certain spiritual sources that nourished him in the ascent to the mysterious dimensions of divinity.

1. Bl. Chavara – A Rishi

The concept of a *rshi* or *muni* brings to mind the image of a spiritual man seated contemplatively at the feet of his Lord, clad in white and ashes. Bl. Chavara was a sage in the true sense of the term as he was seated at the feet of his omniscient and omnipresent master in deep contemplation for hours together seeking His will and empowering spirit. It is this intimacy with the ultimate that enabled him to offer himself as a gift to God amidst the magnitude of obstacles and pressures following the sudden demise of his parents and only brother that left him with the obligation of looking after his niece and other family affairs.

Bl. Chavara cherishes the inner urge for God that governed him throughout his life. In *Atmanutapam* he recollects:

Mixed in her sweet milk, she (mother) regaled me with thoughts of heaven, and words of grace so pure! And when reason grew strong, my little mind patiently, informed, to lisp holy names. Huddled close to her feet, I learned 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 leaning on her then I would seat myself while devoutly a string of pious words to Mother of God and the Christ, King of Kings... And I listening to the lullaby sweet near my gentle mother quietly reposed. 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 (I, ll. 49-70).

Is not this a portrait of a munikumaran (Son of a Sage) who at night falls to sleep in the act of hearing and meditatively chanting the sublime mantras such as "Light Eternal, Jesus Christ, save us all, Hail, earth-born flower, Lord Immortal!" (I. li. 62-63). The key to the divine experience of Bl. Chavara as we perceive at this stage, was his intense thirst to be with God by any means and at all time.

2. Compunction of Heart

In the second phase the soul all set to unite itself with the eternal source of everlasting life and the perfection of all beauty and truth laments on its faults. Here the individual cries sincerely over his iniquities, being one with the creatures, and asks for forgiveness. Despite his inner purity, we see him wailing over his incompetence to receive the Holy of Holiness into his heart. This simple and genuine gesture speaks volumes of his humble belief that he is incapable of practicing greater virtues or of attaining high contemplation. He confesses that sins pose a big block to his loving chats with the heavenly bridegroom:

A sinful heart is incompatible with God. Therefore... I must come to my saviour Jesus Christ my beloved Bridegroom, to beg pardon for my sins (Colloquies, p. 3).

Hence it is clear that, to Bl. Chavara, mourning over one's trespasses is a prerequisite for spiritual treasures. The real disposition to prayer demands a repentant heart. But he, on his deathbed, has declared that he had never tarnished the grace, which he received in baptism. Then why should there be so much contrition in such a saintly soul? The question sounds quite reasonable. Only a man of grace like Bl. Chavara would understand this. Even the slightest sin hurts saintly souls. The thought of one's own imperfections and lack of virtues cause in them great compunction of heart. He writes in his letter to the religious:

... if you continue to live thus, 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 (Letters, VI/I, p. 65).

Such remarks as early as the Congregation is established are not provoked by the indifference of his co-religious, for sure. Rather, it could be an expression of his zeal to be perfect in all respects even in matters trivial.

While to son-ship divine you raised me
The Grace I caste away, and turned a devil
(*Atmanutapam*, II, u. 347-348).

The elements of contrition, humility, and self-surrender in Bl. Chavara take root from his firm conviction that he is a mere trifle before God, the eternal fountain of all virtues. This thought does not make him desperate, but leads him to a profound trust in the all-pervading divine providence.

"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."
(*Atmanutapam*, V, U. 177-180)

3. Intercession

In this stage we see the soul seeking intercession of all the saints. Here strong faith dawns on him that, God would even compensate for one's shortcomings, since he is ever kind and merciful. Therefore like anyone in spiritual pursuit, he pleads for the intercession of St. Therese of Avila, the fullness of spiritual wisdom. He is certain that she would earn for him all spiritual gifts, as she loves him more than all "blood mothers." In other words, his prayer is that, the mystic should be always with him in his endeavour to reach the ecstatic spiritual heights described in her classical work, "The Interior Castle."

The image of Bl. Chavara invoking all saints, acknowledging himself to be a mere worm in the presence of the Omniscient God, testifies his great regard and yearning for the Ultimate. This phase comes to a close with his visualizing St. Therese as 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.

4. On the Shores of Immortality

Bl. Chavara envisages the soul as seeking heavenly waters on the shores of immortality in this stage of divine encounter. He imagines himself to be a boy scratching for pearls along the vast seashore. Here he is met with certain difficulties. He feels frustrated being unable to have even a glimpse of the all-graceful Divine Face. He earnestly wishes to have a vision of the Divine Face with his little eyes.

Immediately, he remembers the parable of the loving father. He realizes the need for a return, as the prodigal son did, to the father to secure mental peace. He is perplexed a bit, if the door would open to him too, who is shabby both in attire as well as character. Gradually the soul parts with this dilemma and hits upon the inner thrust to say:

Here be on your fact with vigilance. Don't you see a motion at the door? Behold the doors are wide phew! 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 frustrate at His feet (*Colloquies*, pp. 4-5).

These words denote the boundless joy of a soul that reached the preliminary stage of God experience. The hymns of David, upon the grateful face of the Lord, echo in the recesses of his soul, which is aware of its drawbacks. Here the soul enjoys an outward vision of the inner divinity of God. It sings out in delirious ecstasy:

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" (*Colloquies*, p. 6).

5. The Flood of Ecstasy

Dwelling close to the God, who knows hearts, engaged in a hearty dialogue with Him, oblivious of the surroundings and fully absorbed in an ecstatic union, constituted the God experience of Bl. Chavara. His mystical experience reached its zenith when the human elements got dissolved in and were transformed into the divine. This union excludes all distinctions and limits of time and space. Now, God embraces

the soul with tremendous love as His 'dear son' making him his own. Such a union marks the culmination of the mystical experience of Bl. Chavara.

The God-experience of Bl. Chavara doesn't end with his personal encounter with God. He extends his experience to others as well. His spiritual life was a harmonious blend of love for God and concern for man. The social reforms and the mission he undertook, with the view of the other, were indicative of his intimacy with God.

The foundation of two indigenous religious congregations (CMI & CMC), for enriching the Indian Church through contemplative action, was the natural outcome of his farsighted, other-oriented thinking. His attempts towards social reformation, beginning with the establishment of a printing press for better communication and the setting up of schools attached to the churches in villages, are eloquent examples of his option to serve the needy. Above all, this holy man spent every moment of his life for the material and spiritual advancement of his brethren.

Conclusion

Bl. Chavara, a great sage born in the bosom of Kerala, in the early 19th century, consecrated his whole being, energy, and skills for the blossoming of the Indian Church. The youthful vigour that led him to the secluded, ascetic way of life transformed him into a mystic, who explored the unknown realm of great divine mysteries. It is certain that his unique spiritual experiences would ever remain as enduring incentives alluring human hearts to life exuberant and eternal.

Christ Experience in *Atmanuthapam*

SOPHY ROSE, CMC

My soul is longing for God
When shall I see Him? (Ps.42)

Centuries may pass, seasons may change, but the man of today and tomorrow will experience the painful feeling of the soul, i.e., the longing for God. This is expressed in the above cited lines of the Psalmist. Many prophets and just men have desired to see him and hear him, but they could not (Mt 13:17). But when the time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman (Gal 4:4) and became Emmanuel – “God with us” (Mt 1:23). Thus God responded to man’s longing for Him and gave Himself as the Soul of his soul, essence of his existence, true light to his paths and salvation to his soul. Bl. Chavara, a man who ardently longed and prayed to see this Emmanuel in the centre of his heart, articulates his experiences in his literary work *Atmanuthapam* in a vivid manner. He finds his fulfilment in seeing, hearing and experiencing the Messiah who is his love, breath, food, fortune and consolation. So let us analyse his book *Atmanuthapam*, that gives his own history together with the life of Jesus in the world and see how his Christ experience is depicted in it.

1. Through Jesus to God

The basis of Christian faith is the mystery of the Triune God who is the communion of three divine persons: Father,

Son and Holy Spirit. It is the Son who revealed this mystery to the world. However, it is through the Son that God revealed himself as the Father, redeemed the world from sin, and sent the Spirit to us in order to be with us always. Consequently, it is through the Son we reach God and approach the divine mysteries. Since, '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); however, 'he who has seen me, has seen the Father, he who has heard me, has heard my Father and he who has received me, receives him who has sent me'. Imbibing the spirit of these words of Jesus, and the master plan of God, Bl. Chavara turned to Jesus who is both perfect man and God, to see, hear and experience the Father. Thus God has become everything for him. His experience that God is his Father and he is His son is the most sublime aspect of his God experience and he attained this experience through Jesus the Messiah. It is this messianic or christic experience of Bl. Chavara that is the foundation of his deep experience of God as Father, experience of universal brotherhood, awareness of him as God's son and the vision of the Church as the body of Christ.

2. Christ Experience as Emmanuel Experience

God becoming one with man

Emmanuel, I long to see. (III, 15-16)

When the Word of God assumed flesh and became man, in his humanity the divinity has been revealed; God appeared in the form of man. "In many and various ways, God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his own Son" (Heb 1:1-2). Yea, in the incarnate word, God has become one with us – Emmanuel. Bl. Chavara is longing to see this Emmanuel in all His aspects. The third stanza of *Atmanuthapam* is the verbal expression of his feelings

and longings. His ardent desire to see the one whom every eye longs to see, every mind cherishes to experience, expresses certain sublime characteristics of his personality: his craving for the divine, his humanness, childlike simplicity, sense of wonder and appreciation, profound sense of gratitude and also his open-mindedness to see greatness in little things. Just like a child who enjoys the sweetness of honey, Bl. Chavara meditates on the Emmanuel. For that he imagines the different stages of the child Jesus' growth in the immaculate womb of the blessed mother and the subsequent events relating to Mary's journey to Bethlehem. See how he narrates those events:

How He stayed for nine months
In the womb of His mother, I long to see
Borne in her womb, to Bethlehem he came
To obey mighty Caesar, I long to see (III, 10-13).

The birth of God in a manger
From the town rejected, I long to see (III, 19-20).

The holy child gazing at his mother
With darling eyes, I long to see
The lips enkindled with a smile
The fire of love, I long to see (III, 29-32).

Bl. Chavara is contemplating the events relating to the incarnation not as an event that happened in the past but rather as an event that is happening before his eyes at present. He ponders over it in his mind and makes it a part and parcel of his life itself. Yes, the experience of God with us - Emmanuel - has become an evergreen experience for him. Because, Jesus himself has assured us of his presence with us by saying "I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:20). One of the important aspects of Bl. Chavara's Christ experience is this firm conviction about the eternal presence of

the Emmanuel who is with him here and now and always. He feels, the Messiah became man for him, he lives in and with him; he is in search of him and waits for him. This conviction enabled him to sing a song of praise as follows:

Emmanuel, Lord, praise to you
Singing carols, I praise you (II, 365-366)

O God Emmanuel, I, a sinner
With love, I adore (III Epilogue, 63-64).

Another aspect of Chavara's Emmanuel experience is his feeling that the Lord God wished to make his abode in his heart:

My Lord the blessed Babe Emmanuel
Did choose to make his dwelling in my heart
(IV, 189-190).

The next moment he expresses his deep sorrow of rejecting his Lord for not giving him a place in his heart and thereby he has become unworthy to receive his blessings. With that sorrow he writes:

But planting my love low on things of the earth
The just one, I ruthlessly drove apart (IV, 191-192).

These feelings of Bl. Chavara are in tune with the words of St. John: "he came unto His own and His own received him not" (Jn1:11). He expresses in a very vivid manner this most tragic situation that exists in the God-man relationship: the rejection of God by his own people whom he himself has created and redeemed. Yes, the almighty God gave up his divine glory and took the form of a humble servant and came to this world in search of his people, for their salvation. But his own people who were leading a

deplorable worldly life went away from him without understanding his steadfast love. Yea, love is not accepted, it is rejected! Bl. Chavara is reflecting on this ingratitude of mankind and he asks in a lamenting mood:

Alas, great city whom have you rejected?
Do you deserve anything again but sorrow?
You did forsake Him and cast him out
Sure, you'll be by Him rejected!

How eagerly did you await Him?
Reputed Kings and all the prophets
Today you've forgotten all the past
When again you wish, you'll not be blest (IV, 173-180).

Moreover, he realizes the truth that those who rejected the Lord may not get another chance to find him. This thought made him turn to his own soul and lament on his own ingratitude of not receiving him whole heartedly. He examined himself and found fault with himself saying:

Why, oh why do I so meanly accuse them
The same through my concupiscence have I done
(IV, 187-188).

He realized that like other people he also rejected the Messiah and so he had no right to judge others. This self-awareness led him to repent over his ingratitude, lack of love, etc. But at the same time, he realizes that the Emmanuel still loves him, He is searching for him, and yearning to abide in him. Because his love is everlasting he is the Redeemer or the Saviour of sinners. Bl. Chavara's child-like trust and confidence in the Lord is one of the remarkable characteristics of his spirituality and Christ experience.

3. God: Redeemer in Search of Sinners

Certain, I ken you haven't cast me off
When I forsook and turned myself away
Still remembering you followed my trail
Did you not subjugate my mind? (VII, 245-248).

Bl. Chavara had the firm conviction that even though he and mankind abandoned the Messiah, who came in search of man, He is his Saviour and also of the whole world. This is one of the most profound insights he acquired from his Christ experience. According to him, even the meek eyes of the infant Emmanuel proclaim this truth and his tender feet are ready to run in search of sinners. See, what he writes:

In your look of mercy I behold
A gentle saviour, not a judge (IV, 165-166)
Your soft lotus feet, I surmise
Are on a race to capture sinners (V, 169-170).

The assertion that Jesus is the saviour and the redeemer of sinners is the backbone of Christian faith. And this is the core of the mystery of God's eternal plan of salvation and the meaning and purpose of the Christ event. Jesus himself was aware of this truth. Being conscious of his mission he says: "God sent the son into the world not to condemn the world but that the world might be saved through him" (Jn. 3:17). St. Paul undersigns this truth when he declares: "the saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners and I am the foremost of sinners" (I Tim 1:15). Bl. Chavara wholeheartedly accepted this revealed truth, experienced it in his life and wrote it as follows:

May your Son, you granted to be
Saviour of all, come forth from the virgin womb (V, 27-28)
You came down below and became man
To give us salvation (III Epilogue, 43-44)
Oh shepherd gracious, seeking lost sheep
You came, save me, I've gone astray (V, 173-174).

While meditating on the agony of Jesus at Gethesemane, Bl. Chavara experienced the forgiving and condescending love of God. In the 7th stanza of *Atmanuthapam*, especially in verses 257-276, he describes the unending, merciful love of Christ at Gethesmane. Bl. Chavara feels and considers the agony of Jesus in the garden as the agony of the good shepherd who is going after the lost sheep and he identifies himself with the lost one. In the afore-mentioned passage, the author is pouring out his feelings like a redeemed sheep. He says: The son of Almighty God, the fount of mercy, the eternal Son of God, co-existent with the Lord of God, the sovereign of mankind, the royal son of David, the one who is adored by nine choirs of angels is seen searching in midnight. What is he searching for and whom is he seeking? Oh! he is searching for no one else, but me alone! I am his beloved sheep. Yea, He came to the world in search of me and he searched for me for thirty three years. He wandered through hills and valleys, mountains and streams; he wandered up and down over sharp stones and thorns, deserting his Father's divine lap. Everything was for me, me alone! And he calls me to his side (VII, 257-276). In the gloomy atmosphere of Gethsemane, the spotless shepherd carried the burden of the sin of mankind on his shoulders, and got ready to sacrifice himself on the top of mount Calvary - on the altar of love - and thereby he proved that 'greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends' (Jn. 15:13). He feels that even at these moments of agony and fear of death, his good shepherd is in search of him and his hands are extending to embrace him. Bl. Chavara experienced this greater love of God and he realized in himself the salvation accomplished by his good shepherd and thereby he conquered the very heart of his beloved. This Christ experience of Bl. Chavara is something mystical rather than empirical. Because, in his life he experienced the unlimited love of God and that was as vast

as the universe and as deep as the ocean. That is why he could turn to his beloved Emmanuel as frequently as he wished and be able to confess his emptiness and sinfulness before him with the hope of not being abandoned.

4. Christ: Father and Mother

At the zenith of his God experience, Bl. Chavara calls Christ, the second person of the Holy Trinity, Father. It is particularly when he meditates on the agony of Jesus that he calls him 'Father' most affectionately. The following lines of *Athmanuthapam* which describe the agony of Jesus standing before Pilot explicitate this fact :

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

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

His words divine he recalled to his mind
"I am your Father, I'm your loving God
Yet, you thrust this cruel spear in my heart"
Alas, my father, my creator, my Lord (VII, 331-334)

As noted above, about eight times the blessed calls Jesus 'Father' in the seventh stanza of *Atmanuthapam* (VII, 223, 286, 343, 345, 416, 419, 532, 548; also in VIII, 61, 63 etc.).

When he meditates on the passion of Jesus he calls Him 'Abba' in his *Dhyanasallapam* too (Colloquies with the heavenly Father):

Oh merciful Father, I am unable to raise my eyes and look at your face. Lord looking at your holy head, I feel frightened to think how it came to be pierced with thorns.... O my Father how graceful; is your face! The rapturous Song of David in praise of the beauty of your face rings in my ears....But, my Father, my heart now gets heavy to look at your face..... Alas! I myself disfigured my Father's face, the beauty of which David the prophet sang plentifully.... (Complete Works of Bl. Chavara, Vol.III, p.6.)

This extraordinary style of addressing Jesus as the Father expresses his unison with the divine persons, than his ignorance. It is also an indication of his mystical union with the second person of the Trinity who himself says: "I and my Father are one" (Jn 10:30).

As we have already seen, it is when Bl. Chavara contemplated the passion of Christ that he addresses Jesus as 'Father'. It may be because when he meditated on the passion of Christ that he experienced the intensity of God's undefinable love in its depth and perceived the manifestation of that love in the self-oblation of Jesus on the Cross. The overwhelming love led him to a mystical realm that was beyond the categories of human mind and intellect. This enabled him to ignore the difference between Father and Son.

Bl. Chavara's Christ experience has another aspect. For him Christ is not only his Father but also his mother. See what he writes:

You like a father patiently followed my trail
Whispered unto my heart, "you are my love
Mark ye, my son, a good Father am I
And a mother both" – you filled my mind (VII, 343-346).

We don't come across many spiritual works in which God is described or addressed as mother. But there are clear references in the Scripture presenting God as a loving mother. For example, Prophet Isaiah says: "Can a mother forget her sucking child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even if she forgets, I shall not forget you" (Is 49:15-16). Again, Jesus is saying in Mathew: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem How often would I have gathered your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not" (Mt 23:37). In these passages, the scripture highlights another sublime character of God's love, maternal care. Now Bl. Chavara recalled, the caring, forgiving, self-giving, tender and merciful love of his 'mother' – Christ – who searched for him, carried his sins, healed his sickness and sacrificed His life for him. It is this heartfelt, sweet experience of the maternal love of Messiah that made his life beautiful like a green pasture, fruitful like a vineyard, sheltering like a tree and dynamic like a running stream.

5. Messiah: Son of God and Son of the Virgin

Bl. Chavara experienced not only the fatherhood and motherhood of Christ in His humanity; but also the divine realm of his personality as the Son of God. He knew that the child who was born of the virgin was not simply a human person, but the Son of the Almighty. The following lines of *Atmanuthapam* that praise the glory of Messiah explicitate his faith in the very personality of Christ who is both human and divine:

The son of God the angel placed
In the mother's arm I long to see (III, 27-28)

God Almighty, the fountain of all goodness
The King of kings, Omniscient Lord of all

The second person of the Holy Trinity
The Lord borne by the Queen of the world (IV, 29-32).

That Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God, is a revealed truth. Bl. Chavara's confession of this truth shows how deep his faith experience is. As it is evident from the Scripture, Jesus laid the foundation of the Church on the firm rock of faith confessed by Peter: "You are the Christ, son of the living God" and He appointed Peter as the leader of his flock. Likewise, Jesus appointed Bl. Chavara who was a man of faith and hope, to lead His flock, to the green pastures and to become a 'lamp' to his people.

Again, through faith, he saw the Son of God in his humanity, in the Son of Mary. With that same faith he saw the Son of God in the least of his brethren and that enabled him to do selfless service to the needy and the oppressed. The faith experience of Bl. Chavara was therefore a perfect blending of his Christ experience and the experience of universal brotherhood. It was this same experience that enabled him to see the Church – though imperfect in its visible aspects – as a divine mystery: ie, the people of God, the mystical body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit. This profound faith vision strengthened him to dedicate himself for the building up of the Body of Christ amidst all kinds of trials and troubles.

6. Christ Experience through the Cross

When we think of the Christ experience of Bl. Chavara, it is appropriate to reflect on his vision and experience of the Cross. He says: in order to bring his beloved children before His Father, Jesus was eagerly waiting to embrace the Cross, ie, his crucifixion. Bl. Chavara narrates this as if Jesus is saying His feelings. In fact, that was his spiritual

vision and insight on the Cross. He knows that, the Cross is the divine instrument of salvation.

O Cross, beloved, open your arms wide
And in your loving embrace quickly close me (VIII, 13-14).

Here Bl. Chavara acclaims with enthusiasm and joy his spiritual experience of the Cross as if they were the feelings and utterings of Jesus. He was ready to embrace the Cross of Christ and was longing to bear it for the sake of others. He accepted it in his life as a symbol of his love towards the Messiah.

Again he says: Jesus is longing to have a deep sleep on the Cross. Because, only on the Cross Jesus can offer his self-sacrifice for the atonement of the sins of the humanity. He also admits that the Cross is the strongest weapon against Satan, it is the key to open the gate of heaven. Moreover, it is through the Cross that the whole of humanity has become one tribe of Jesus, the Messiah. And they have become the children of his Father and the heirs of heavenly treasures. Hence he thinks that many will seek the path of the Cross and follow Him who is their Saviour, because the only means of salvation is the Cross and that is the way of the Messiah. Through his death on the Cross he made the whole humanity as one children of God and thereby humanity has become brothers and sisters in Him. This is the profound insight Bl. Chavara imbibed through his meditation on the salvific death of Jesus on the Cross. By personalizing the attitude of the crucified one concerning the Cross, he experienced its sweetness and salvific grace.

Bl. Chavara's positive outlook and the spiritual experience of the Cross enabled him to overcome all the hardships, misunderstandings, problems and sufferings in his

life. He realized that Christ-experience without the Cross is null and void. Only the Cross can give depth and width to our Christ experience and that makes one to identify himself/herself with Christ. To become like Christ means this identification. This is actually the identification mark of a saint, a true follower of Christ. The secret of Bl. Chavara's life, mission and holiness resides in such identification.

Conclusion

Our father and founder Bl. Chavara is a man of God who reached the apex of divine experience through the personal experience of the incarnate Son of God. 'Through Jesus to the Father and to humanity' was his life principle. Thus his life was both God and man-oriented. The underlying spirit of him who sang "you are my love, fortune, breath and food" is as that of St. Paul: "it is no longer I but Christ who lives in me". Let Bl. Chavara, who enlightened a period of time in history through his life filled with Christ-experience enlighten us, inspire us and strengthen us to live a life according to the plan of God for us.

CHAPTER XXVI

Marian Vision of Athmanuthapam

LISIEUX THERESE, CMC

Introduction

The Bible teaches the history of humans turning away from and towards God. In the Bible the Hebrew word "*shub*" signifies a total openness or turning towards God in Bible cordial invitation to turn to Him. Christ the son of God is the best example for this total openness to God. The essence of the teachings of Jesus and the miracles we see in the Bible are all but a call to turn to God the Father. This call comprises the humans and the cosmos in its totality. The Holy Trinity is said to be a total openness or total turning to each other. God the Father is one with the Son as the Son is towards the Father through the Holy Spirit. The story of the Holy Family is a *shub* story. Mary and Joseph lived a life of being turned to Jesus.

Athmanuthapam is a story of turning to God the Father as experienced by Blessed Chavara. The first two chapters of *Athmanuthapam* give us a briefing about his childhood. In the first part he describes how he had been experiencing the closeness of God at different stages of his life. That God the Father is totally turned to him is the basis of his yearning for total turning to God. Through the heavenly Family he understands the depth of the mercy that God the Father had on him. Within this immense mercy when he turns to God he

sees only his shortcomings. This realization his turn to the Holy Family with hope.

Tapasbhavanam and *Darsanabhavanam* were meant to facilitate a life of turning to God as described above. The desire to see God is realized through *darsanabhavanam*. The real darsanam is a spiritual ecstasy by merging with the object of love. This desire is expressed using the word *Kanakenam*. *Athmanuthapam* also is a description of the contemplative experience. How can one reach this stage? he says: "Stay constantly in His presence. Walk along with Him. Converse with Him continuously". (Letters 7:6)

He sees the Holy Family as the earthly symbol of Holy Trinity. The life of the Holy Family is one of turning to God the Father. Blessed Chavara has seen in the Holy Family the paradigm and pattern of being oriented to united to the other in God. He added the title Holy Family to his name and allowed the Holy Family to reign in him. He proclaimed this fact in his last words: "I have always visualized, remembered and venerated the Holy Family in my Heart".

Blessed Mary has an important role in the Holy Family. She is the model for turning to God, visualizing Him as well as becoming one with Him. Blessed Chavara looks up at the Trinity by turning to Mary, the Mother of Jesus. *Kanakenam* is related to the life of Mary and in the third section of *Athmanuthapam* the emphasis on it in relation to Mary is particularly noticeable.

The Lord of mercy, the Son of God
His glorious Splendour, I long to see
The nativity of God the highest
From mercy, the virgin, I long to see
How he stayed for nine months
In the womb of his mother I long to see

How his mother to the temple brought him
As enforced by law, I long to see. (3: 1-2, 9-12, 65-66)

Dividing Athmanuthapam into four parts let us look at the Marian vision of Blessed Chavara.

1. Chapter 1-2: The concern and love he experienced from God the Father, his own family and his response in return are described.
2. Chapter 4-9: Through the Holy Family and life in Christ, he sees the blessed Mother.
3. Chapter 10-12: describe the glorious vision of the Mother Mary.
4. Through the life of Mary he sees himself and the history of the Church; he becomes one with the story of Mary.

1. Turning to Holy Mother Through His Own Mother

the first two chapters describe the influence of God in his life and the mercy he experienced. The very fact that God gave him a mother is the sign of God's concern for him. He describes all the circumstances that lead to turn to Holy Mother through his own mother.

Long hours, on her knee in prayer she stayed
Leaning on her then I would seat myself
While devoutly a string of pious words
To Mother of God and the Christ, King of Kings. (1:53-60)

Listing a few:

1. His mother taught him a lot of prayers to Mother Mary, 1:59
2. Even in his infancy he was taken to the Church at Vechoor near Kainakary and she surrendered him to the Holy Mother.
3. Every year (on 8th of September) with his mother he visited the Church where Mother Mary was venerated. (2:17-20)

4. A sum of money (in honour of Mary) was given to the Church every year until his death. (2:21-22)

2. Turning to the Holy Mother through the Holy Family

The Holy Family is the merging of Heaven and earth. They love each other, charge each other and respond to each other. Blessed Chavara merges with the life and experience of Jesus, Mary and Joseph and his outstanding experience is seen in *Athmanuthapam*.

Blessed Chavara visualizes in his *Athmanuthapam* all events in the life of Christ since birth. In the fourth chapter, as he narrates the journey to Bethlehem, he feels that all the pain, troubles they had to bear are because of his sins. To see the Emmanuel-infant Jesus-he also pray and waits along with Joseph and Mary. The life of Holy Family centres round Jesus Christ. In other words, they are moved by the words of God. The 'word' is the one that gives light to the whole world like the sun to the earth. Holy Mother is interested in showing the world the 'word' shining like the sun and she is praying for it.

O Father, sea of Mercy, your Spirit
The Lord, took birth in my womb
The Blessed Gem of your Son I pray
Place in my arms, that men may see (5:43-460).

How the Holy Mother shows the 'word' to the world is described as below:

Beloved Mother, watch over me
Show yourself a mother to me (5:76-80).

The Child Jesus invites his mother as a disciple to follow him. Here Blessed Virgin has a double role as mother as well as disciple. She is the first one in the Kingdom of God fulfilling the will of God the Father. This was her vocation. By looking after and also following the 'word' Mary fulfilled her role and

showed the world that she is the mother of the saviour of the world. Mary responded in the following way on hearing Jesus' words.

Mary seeing her creator then
In the miniature of her child
reverently kissed His Blessed Feet
And His hand as the King of Kings (5:83-86)

Though the Word has taken birth on the earth in a pathetic and shameful way, it is an experience of glory. Holy mother knew this secret. After explaining the self-emptying process Chavara turns to Holy Mother and proclaims it in the following way: "The child born is your creator as well as your beloved Son and his greatness is known to you" (2: 221-224). In short, the Holy Mother lived centering round the 'word'; showing the 'word' in the world; carrying his wishes as a disciple and praising the Lord. These were the activities the Holy Mother carried out in her life. Blessed Chavara also took these as his way of life.

In the sixth Chapter, the Holy Mother through conversation with Santhi, the shepherdess, clears her doubts and explains how God turned to humans and lived with them. God as man, through forgiveness and obedience bears all sufferings in his body shedding blood and sowing the godly qualities of compassion and mercy in the humanity. Further, shaking with fear, she also asks about the second coming of Jesus. To this Chavara answers that holy mother is his heaven when all men are trembling in fear.

Come Sweet Lady, station you before Him
Queen of the worlds with your mantle, shield me ! (6:215, 228)

When Jesus arrives for the second time to judge the word, the holy Mother also will be with him. The Mother will show her mercy for him. He sees the Holy Mother as the seat

of mercy and compassion. He is one who finds protection in the Holy Mother as her servant.

3. The Servant of the Holy Mother

Chavara sees himself as the servant of the Holy Mother when he describes his experience with the holy family.

1. He declares that he was the servant of the Holy Mother since childhood.

You helped and guarded me, your very own (2:251-252)
Handing me o'er to my mother, the august priest
Declared in deliberate tone thus to her
"Tend him with care; know you that he is no more yours
But Our Lady's-solemn your scars bond (2:12-16)

2. He joins the legion of Mary which is itself a recognition of his position as a servant. (7:189)

3. To be a servant of the Holy Mother is considered as luck and a boon. It is given by the Holy Mother. Chavara repents several times, as he cannot reach the expected level of servant hood as described elsewhere in the Holy Bible.

So, he, with the freedom of a son, reminds the Holy Mother that he is a servant and repeats it more than twenty times in the *Athmanuthapam*. There are passages where he reminds the holy Mother about it:

1. Mary my mistress, remember now your servant (4:205).
2. Save me by remembering that I am your servant (2:286)
3. Remember me, intercede with your Son grant me a happy death and salvation (4: 209-210).

In 7:193-200, he describes how Holy Mother took him as 'dasan' i.e., Servant, "embracing him with hands, joined to her feet". He considers this as a special gift. He takes the Holy Mother as an example to follow in his life. He lays his life fully at the feet of the Holy Mother. He is a worshipper of Holy

Mary because he is a '*dasan*' servant of Holy Mary. He liked to live praising her and thus adoring the master, the creator.

4. The Names of Mary

In the Bible a name identifies not only the person but indicates his character as well. In the old Testament God gave names to Abraham and Jacob. They receive their new names because of the personal relationship with God. To give a new name to a person means to accept his personality and increase his overall fame. Blessed Chavara who was a devotee of Mary gives several names to Mother Mary. As in the religious practice by Hindus in India, Chavara also praised Holy Mother through the recital of synonyms of the Mother of God. Just as Jesus Christ loved and died so as to bring glory to God the Father, Chavara also merged with the name of Mother Mary.

Examples: Queen of Virgins (2:221)
Immaculate treasure of grace (7:141)
Mother benign (4:1)
Mother Merciful (4:82)
Door of Carmel (7:184)
Star of the Sea (6:36)
Queen of the worlds (6:228)
Crown of woman kind (4:1)

5. Quotations from the Bible

This is another form of praising with synonyms. Here Mary is connected with her role with Jesus and his mission in the world. In *Atmanuthapam* we can see several quotations repeated from the Holy Bible.

1. In 4:1-12 it is stated how the assurance of God is fulfilled on Mary. Genesis 3:14-15 is fulfilled here.

"The Son born of her, your head shall crush
Under foot without fail".

2. Ark of the Covenant (4:53). 1 Kings 8:6 speaks about the construction of the Church at Jerusalem by King Solomon, where he placed the ark of the covenant after writing the words given by God on stone plates. Only the priest could approach and touch the Ark of the Covenant. But this is not the case in the New Testament. In the New Testament God is near to all. It is Mary who conceived the 'Word' in the womb and presented it to the world. The contrast is made in the following way:

Even to approach the Ark and bear it
None but the Chief Priest was granted leave
But Lord, your loving mother, oh the contrast
On her bare feet, walks across thorns and dust. (4:64-68)

In chapter 13:22 and 197-211 reference is made to the Ark of the Covenant. King Solomon desired to install the Ark of the Covenant in the Church at Jerusalem. In that Jerusalem, the Son of God willed to bring the Holy Mother with all praises. Thus the Holy Mother became the Holy Church bearing the Ark of the Covenant and the agreement. She was sacred and exclusively meant for God.

6. The Holy Mother in the Mystery of Christ

Leading a life centering round the 'word', the Holy Mother's participation in the mystery of the Passover is also very clearly described in Athmanuthapam. In the seventh section the crucifixion scenes of Christ is described. The eighth section describes the journey of Jesus into a life of glory. Not only that because of the prayer of the Holy Mary, Simon comes forward to carry the cross helping Christ and when she desired to see the face of Christ, angels pave the way by separating people on the way thus guiding the mother to see the son's face. During this occasion of glory, Christ addresses the blessed Mother as the Mother of all. The ninth chapter

describes the last stages of the crucifixion of Jesus. Holy Mary consults with the angels on the burial of the sacred body of Christ (9/6-10).

It is because of the prayer of Mother Mary that Lonkinose who stabbed Christ with a spear on his chest, got his eyesight back. The next section is called 'The Mother's Grief' which is a description of the mental agony of the Blessed Mother. Each scene of the crucifixion of Christ passes through her mind and she experiences great mental agony.

7. The Life of Blessed Virgin Mary in Full Glory

The life of Mary was to attain glory, as in the case of Christ. Except for the final prayer, along with the description of the Resurrection and Ascension in chapters 10-12, a good portion is the description of the glorified life of Mother Mary. Here the description made as to how blessed Mary turned to the Holy Trinity and lived in complete union with the Holy Trinity. In the tenth section it is further narrated that the Holy Mother gets engaged in the service of the Church. It is after this that Holy Mother is taken to the fully glorified state. Serving the Church she leads it also to glory. Glorification or assumption to heaven is expressed by using the words 'raising or lightening up'. At this stage Chavara reaches a state of trance. The vision of the Holy Trinity to Holy Mary becomes his own experience. In the tenth section where the glorified life of the Holy Mother is explained only on four occasion Chavara mentions about him.

1. 10:30-36

The beloved Son then approached her
With love intense, close he held her
What a heavenly effulgence!
Powerless am I to narrate!

That is, after the resurrection, it is seen that Jesus comes and embraces the Holy Mother. Chavara says that he is powerless to illustrate the spiritual ecstasy experienced by the Holy Mother.

2. 10:37-42. Here the Holy Trinity asks the Holy Mother 'ascend my beloved'. Then the Holy Mother spends her time in full happiness and Chavara confesses that this words are limited to describe the event.

3. 10:120. Chavara finds that it is beyond the power of his tongue to speak about the ecstasy felt by the Holy Mary at the time of 'Jesus' ascending to heaven.'

4. 10:129-130. While mentioning about the gifts the Holy Mother had on the occasion of Pentecost, Chavara says that they are inexplicable by him.

The Narration of a Vision

10:28-44: This is the scene when Jesus appears to mother Mary after the Resurrection. With love he lifts up the Holy Mother and embraces her. It is said that the son has come and lifted her up in love. In this situation the sound was heard: *Beloved! ascend!*

2. 10:65-78: It is said that the oratory in the name of Holy Mother was filled with a dazzling light. When the Holy Trinity approved in vision Mary prostrates herself and worships them. Then also a sound is heard as before.

7. 11:224-228: It is mentioned that the Son of God lifts up the Holy Mother who is seated in a lovely chariot towards God the Father. There the holy Trinity praises the Immaculate Conception of the Holy Mother.

8. 11:353-375: The Son of God calls the Holy Mother 'beautiful dove'. While falling at the feet of the Son the Holy Mother experiences great joy.

9. 11:417-418: When the Holy Mother meditates in the oratory on God, the Holy Trinity arrives in all glory and approves the death will of the Holy Mother.

10. 12:189: Impelled by the Holy Spirit angels sang: 'my loved one, ascend'

11. 12:249-251: The same words are quoted as in *Song of songs*. When the bridegroom speak to the bride:

My love, sweet my dove, come forth!
Winter's gone and summer's here
In my land have blossoms bloomed
The mother then gazed at her Son.

Thus, it is narrated that the life of the Holy Mother 'ascends towards heaven. This is because of the Holy Spirit living in her and her total submission to the Holy Trinity. The reason for the death of the Holy Mother is pure love. With love Holy Mother transformed disease and death as nectar on the earth.

After being unified with life of Holy Mother Chavara turns to himself in the Final Prayer. Then he sees himself no mere *dasan* but as *dasi* (hand maid). Like Mary her beloved son is transformed into *dasi*.

8. Holy Mother in the Service of the Church

The relationship between Holy Mother and Church is described from the tenth section onwards. The Resurrection of Jesus, the vision of Holy Mother and has ascension to heaven is described in the beginning of the chapter. Thereafter, the coming of the Holy Spirit at Zion, the increase in membership of the primitive Church, the role of Holy Mother in the

conversion of Saul, the assembly in Jerusalem in the presence of the Holy Mother are described. The Holy Mother who had the vision of glorification becomes the protector of the Holy Church. In 10:81-84 the Heavenly Father hands over the Church to the Holy Mother. "O, daughter, you may protect the believers in the newly built Church founded by Your Son and my Son Jesus when he was in this world."

1. "Always remaining in prayer the Holy Mother fights against evil and protects the sheep of Christ (10: 139-140).

2. The Holy Mother like her Son leads a life of glory by taking up the cross (11: 56-64).

3. The Holy Mother leads a simple and poor life in the world (11: 113-114; 10: 216-220).

4. She accents Peter as the leader of the Church (11: 33-40; 12: 23-28).

5. The Church is a ship sails through the world ocean. Thus during the period of darkness and struggle the Holy Mother extends close help to the Church (10: 221-404).

6. The Holy Mother declares that she is the daughter of the Church (11: 397-416). With that attitude she proclaims:

"You are truly my mother, my heaven
My glory and prism, by you I will reach.
You my solace, my sorrows yours
Your chief my Head shall be" (11: 407-410).

9. Request for Mercy

In the view of Chavara, Mary is Mother as well as mediator. The motherly affection towards humanity is the foundation for the mediatorship. In 11:365-368 Chavara sees Jesus saying to Holy Mother as follows:

And once you have entered Heaven
 To absolve these from stain of sin
 and be the succor of men who sin
 Your duty would be to pray for them.

From this view develops the mercy prayers. Mercy and sympathy are words seen frequently in *Athmanuthapam*. Whenever he sees himself as 'sinful servant' he depends on the mercy of the Blessed Mother. He also demands mercy of the Holy Mother and trust in her mercy. (6:205-212, 7:129-141). The Final Prayer is a mercy prayer.

1. "You alone my hope, none else have" 1. 6:206
2. "Grant me succor, my mother, my hope" 7:213.
3. "Beset with terror, my heart would be sore my lady
 Grant me your mercy then, oh fill me with solace."
 (The Final Prayer, 19-20)
4. "O benign mistress succor me, I pray

At the hour of my death, save me with care" (The Final Prayer, 75-76)

Conclusion

When we go through the *Athmanuthapam* from the Marcan perspectives what fills our mind is the Christian principle of 'to Jesus through Mary'. The role and the involvement of Mary in the life of Christ is the basis of the Glory of the Holy Mother. This fact was fully understood by Chavara as the '*dasan*' of Mary. That is why he says: 'If I can get a portion of your miseries in life everything becomes OK for me' (7: 164).

It is thoroughly *kanakenam* (seeing act) the this process finds its fulfillment. It may be said that the Marian vision as experienced by Chavara is flourished through this seeing act.

The Marian vision of blessed Chavara is based on the Bible, Church teachings and his experience. If Chavara

experiences such a great vision, then the inquisitiveness and sacrificial mind behind this cannot be forgotten. To script the *Athmanuthapam*, he might have got the inner thrust and vision through different ways. It can be seen that the book 'The City of God' by Maria de Agreda has influenced him. It can be stated undoubtedly that *Athmanuthapam* is the flow of God's love from the heart of Chavara rather than giving mere knowledge. This contains a great mystic experience. In a way his story becomes that of the Holy Mother and vice versa.

Athmanuthapam ends with the efforts of his life as a gift to the Holy Mother.

"O Virgin Mother, behold me your servant
For recounting in little your sacred life on earth
With my tongue impure, to me your slave
Grant that your tongue speak a word of hope
For writing with my hand this your life
Forgive my sins, that I may look upon your face
To fold my hands before your loving Son
Grant me your grace my mother divine, my queen".
(The Final Prayer, 1-8)

What is written is the history of the Holy Mother. In the story of blessed Virgin, he tries to see himself and he pleads for forgiveness from the sins. After this, his whole life is placed in the hands of the Holy Mother. In this sense, *Athmanuthapam* is a poem submitted to Mary. In short, it is a poem praising Mary.

CHAPTER XXVII

Chavara

The Dynamic Hermeneut of the Word

A Study of the Biblical Motifs Underlying the Work
Colloquies (Dhyana Sallapangal)

PAUL KALLUVEETTIL, CMI

1. Prologue

The modern word 'hermeneut', interpreter, derives from the Greek verb *Hermeneuin*, interpret. A true interpretation involves a threefold process: expression, explanation and translation.

Jesus was the interpreter of the word of God. He 'expressed' it by his whole person — making it a living and loving, inviting and involving, provoking and demanding word, which caused the temple guards to exclaim, "No one ever spoke the way he does" (Jn 7:46). Jesus 'explained' the word in such a way as to leave even the peasant folk spellbound at his teaching (Mt. 7:28) and they remained with him the whole day (Lk. 9:12), without food and drink. And the divine hermeneut 'translated' the Old Testament word. The original Latin 'translates' means 'being carried across'. Jesus took the OT world and merge with his contemporary context. Thus he made the 'written' word of the Bible a "Speaking word — directly addressing and arousing his audience, which

caused his adversaries to complain that "the whole world has gone after him" (Jn. 12:19).

Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara was a gifted hermeneut of the Bible, a true disciple of Jesus, the interprets par excellence. His whole personality was an *expression* of the word of God. Chavara's works attest how deeply he could explain the Bible in his own life situation. And there took place the meeting and merging of the word of God in his own life. He 'translated' the Bible; the word of God became his own word.

A humble attempt is made here to study Chavara's spiritual work *Dhyana Sallapangal*, the contemplative Colloquies, from a biblical perspective. It is based on the original Malayalam text.

II Preliminary Observations

The work 'Colloquies' is thoroughly biblical. The ever pervading and underlying stream of thought and insight of the themes of the Book is the word of God. The topics of discussion as well as the style of presentation draw their inspiration and vitality from the Bible. Chavara appears here as an enthusiastic interpreter of the word of God. Let us come to details.

The author frequently cites the Bible texts. Sometimes citations are presented with an *Introductory Phrase*, Thus there exist 14 examples of the Bible texts with an Introductory Phrase.

1. "As Father Jacob said to the angel ..." (p. 18)
2. "As my father *David* sings that ..." (p. 19)
3. "The *divine verse*, he calls the daughters of Zion" (p. 22)
4. "The *holy word* 'You will be with me in the paradise'" (p. 20)

5. *"You yourself declares that nobody will live who sees your face" (p.24)*
6. *"The Holy Bible attests that you sent the angel to give away the commandments and the archangel to guard you on the way" (p.24)*
7. *"As says in the infallible book which contains your holy words ..."* (p. 24)
8. *"As you said, there is a time of justice and a time of grace" (p. 26)*
9. *"As your Holy Word ... disagreed that no one can recognize the figure of your Son" (p. 28)*
10. *"This holy word which our father Peter the apostle says" (p. 35)*
11. *"(The words) uttered by your holy mouth : 'there comes the night when nobody can work" (p. 35)*
12. *"The great saint Job the sage says in dread, 'what could I do when the Lord stands up to judge'" (p.35)*
13. *"The Lord calls the call, 'come to me all you who labour and bear the burden of sin, and I will refresh you" (p.36)*
14. *"In order to inform, the holy apostle loudly proclaimed, 'this is the time of your greatest grace of pardon and love'" (p. 38)*

In the light of these observations let us enter into the world of the book.

III. The Biblical Word of Colloquies

Here we find three types of texts: those which are explicit citations from the Bible, those which exhibits implicit overtones of Biblical phrases, and those which are interpretative or hermeneutical texts.

1. Explicit Texts

See the sentence on the page 37 : " ... will not cry or make his voice heard in the street, or will not quench the dimly burning lamp or to do not break a bruised reed." This is

a citation from Isaiah 42:2-3. I could identify 43 explicit texts in *Colloquies*.

2. Implicit or Allusive Texts

It is difficult to locate this type of texts. Indeed, it is a stream of thought which underlies in the whole work of Chavara. For instance, the author says, "closing my ears against all these voices, I walked" (p.37). This is an allusion to Psalm 58:4-5, "... like the adder that stops its ear so that it does not hear the voice of the Charmers". A good number of the passages of *Colloquies* reflect such implicit texts of the Bible. I could count more than 70 instances.

3. Interpretative Texts

This third type of texts presents Chavara's original explanations and personal interpretations of the word of God. These personal adaptations or applications of Bible themes are quite interesting and inspiring. See, for instance, the hermeneutics of the parable of the wedding banquet (p.13). According to Mt. 22:11-13 there was a man who came to the banquet without wearing a wedding garment. Chavara comments thus on this event. If he had merely said a word, he would have provided one. The one who invited him has enough resources to supply it. But he did not ask for it. He thought that it did not matter at all. Therefore, he was thrown into the outer darkness. Now Chavara gives a new and very personal dimension to this part of the parable. He is similar to, and at the same time different from that character of the parable. Although he himself came to the nuptial banquet without wearing the wedding robe, he dared to ask for it. And Chavara got it. Here the author gives to the parable a radically new and original interpretation. He makes the word of God

his own, he applies it to his own person. Here a new sort of hermeneutics takes from.

Besides this interpretation of the parable of the wedding banquet the Colloquies provides us six other examples for this type of 'translation' of the biblical texts. Thus altogether there are seven interpretative texts in the book. They are merely mentioned in this article.

1. The 'translation' of the parable of the wedding banquet (already explained),
2. The personal hermeneutics of the parable of the prodigal son of Lk. 15:11-24 (see pages 16-17).

3. The new hermeneutical explanation of the event of Sinai Theophany and the sojourn of Moses on that mountain, as narrated in Exodus 19:16-20, 24; 15-18, 33; 18-23 (see pages 24-25), shows how Chavara appropriates the episode: "I am struck with fear to enter this chapel the mountain of your abode, like the Israelites who were afraid to climb up the mount Sinai, He is *not merely comparing* the chapel to Sinai. Daringly he asserts that the chapel itself is the mount of theophany. He identifies the prayer room to Sinai. Thus the world of Chavara is the world of metaphors. He is not satisfied to live in the world of comparisons and similes. This is the originality of Chavara's hermeneutical interpretation of the Bible.

4. The interpretation of the story of Zachaeus of Lk. 19:1-6 (see pages 39, 41): Chavara 'translates', i.e., carries across the story of the biblical character to his own life. The author identifies himself with Zachaeus. "I, your slave, am the poor Zachaeus" (p. 41). " (You deigned) to come to the house,

i.e., the heart of your servant who is more wretched and sinful than Zachaeus" (p. 39).

5. The hermeneutical applications of the parable of the lost sheep of Lk. 15:1-7, (p. 27): Chavara himself is that strayed sheep. Jesus the good shepherd says to him: "In search of you I wandered along forests and hill-tops, seas and mountains, because I loved you and had resolved to take you to my royal house." See how the original parable assumes new dimensions in the text. In the Colloquies Jesus is in pursuit of Chavara, he wanders and wanders, the resolute shepherd climbs up hill tops and mountains, he goes through every nook and corner of the forests. The tireless one even descends into the sea and goes on from one end to the other end of the sea. While the gospel does not explicate the motive of the search, the shepherd of Chavara says: "because I loved you and had resolved to take you to my royal house."

6. The beautiful hermeneutical explanation of the Birth of Jesus (pp. 26, 27, 30): Let me cite a part of a text: "*To find out you I stepped down from my throne. Behold I was born as a son of a (human) creature, that you may have no fear of me... when I was born as a baby for your sake, I and my poor mother had merely an old cage for animals...*" The son of God took human form on account of three reasons which are very personal and intimately related to Chavara: "To find you out", that you may have no fear of me" "for your sake."

7. The very touching 'translation' of the passion (pp. 22, 23, 28, 29) which makes the climax of Chavara's biblical interpretation.

An analysis of the allusive and interpretative texts of the colloquies establishes two important points:

1. Chavara lived up to the Word-spirit of Psalm 119. He loved the word of God and held it in deep veneration. The author of the Colloquies, in imitation of Mother Mary, treasured the Word of God in his heart and reflected over it (cf. Lk. 2:19, 51). He nourished it, made it grow and assimilated it into his very person. It became one with his heart-beats and integrated to his very self. Chavara found his great joy and bliss in the Word. The blessed writer made it the very breath of his soul. He himself became the self-expression, the loving formulation and the living 'translation' of the Word. The heremeneut made the word his food. Like the prophet Ezekiel he voraciously ate it and filled his being with it (cf. Ez. 3:1-3). It provided him with a biblically oriented self-realization.

2. The divine word grow through Chavara. Here we find the special trait of the biblical word: it grows and grows till the end of time, till the dawn of eternity. The word of God is never static or passive. It takes 'flesh' i.e., different forms in different existential situations. The 'text' assumes a contextual form. It has to become his or her personal word. Otherwise, one may say, the Word loses its divine character and vitality, and turns into a 'dead' word.

The dynamic dimension of the biblical Word is incarnated in Chavara. The Word grow through this blessed one. He himself became the paradigm and pattern of the growing Word. The author brought out of the word-treasure both the new and the old (cf. Mt. 13:51). He entered into unknown dimensions of the biblical world and dared to translate it in radically new ways. There took place a wonderful identification with the text of the Bible. To cite some instances, Chavara became the one who asks for the marriage garment when he lacked it. He stood for the symbol of the new covenant community who climbs up the new Sinai

Mount, the chapel. He stood embracing the foot of the cross like Mary Magdalene (p. 31). He became one of the nursing babies who shouted out, "Hosanna to the son of David" (p. 41). He ascended the cross of the good thief and heard the voice in his heart, "Now itself you will be with me in the paradise of my grace" (p. 23).

The writer took the form of the sheep who was healed by the medicine prepared from the wounds and oozing blood of the crucified Saviour and fattened by the tasty food and drink of his body and sweet blood (p. 27). He called himself the converted younger son of Jesus, his dear daddy. Further Chavara became the son of the saying, "Behold your son" which Jesus spoke from the cross to his mother (p. 43). He joined the company of the brides of the Lord (p. 23). He took part in the solemn procession of Jesus towards his nuptial *panthal*, Calvary, on the day of the celebration of his marriage (p. 22). Also he entered into the chamber of the bridegroom and spent the time in intimate conversation with him (p. 4). All these are examples of the three fold acts of hermeneutics: Chavara expresses, explains and translates the word of God. He appropriates and integrates the biblical texts and gives new dimension and dynamism, interiority and intensity to the Word of God. Indeed, Chavara is a charismatic hermeneut.

These observations may be compared to the impression of an artist who stands outside and admires the beauty of the mansions. Now let us dare to enter the interior castle of the Colloquies itself. The following reflections are not to be taken as exhaustive and definitive. Only a Preliminary study is attempted here.

IV. The Triple Biblical Themes of the Colloquies

The Biblical world of Colloquies as already indicated is the world of the metaphors. Chavara in his God-given enthusiasm was not content to remain in the world of similes. With the grace of God he dared into the world of the metaphors and comfortably established himself there. Only those who exhibit a little artistic talent could appreciate, enjoy and involve themselves in this world of metaphors of Colloquies.

The metaphorical world of Colloquies seems to revolve around three themes: the metaphor of the 'Con-verted' Son, the metaphor of Sinai-Zion, and the metaphor of heart as mother's lap.

1. The Metaphor of the 'Con-verted' Son

The traditional understanding of the parable in Luke 15. 11-32 as that of the prodigal son is not correct. It is indeed the story of the one who returns to his home and stays with the father. The Kingdom of God is compared not to the son who squandered the wealth on dissolute living. Rather, Jesus presents the heavenly home as the abode of those converted sinners who have returned to the father. The repentant are joyfully welcomed (Lk. 15:7) and the returned sons never leave the company of the beloved father. Thus our attention is to be focussed on the new style of life on the returned son in his Father's home. The rest of days the son would have spent in loving gratitude towards his father, ever singing the paternal mercies. Only thus one could become the real biblical son of the heavenly father. The audience of Jesus invited to re-turn to God and, like the younger son in the parable live in the kingdom (cfr Mk 1:15), lovingly singing the eternal mercies of the heavenly father. Here the parable becomes, or has to

become, the paradigm and pattern, symbol and metaphor of the disciples of Christ.

Chavara finds in the so called parable of the prodigal son, his own story. He transcends the limits of the similes and enters into the world of metaphors. He is not like the younger son. He indeed, is the very figure of the parable. He becomes the metaphor of the re-turning son of Jesus' story. Chavara freely moves in the world of the metaphor. This new re-turned son lead's a company of his father he finds self-realization. In order to understand the deep and full sense of the concept of 're-turning' son, we have to study the biblical theology of 'turning' theme.

The evangelist Mark thus encapsulates the message of Jesus at the beginning of his ministry (Mk 1:14-15). It has a fourfold dimension.

- (i) the *time* is fulfilled
- (ii) the *kingdom* of God has come
- (iii) *repent* (turn back)
- (iv) *believe* in the good news

The first two statements refer to the same reality. They speak of the already inaugurated time of the Kingdom. The third and fourth sentences are synonymous expressions. To repent is same as to believe. It is now generally agreed that only the second and third proposition formed the original proclamation of Jesus. The first and fourth sentences reflect the early church ambience. The terminology, time and good news, belongs to that early Christian era. Hence the first and fourth formulations may be understood as added to the original words of Jesus, as the explanations of his proclamation. Let us therefore focus our attention on the original saying of Jesus. In him, the kingdom of God has already appeared on the earth. This heavenly reality has to be made one's own. The only way

to appropriate the Kingdom is to 'repent'. The admittance into Jesus' community thus depends upon the act of repentance. It is then of paramount importance to have a correct understanding of the meaning of the expression, 'repent'.

The original Semitic biblical word *shub* is pregnant with sublime sense. It may be simply translated "turn." The whole history of salvation may be epitomized by the word 'turn.' Creation is an act of God's turning to the creatures by which the whole cosmos, every living being is brought into existence. God turned to creation in order to make the whole universe turn to him. The state of remaining turned to God is the vocation, purpose and fulfillment of human existence and that of the world. The act of turning involves different grades and levels. Union with God and its bliss will depend upon the degree of turning.

We may look at the life of the triune God as the most perfect and eternal paradigm of the turning dynamics. The Father is the one who is turned to the other whom we call the Son. In that once-for-all turning act Father gives himself totally and fully to the other person. Thus the Son is the replica and the exact imprint of the father's very being (Heb. 1-3). Son is the person who is perfectly turned to the Father. And the total turning of the Father and the Son entails the being of the Holy Spirit. Thus one may understand the very life of Holy Trinity as the life of turning.

The very call of man to turn to God who has turned to him. It involves different dimensions. First of all he has to turn with his total person. It further demands a turning with the whole humankind as well as with every animate and inanimate being of the universe. When man turns without God to other persons and things - flora and fauna, and mineral kingdom - it becomes sin. That act amounts to turning away

from God. It brings forth in man the feeling of the absence of God as if God has turned away from him. Here comes the concept of punishment. It has a medicinal purpose whereby God wants to make turned-away-man re-turned to himself. When man is engulfed in miseries he will naturally cry to the Lord. It induces him to turn back or re-turn to his Creator. God's design for man will be fulfilled only in so far as he can turn to his maker. One's humanness depends upon the turning, the more one attains the perfection. Christ is the perfect paradigm and pattern of turning (*shub*). Jesus, the son of man, remains, turned to the Father totally. Thus he has become the visible manifestation of the presence of God in the World.

The bible itself is the story of God's turning to man. The history of Israel may be entitled the '*Shub*' story of Yahweh. It is the picture of God who is wedded with Israel. His only desire and dream, ambition and emotion, enthusiasm and ecstasy is how much he could turn to man, how deeper he could become one with man. Man's lack of enthusiasm and co-operation, ingratitude and betrayal do not deter this resolute lover. The biblical God, if one is permitted to say, seems to find his self-realization in the act of union with man. Prophet Hosea has dared to articulate this passion of God in his book, especially in 11:1-9.

This turning dynamics of Yahweh finds its fulfillment in Christ, true God and true man. In Jesus, God himself has in human form turned to us: Christ is the incarnation of the turned-to-man God, as well as the paradigm and pattern of the turned-to-God man. This first born of all creation (Col. 1:15) invites us to integrate our personality by becoming fully man in imitation of him. The more we are turned to God, the more we realize our humanness and enter Christ's kingdom. Jesus, the Alpha and Omega of turning dynamics provides us

assurance and surety, confidence and courage to live this call to integration. "The heavenly kingdom, God's abiding turned-to-the earth, is inaugurated in me-the one who is totally and fully turned to the heavenly father. Return and yours will be the blessing of God's Kingdom. Re-turn, then you could live in God's presence and enjoy heaven on earth" - calls out Jesus, the perfect *Shub* of God (cfr. Mk. 1:14-15).

Let us now turn to Chavara's work. There emerges in the Colloquies the wonderful interior castle of turn dynamics. We find there the picture of a son who turns to Jesus, his dear Daddy with all his heart, soul strength and mind (cit. Lk. 10:27). The main theme which underlines the whole book is this *shub* ideology. The converted son strives to be turned to the figure of his Daddy. The intense yearning for the mystical experience of oneness with Jesus pervades the whole work. Chavara tends towards the emotional realization of the affirmation "I am yours, you are mine" (cf. Jn. 17:10). Hence the word compunction or repentance does not portray the true nature of the book. Colloquies illustrates the theme of the converted son who remains turned to Jesus. It presents the story of Chavara who remains turned to Jesus. It presents the story of Chavara who stays in the presence of his beloved Daddy, being engaged in mystical conversation with God, Christ, Mary, Joseph and other heavenly patrons. In this act of turning he is transformed into the biblical image of an authentic son.

Let us trace out some dimensions of the process of turning dynamics in Colloquies. "Behold I go towards (start my journey) my father" (p. 16); "Behold I come before (approach) the holy presence of my father" (p. 16). Here we find the first steps of the turning process. It entails going and coming or approaching. The one who has ventured to take these steps of starting and approaching is filled with a craving

for the immediate presence of the beloved. "Oh, it is a long time since I saw the beautiful face of my father" (p. 16). There blooms the divine countenance in his heart. His inner eyes are fixed on that face and a spiritual joy fills his heart. But the contemplation is interrupted by another stream of thought. Chavara turns to his remorseful past life. Alas, he had then often turned to and absorbed in other faces ! Only true souls would feel such unbearable pain for the past guilt of disloyalty toward the loving Father.

The process of turning is now reaching the climax. The intense yearning for the presence of the Daddy is now realized. At the very sight of his Father, the Son goes down on his knees. "Let me prostrate at your scared feet" (p. 17). It was not a momentary and impulsive act; "I will not withdraw myself from embracing your feet" (p.18). Like Mary Magdalene, he is bent on clinging to the Saviour's feet. The son persistently continues to lie prostrate at the feet till Jesus graciously speaks to him... the fixation of eyes on the face of the Daddy, makes the next grade of turning, "let me raise my thankless eyes to the gracious eyes which compassionately call upon me" (p. 19). But the very sight of the Father's face was indeed shocking. It is totally disfigured. An uncomely face, mutilated by those who turned against Jesus. A distorted figure who undertook the ugliness of sin upon himself. There gushed out streams of tears at the sight of this anguished countenance. At the same time Chavara was affected by an uncontrollable desire. A craving for contemplating Daddy's real blissful face. "Oh my graceful Father! When am I to see the beauty of your blessed face?" (p. 21).

The acts of turning dynamics go on. "Oh, with my eyes down, let me have a look, at the scared body of my father" (p. 21.). The turning process gets deeper and deeper. Detailed description of the acts of turning to 'Jesus' Head, forehead,

eyes, lips, shoulders, stomach and feet are given in the Colloquies (pp. 20-22, 28-29). Thus one may say, Chavara stands out as the passionate symbol of the turning son. He seems to integrate in himself the distress and groans of all who have turned away from God. The mystic takes the place of whole humanity and stands as their symbols before the divine presence.

2. The Metaphor of Sinai - Zion

The ingenious Chavara "Translates" the biblical images of Sinai-Zion in an original way. He understands, the coming of the converted son to the presence of the father as ascending the Mount Sinai. The writer draws heavily on the Sinai episode of the Exodus (chapter 19:24-30, 34). The people of the Old Testament do not dare to approach the Mountain. They were frightened by the great theophany. There were peals of thunder and lightning and a heavy cloud over the mountain and very loud trumpet blast. Israel trembled and could not ascend to the presence of Yahweh. Even Moses stood terrified. Mount Sinai is a symbol - the scene of God's manifestation and majestic presence. There Israel was transformed into the covenant children of Yahweh. On that holy resort God became the Father of Israel and they his children. Sinai could be called the tent of God's presence.

Chavara seems to identify the Sinai symbol with the Zion figure. The temple of Jerusalem was built on Mount Zion. Zion itself became a symbol of God's eternal tent or Abode. The temple or dwelling was filled with the glory of Yahweh (Ex. 40:34-38). This holy place had a further importance as the site of covenant sacrifices which ratified the Yahweh - Israel relationship. Zion stands out as the abode of holiness itself. At the vision of Yahweh's holiness, prophet Isaiah cried out "woe is me ! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips" (Is. 6:5).

Unholy persons are forbidden under the threat of death to enter into the Holy of Holiness. It is a privilege granted to those who live the life of God's children. Moses could ascend the Mount Sinai, because he as Yahweh's representative was called to the presence of God.

Like the people of Israel, Chavara is struck with fear to climb up the new Sinai Mount-the chapel. The holy God who is invested with all goodness, glory, power, effulgence and majesty" (p.25) is seated here on the royal throne. Who will not be afraid? But God is also "the gracious Lord" (p. 25). Entrusting himself to the eternal mercy Chavara comes to the divine presence. He approaches his daddy. He understands the new Mount Zion as the centre of mercy, the tabernacle and abode of grace, the throne of blessing and the source of the new covenant of Love.

Chavara goes a step further in presenting it as a nuptial chamber the place of loving conversation between the bride and the bridegroom (p. 15). Further, the new Mount Sinai and Mount Zion get a new twist : they are transformed into Mount Calvary- the scene of suffering and agony. There the lifted up Jesus (Jn 3:14), the lamb who carries the sin of the World (Jn 1:29), remains turned to man. He beckons us to turn towards him, the pierced one (Jn 19:37) that we may have life in abundance (Jn 3:15, 10:10). Chavara finds the divine eyes of mercy fixed on him. Jesus' arms are extended to receive him in close embrace the holy face is inclined towards him in order to affectionately kiss him (p. 37). To conclude, Chavara is never tired to pour out metaphor after metaphor to describe the seat of divine presence. The Sinai metaphor grows into Zion, bridal chamber and Calvary figures. All he wants at that majestic presence is : "my soul, you approach the divine presence and praise his grace" (p. 26).

3. The Metaphor of the Heart - the Mother's Lap.

Although Chavara is admitted to the presence of his dear Daddy, he is not content in remaining simply turned to Jesus on Mount Zion. He wants to go a step further, by bringing the Sinai - Zion realities into himself. There took place an ardent endeavour to interiorize these metaphors into his person. This daring ambition to find eternal bliss in the divine presence of his heart assumed even unreasonable proportions. He was haunted day and night by a single question: what can I do to convert my heart into the indwelling presence of my father? Finally his *tapas* bore the desired fruit. He became an enlightened person, Buddha. The divine secret was revealed to him (cf Mt 11:27). He address Jesus thus "Behold, I have opened the door of my heart, I have set in my Heart the holy lap of your mother which is most dear to you" (p. 43). Chavara has found out Jesus' best and the most favourite place of rest, the holy bosom of Mary. The devotee has placed the mother's lap in his heart. Now Jesus can come and enjoy his rest in Chavara.

"Bosom" in the Bible stands for the most dear place of rest and the abode of realization of every desire and dream. John presents Son of God as the one who is seated at the bosom of the heavenly Father (Jn 1:18). The blessed children of Israel are said to be carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom (Lk. 16:22). It was a heavenly place for rest, bliss and enjoyment. According to the parable told by prophet Nathan, the poor man who had nothing but one little ewe lamb, and he reared it as his daughter by making it lie in his bosom (2 Sam 12: 1-4). In the bosom of 'the father' the little lamb found its heaven. In all these instances, the most beloved children, are admitted to the bosom of the father. Further, the bridegroom's bosom is the most cherished and coveted seat of the bride. Hosea 14:7 metaphorically calls it, the shade of the beloved.

Chavara 'translates' this biblical metaphor into his life. Jesus will be most pleased and happy to find his cherished and coveted resting place in Chavara. He could there re-live the sweet memory of his infancy days. "The babe who lovingly sits in the lap of his mother is the most pleased ..." (p. 43). These words of Chavara echo the expression of Psalm 131:2. Chavara dreams about the lap which is the cherished biblical resting place of the most loved ones such as bride, child and perhaps the beloved disciple (cf Jn. 13:23).

Jesus is seated in his beloved Father's bosom which is his throne. Heaven may be figuratively understood as the bosom of God who draws everyone to this dearest seat. There humankind has to find its place of refuge and rest. Chavara has conceived this biblical idea in his own original way. Jesus as the Son of man holds most dear, lap of his beloved mother, which is the earthly replica of the heavenly abode. The divine babe enjoys to rest, to relax, to rejoice and exult in this earthly heaven, which is placed in the heart of Chavara. At that moment, he is ready to grant every desire of the mother, and Mary utilizes this chance to intercede for her son Chavara. Her poor son is to be granted the grace to become a perfect turned-to-God man.

Thus Chavara brings the divine presence into himself. He carries in his heart, the holy bosom of Mary, where the divine infant is seated in bliss. The author of *Colloquies* becomes the abode of Christ. Instead of turning to Jesus outside of oneself Chavara turns to the interior castle of his heart and attains the grace of the sublime degree of turning. The kingdom of God has come to him and he has become the blessed one. This is the greatest bliss which a human being is entitled to attain on earth. Chavara serves as a model and surety in the art of living in the realm of *Colloquies*.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Behold the Man! **The Person of Chavara in His Letters**

SANTHI, CMC

1. Introduction

The letters of Chavara unveils the traits of his personality. Humanness is the goodness of man the Son of God, who took human form is the best example for this human glory. Son of God, the perfect man, takes everybody to this realm of self-realization. It is the word, which becomes God. Christ provides us with a human vision, which helps us to look at man in his wholeness and to accept him as God's child. Humanness and personality are inseparable.

The basic principle that Chavara adopted in his life was that God is the only Father so all human beings are brothers and sisters. He could act as the spokesperson of universal brotherhood in a period of caste system and untouchability. The Upanishad idea that the mediator sees God everywhere, but a non-yogi sees himself everywhere, is very meaningful. Chavara could see the divinity in himself and around him, in its humanness. His letters are best examples of love and brotherhood. Anyone who peruses these letters can easily identify the human aspects in it.

2. Personal Relations

It is through personal relationships that we can know others. The individuality and warmth of relationships will increase the depth of love. Here person and person, or person and community enrich each other. This is the stage on which God treads on.

Chavara's letters express all the aspects of his personal relationships. In him we can see the different aspects of humanness such as a loving father, a righteous superior, a brother who enjoys a vision of equitableness, a psychologist who understands each one in his uniqueness, a broadminded person who doesn't take in to account the caste, creed, or colour differences, a karmayogi who has dedicated his life for the cause of Kerala Church, and a humble person who behaved as a servant of everybody. This man of God who found divine milieu in every relationship. The letters disclose such attitudes and aptitudes of Chavara, an authentic human being.

3. Humanness and Family Relations

Family is the school where man's birth, growth, and formation in humanness take place. Family relationships are the source for other relationships. The loving memories of his family remained ever fresh in the mind of Chavara – the prayers of his mother, her corrections, the teaching of the names Jesus, Mary and Joseph, and so on. As a special devotee of the Holy Family he wanted to form all Christian families on the model of Holy Family. The family relationship, which made him a genuine man, were not only an earthly matter, but also a source of spiritual teaching which enabled him to leave his family for God's sake. The family is a domestic congregation. It is the cradle of the children of the

church. The family atmosphere of sharing between parents and children helped him to write his testament of a loving father. According to him children are the treasures which God has entrusted the parents to safeguard. The parents have to give them back to God. If the children are spoiled by parents, they are accountable of it.¹ His testament give instruction how to keep the different aspects of kingship in a divine manner. Family relationships are a strictly personal experience. It is the shelter to be depended on. One can be free in his uniqueness, only in the friendliness of his family atmosphere. This family vision very much influenced his human aspect and religious vision.

4. Family Relation in Religion

Fr. Chavara tried to ensure this family relationship, which he experienced and wanted to retain it in the Kerala Church, in his religious communities. The religious community is the family where humanness overflows. For him, religious communities are not a community of lost sensitivity, but a community of vibrant relations. It is usual in families that children build new houses when they grow up. Similarly, even if the monasteries are different, it should not affect the love and unity of the members. Everybody should feel that all are children of one mother. Humanness in family relationships must grow day by day.² Chavara, who enriched this family relationship, gave the warmness of the natural family to his religious communities. A monk becomes a real man only when he lives this love which we call family Spirit.

5. Chavara: The Father

The father is the head of the family. We can see this aspect of Chavara, in his letters as an affectionate person, one who is filled with forgiving love, one who corrects, one who

guides the children, etc. His paternal love and concern are find articulation in the letters to the sisters and to the people of Kainakary: "O... My loving children"- is the usual introduction in the letters to the sisters. In his first letter he promises to send his monthly devotion book to the sisters.³ In the 5th letter, he sent the rubrics of the divine office. More than this, he explains how to work in their farm⁴. This loving father showed much attention to minute things which others may leave carelessly. He was a keen observer, man of wisdom, prudence, and practical sense.

In his 7th letter, he teaches them the method of keeping accounts. In the 8th letter we see the father, who is full of affections and sensitivity, as to send them chilly and mangoes. The good father, who loves his children, instructs them in the lessons of universal brotherhood. He instructs them to cut the mango and share it with all so that everyone could get a taste of it. He is doing it for the glory of Bl. Virgin Mother of God.⁵ When he sent something to the nearest convents he also communicated his love and paternal heart. In the 2nd letter he sent a small book, translated into Malayalam, to his sisters. He was so eager to foster his children spiritually as well as physically. In the 8th letter, he instructs them to use the time for spiritual reading rather than spend time in useless walking.⁶

Again, we see his fatherly quality in his last will to his community members.⁷ "Loving children, by the grace of God we are called the Carmelites of the Mother of God." He instructed those children, who were not satisfied with the title 'Carmelites' and showed them that it was by the providence of God they were called so. He wanted to recognize it with blind obedience. In the 8th letter to the sisters we have already seen his fatherly aspect which gives way to motherly qualities.

6. Fraternal Fellowship

Not only as a loving father but also as an excellent brother, he shares his love. We can see it in his special letter to his community members. He calls them 'beloved brothers.'⁸ They are his twins, those who are born together with him from the womb of the same mother. The term denotes emotional aspects of the family fellowship. He wanted to relate with them not as the prior of the congregation but as a brother. He shared himself as an elder brother with his shortcomings and weakness, with his community members.⁹ Even though he was the superior, he was one among them. He never wanted to be known as their leader. He considered the Kerala Syrian priests and deacons, his youngest brothers.¹⁰ He was a brother to his community members. So he wanted them to consider each other as brothers. What we see here is the Christian vision, which proclaims that authority is service and the Minister is a servant. The authority aspect has the drawback in understanding subordinates. But a brother can understand his fellow brethren. He can see their drawbacks and failures and can solve them easily. When the superior subordinate's relationship grows to the level of brotherhood, monasteries and convents will become the symbols of eternal bliss. According to Ps. 133: 3 the Lord will bestow his blessing on brothers who live together in unity.

7. Chavara: The Superior

Most of his lifetime, Chavara was a superior. He was never an opportunist, who showed favouritism or connived at the defects. He assumed the status of brother and servant before others even though he was the founder of the congregation and the Vicar General of the diocese. His only concern was the spiritual growth of those who were entrusted to his care. He used to give a reasonable solution to all their

problems. We can see it in the letter to the Cardinal prefect of the Propaganda Congregation. He wanted to get solved the doubts about Bishop Roccas. He requested the Roman authorities to send their reply "in our Chaldean Syrian language so that our priests could read and understand for themselves in their own tongue."¹¹ In another letter to the same congregation Chavara daringly and bluntly states: "We are Mar Thoma Christians who have received our faith from St. Thomas. For the past many years we had no bishops of our won.... It is good to have two bishops here: one for the Latin Church and the other for the Syrian Church."¹² This letter engendered the dislike of Archbishop Leonard. But Chavara was not bothered about such displeasure. He loved the Kerala Church and did everything for her good. Here Chavara is a superior who represents the people. As the superior of the Congregation he used to scold and correct the members of the community. Seeing the scarcity of religious virtues among them he became very sad.¹³ Like a loving father he chastises, threatens, pleads, evokes, and provokes.

8. A Man of Dharma

The very history itself is a witness to the fact that, nothing may have an everlasting subsistence if it is not centralized in Dharma. Chavara's life style was a happy synthesis of Dharma and consciousness of justice. Morality is the basic element of humanness. One cannot be considered as a human being if he has lost his moral consciousness. Moral man is free from fear. "Can any one of you accuse me?" Jesus could challenge the Jews on the basis of this Dharma consciousness. Chavara was never influenced by personal grudge or divisional thoughts. He could respect everybody and even welcome his enemies gently. This mentality can be seen in his letters to the Holy See against Bishop Roccas and the followers of Antony Thondanatt. Although the presence

of these persons caused spiritual disintegration, quarrel, and division among the Christians, Chavara dealt with them in the spirit of Christian charity and forgiveness. Even though the relationship with the Italian Carmelites, who were the church authorities of that time, was not so good, he obeyed them in the light of Christian faith.

He had that much courage to send a circular letter to all the parishes, indirectly referring Bishop Roccas that an original shepherd would enter the sheep-pen only through the front door and the one who is entering through the back door is fake shepherd who is really a wolf who wants to "scatter the sheep and derive them to the eternal fire of hell."¹⁴ His sense of Jesus Dharma provided him the courage and moral strength to obey even the difficult dictates of the ecclesiastical and religious superiors.¹⁵

One may say that his sense of Dharma guided his every word and deed concerning the welfare of the church, men and women congregations, Kerala society and his own parishioners. Nothing, whether oppositions, or enmities or defamation or financial difficulties or health problems could deter him from pursuing his Christian Dharma.

9. His Psychological Approach

Bl. Chavara could see and accept everybody in his or her uniqueness. This personal approach is very evident in his letters to the members of his congregation and to the sisters. Even the administrative matters are tackled in a human way. Thus Chavara writes to the Vicar of Mannanam monastery: "The rule that you should not spend a sum beyond Rs. 400/- at a time, does not forbid you to spend more than that sum in one year. More than Rs. 400/- should not be spend at a time on food and clothes."¹⁶ In letter VII/3 he consoles the mother

superior who was sick by referring to his own maladies. Then he tells her how he and she could practice virtues and become united with God during that time.¹⁷ He does not preach to her. His words are equally addressed to him. This is indeed a psychological expertise. His testament of a loving father is a masterpiece of psychological approach. It deals with every minute family issue which husband, wife and children have to confront in their day to day life. Like a mature psychologist he propose solutions which help to foster mutual respect, peace, love and joy among the family members. Nothing did escape the attention of this man of intention. He encouraged them to take unambiguous attitudes and aptitudes even in social, financial and cultural affairs.

10. His Option for the Poor

Love for the destitute is the noblest form of humanness. The very norm of love for God is one's ability to find God in the poor, the sick, the marginalized and outcasts and render them tender service. He appealed to his parishioners to start a confraternity for happy death in their parish. Further he requested them to start a house of charity where the poor and the destitute are to be given free hospice and tender care in their material and spiritual needs.¹⁸ This letter reveals beautifully the tender attitude of Bl. Chavara towards the poor, the suffering and the helpless brethren. He advises his parishioners to see God in the sick and the dying. He tells them: "Of all the help given to a man, the greatest is that given to him at the moment of death. This is again, the greatest act of mercy. This is also the supreme act of charity. One cannot measure the greatness of such a deed."¹⁹

Accordingly charity home was opened soon at Kainakary, where everyone, irrespective of caste, creed or gender, was taken care of. The charity homes, orphanages that

are spread throughout Kerala, beginning with the one at Kainakary are the realization of a dream of the visionary, Bl. Chavara. This particular type of apostolate is now extended to all sorts of unwanted and suffering people culminating in the protection of the mentally retarded, called "birds of the sky."

11. A Man for Others

The fulfillment of one's life lies in the conviction that one's life is a gift from God and it is to be spent freely for the betterment of others. It is this selfless service and self-gift to others that exalts humankind. Consecrated life has its relevance and worth in this self-sacrificing love. The greatness of consecration is this self-gift and availability. More would be asked from the one who received more and vice versa. Bl. Chavara writes to Fr. Joseph, his nephew: "The almighty God has granted me more time than to my ancestors. This was granted not for me, but for the benefit of others."²⁰ He sends his own prayer book 'Piusham' to their nuns, so that they may love and serve Mary the Mother, as they would wish to.²¹ Even in his last days he translated a book from Tamil into Malayalam for the use of sisters.²² He always practiced an attitude of sharing, which began with distributing all his family inheritance to relatives. His was literally "a life for others." His letters speak volumes on how he shared his persons, time, skills, health, faith, prayer, experience, zeal, and love for the Church with others. He used to hand over everything he had, heard, and knew to his spiritual children.

12. An Unworldly Personality

Bl. Chavara literally lived the liturgical invitation to lift our hearts always to heaven. One can undoubtedly state that he was never influenced by wordily attractions of praise, prestige, position, and fame. His every movement and action

was guided by divine perspective, whether it was in showing affection, correcting, advising, building houses or financial dealings. "God is my inheritance" – this was his motto, which prompted him to leave his dear ones and patrimony, and he resolutely stuck to his resolve till the end of his life. We can trace a divine touch in each of his letters.

This spiritual vision of Chavara could be entitle and eschatological vision of his humanity. The source of this vision is neither worldly, nor material, nor love of flesh rather pure love deep rooted in eschaton. He guides each one of us to this all-pervading, all-transcending, intimate and eternal bond of love.

He finds the greatness of divine intimacy in the noblest form of human love. Thus he writes to the sisters: "Why do I love you more than your own people? Or, why do you love me more than your own people? O Lord, do not leave us until we are united with you."²³

The key to oneness with God is continual life in the presence of God. He insisted that his daughters live their life in the divine presence. In the third letter he instructs them about the practical aspects of spiritual exercises. St. Theresa of Avila reached the seventh stage of the mystical union. Her children should rise to at least to the fourth stage.²⁴ To him, finding a good book for spiritual reading itself is the providence of God.²⁵ The same eschatological vision is dominant in the 'Testament of the Loving Father' the section on 'Upbringing of children'. Growing up in sanctity, humility, and prudence they should become children of God. We could trace out the same God orientation in his 'Rules for a Family' and the ideas of a confraternity for happy death, and the house of charity. It is this intimacy with God, effected through other oriented life that made him venerable and holy.

13. Integrated Personality

Integrity is the hallmark of perfection. The perfection of humanity demands a synthesis of mental, emotional, spiritual, intellectual realms. A person is said to be straightforward if there is a concordance in his thoughts, words, and deeds. Only an integrated person can discern the problems and cultural tendencies of the times and respond properly. This faculty helped Chavara to plan for the future with farsightedness and give shape to new endeavours and ventures. He was convinced that the legerity of everything depended upon its spiritual basis.

Chavara's attention fell on the political, social, religious, and cultural life of the time. His outlook was much above and wider than that of ordinary persons and had its foundation in his strong faith. He consoles thus the sister superior who had no money to pay the workers: "Our task is only to arrange for the work to be done. God will give us the money for it, because all this is God's work."²⁶ He viewed the whole of Malabar as the patrimony of the Lord and did his part unconcerned for the reward. In the tenth letter to the sisters he exclaims: "O joy of joys! O Lord we are mere worms incapable of understanding anything. Like unto the mother who nourishes her children with milk even while they are asleep, or are unable to express in words their hunger and thirst, your are looking after our needs everyday."²⁷ It was quite natural for him to find the divine hand in all the events of his life, both great and small. He confesses that he never had cast the net in vain, after invoking the Bl. Mother. Rather he had miraculous catches.²⁸ The document 'Reflections' brings to light his promptness in understanding the attitude of the people. To the query "Why do the Malabar Christians adhere to Babylon," he reiterates that the whole issue would be solved if they are given their own bishop and liturgy.²⁹

He experienced God not only in his thoughts and words, but even in his movements and in every breath. It was the greatest of all his talents. He was very much a man of God. He could bring along with him to this intense God experience everyone who traveled with him. He could serve divine love without missing the warmth of humanity, in every relationship. It was the self-giving love of the Holy Trinity that filled his life. It is the sole reason for the spread of his charism beyond time and space.

Conclusion

Ours is a time when tender human feelings and qualities loose their value. Everyone is in a hurry to secure the best in life. Amidst these struggles, greater values like the biblical upbringing of children, moral virtues, neighbourhood relationships, familial bonds and family prayers are somehow ignored and consequently lost. The Nation and the Church are faced with an uphill task to reclaim recapture the personality of their citizens damaged in the cradle of childhood and early adolescence and to build up a powerful society. Here comes the relevance of Bl. Chavara. His personality would inspire us to recognize the greatness in every man and to fill our lives with the colour and flavour of healthy, human sentiments. He speaks to generations through his letters. He uses his pen to love, warn, correct, and show the way. He invites us to be the spokespersons of a new culture with its thrust on human relations and divine human intimacy. His letters deal even with trivial matters that we often forget or neglect in our busy schedule. They should enable us to attain a higher vision of divine kinship to evoke the human values in us, to recognize the good in others and thus enjoy unity in our lives. It would help us to respond creatively to the problems of our times and become true

human beings with vibrant personalities and a broader world vision.

Endnotes

¹Complete Works of Bl. Chavara, Vol. IV, The Letters, p. 112.

²*Ibid.*, p. 71.

³*Ibid.*, pp. 75-76.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 81.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 85.

⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 70-74.

⁸Literally "Beloved Twins" (koodappirappukal), Complete Works, IV, Circular I, pp. 60-66 (13 times); Circular II, pp. 66-67 (once), circular III, pp. 68-69 (once); Testament, pp. 70-74 (4 times).

⁹Complete Works of Bl. Chavara, Vol. IV, The Letters, p. 74.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 100.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 7, 9.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 61.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 98-99.

¹⁵*Ibid.* V/16-17.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 37.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 78-79.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 117-127.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 119.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 53.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 75.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 87.

²³*Ibid.*, p. 83.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 85.

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 86.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 81.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 86.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 55.

²⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 57-59.

The Humanity of Chavara in the Chronicles

ELIZABETH SALY, CMC

Chavara, the man who enlightened the Malabar Church in the 19th century, the man who initiated social changes in the 20th century, a man who extended new dreams to the 21st century, wrote the history of his time – the chronicles (Chavara Complete Works, Vol. IV). The Chronicles work is the narration of the historical events in the Malabar Church from 1829-1870.

The objective of writing the Chronicles is clearly stated in the letter to Sister Eliawa on 29 April 1867: "You must remind Anna to write all the news. Now, if you write even the unimportant things without leaving out any of them though laziness, you yourself will feel happy about it two years so later."¹ Chronicles contain happy news to be handed down from generation to generation. They are contains precious peals preserved in the annuals of history.

1. The Humanity of Fr. Chavara in the Chronicles

We encounter Chavara amidst historical events – the foundation of the Mannanam Monastery, the Roccas Schism, the Ampazhakad monastery, the foundation of Koonammavu Convent etc. The undisputed leader of the remain the

background. The human qualities of Chavara, such as humility, farsightedness, honesty, kindness, courage, love of the Church, love the enemies, respect for other, hardwork, beautify the pages of the Chronicles. "What I am going to write is seen with my own eyes and heard from reliable persons" – wrote Chavara.² He was not in the habit of thinking that he knew everything. So he wrote: "Many other facts may be there which I do not know. Only the things that I have come to know and have been able to remember I am putting on record."³

The description of the construction of the 'darsanaveedu' is expressed in words filled with humility.⁴ He says about himself that he is: "the least among there who studied with Rev. Fr. Palackal Thomas Malpan." He was aware of his ignorance, foolishness, and lack of understanding.⁵ so he writes everything with humility.

2. A Man of Memories

In the chronicles we meet Bl. Chavara as a man of vivid memories filled with much gratitude towards his benefactors for their goodness even in little things. He remembers Fr. Palackal Thomas with a deep sense of gratitude who had actually spent all the expenses of his seminary life. He says that from early childhood Fr. Thomas nourished him with physical and spiritual support.⁶ Chavara never reasoned whether the people who come into contact with him were rich or poor. The names of certain poor people such as Kittan, who helped in the initial stages of the building of Mannanam Monastery, especially, in preparing the ground; Kochuparampil Eapen Mappila who gave his food on certain occasions, and Vempenny, Tharayil and Malayil families are recorded gratefully in the chronicles.⁷ Once Chavara was

of the fund raising for Mannanam Monastery, a Reverend Father (name is not mentioned) complained to the Archbishop that these people were collecting funds and helping their relatives.¹⁵

4. A Man of Vision

The foundation of the 'darsanaveedu' at Mannanam, the intensive preparation for finding the appropriate site were clear indications of the vision of three priests – Palackal Thomas, Porukara Thomas and Fr. Chavara. The possibilities for the establishment of indigenous religious houses in this soil were considered. After that the permission and blessings of the superiors were sought. The 'Tapas Bhavan' was not his only vision. Chavara had the firm conviction that the Kerala Church which had been founded in the faith hundreds of years ago, lacked many good deeds mainly because of the absence of monasteries and convents.¹⁶ What we read the first page of Konammavu Nalagamam is his deep yearning for a convent for the women, which still remained unfulfilled. He envisioned that the participation of women in the life of the Church would be encouraged through convents. On 13 February 1866, his great desire was fulfilled. On the inauguration day of the new convent in 1867 he wrote: "Almighty God, I believe that you allowed me to live so long so long so that I may be able to see this and feel all the more obliged to you. Greater praise be to You now and forever. Amen."¹⁷ In 1860, the construction of a convent was started at Puthenpally, but due to the Roccas Schism it was changed into a seminary.¹⁸ To build the Koonammavu convent Chavara raised funds from different persons and places.¹⁹ In the pages of the Nalagamam we see the farsightedness of Chavara in starting a religious congregation for women. He envisioned convents as houses of virtues. He encouraged the education of

women through the boarding schools attached to the convents thereby uplifting their social statues.

5. A Man Who Loved the Church

The Church – the spouse of Christ – was always in his heart. He called the Church of Rome, his Mother. The chronicles bear witness to this. As a loving son, he embraced the joyful and sorrowful events of the Church. As the Malabar Church had no canonized saints he felt very unhappy.²⁰ He longed to make the Malabar Church a mother of saints and expressed his desire ardently throughout his life. He saw the face of Christ, the head of the Church, in his superiors. The respect and submission he showed to the Church and authorities were something unique. Chavara, the heroic son of the Church, who showed great love and obedience to the Popes, received a letter of appreciation and honour from Pope Pius IX. He was ready to undergo trials and tribulations in order to seek the truth. In times of crisis, he always tried to unite the people under the supreme Pontiff.²¹ In 1869, Pope Pius IX summoned the first Vatican Council. In the Chronicles, he mentioned about the council and wrote the details regarding the number of bishops, their age, rite etc.²² these are clear evidence to show that the more we know the Church, the more we can love the Church. Moreover Chavara took the initiative to collect offerings from the local churches and presented a sum of Rs. 32,007 to the Holy Father.²³

6. A Man of Reconciliation

In the 19 century there was dissatisfaction among the St. Thomas Christians against foreign bishops and there arose a great urge to have indigenous bishop. On this occasion, Audo, the Nestorian patriarch sent Roccas as a visitor in 1861

to Kerala. Then most of the Churches went over to his side. Bl. Chavara found out that Roccas was an unauthorized bishop to rule here. He underwent great trouble to save the Church from this schism. As a man of reconciliation, Chavara forgave him unconditionally and made all possible arrangements for his return trip. When Antony Thondanattu (Abdiso) came here soon after his Episcopal Ordination from a Nestorian Patriarch, Chavara came forward and took the necessary action to save the Church from the crisis.²⁴ But when Abdiso was rejected by all, Chavara accepted him wholeheartedly in spite of his offensive actions against the Church. Besides this, the chronicles reveal to us the efforts made by Bl. Chavara to help Abdiso in providing him with medical treatment, repaying his debts and obtaining permission to offer Mass.²⁵ These are clear evidence of his forgiving attitude.

7. A Man Who Never Sought for Power

Chavara was an uncrowned King of the Kerala Church. He was appointed the prior of his congregation in 1855 and his selfless and humble services made him loved by all. He was elected the Vicar General of the Malabar Catholics in 1861. After reading the secret letter from Roccas promising him to make him bishop he replied: "My child, the great desire of my heart is not to become a bishop but to attain salvation."²⁶ Even though Chavara respected others he never demanded it from others. He was a man of convictions. For example, he says, "I am willing to kiss Roccas' hand or foot but not his ring."²⁷ By this he expresses his due respect to the supreme Pontiff of the Church. He was ready to approach higher authorities for the needs of the people. The perfect co-operation he received from the people is a clear evidence of his approval among the people (e.g., Collection of handful of rice or pidiyari).²⁸

8. A Man of Optimism

Malabar Church in the 19th century was undergoing a critical period. Still nothing could diminish the Christian optimism of this ardent believer. Chavara was ready to undertake new ventures for the total growth of the Church. The will of God will be fulfilled²⁹ - this strong conviction enabled him to work hard. His optimism enabled him to set up a printing press at Mannanam. *Jnanapiyusham*, the first book in Malayalam was soon published. The long journeys and arduous tasks for the beginning of the *darsanaveedu*, *Koonammavu* convent, and boarding school show his optimistic ideas. He always encouraged others and co-operated with them. He found the best in others and they were always ready to support him. The Italian missionary, Fr. Leopold Boccaro and Fr. Chavara's co-operation paved the way for the establishment of the *Koonammavu* convent, a long cherished dream. The chronicles exhort us to promote this team spirit. The optimism of Fr. Chavara is expressed on different occasions as in the case of his own health problems, the death of colleagues, the decision of persons who left the congregation etc.³⁰

9. A Man Who Recorded History

As a historian, Chavara recorded many historical events of the Malabar Church - the *Roccos Schism*³¹ (1861-63), the works of *Danaha* and *Kudakkachira*³² for Syrian Bishop, *Thondanattu Antony's Babel journey*³³ etc. The chronicles of *Mannanam*, *Ampazhakad* and the *Koonammavu* convent shed light on economic, social, cultural, religious and Ecclesial occurrences, facts and persons of that period. Contemporary political events (e.g. *Tippu's aggression*,³⁴ welcome to the raja of *Tiruvithamkoor*)³⁵ were also included. Without rest,

Chavara dedicated much time and energy to the completion of the chronicles. He also prompted the younger generation to follow his example through writing the chronicles.³⁶ Chavara himself wrote the first sixteen pages of Koonammavu Nalagamam. According to Chavara fidelity to history is an evidence of the love of God and men.

Conclusion

We love to listen to and speak about history, but forget to write history. The chronicles remained dusty for a long time. Since the Chronicles is a treasure for future generations we are indebted to Fr. Chavara, the pioneer writer. He had the eye of a historian, the tongue of an honest man and the vision of a sanyasi. The chronicles reveals the personality of Chavara and his humane works. Let the excavations of Chronicles lead us to a better understanding of the founder's charism. Through the study of chronicles, let us try to imbibe the spirit of Chavara in our communities and wherever we are.

Endnotes

¹Letter, VII, 1.

²Complete Works, Vol. I, p. 53.

³CW, Vol. I, p. 53

⁴CW, Vol. I, p. 1.

⁵CW, Vol. I, p.31.

⁶CW, Vol. I, p. 52.

⁷CW, Vol. I, p.16-19

⁸CW, Vol. I, p.48.

⁹CW, Vol. I, p.58.

¹⁰CW, Vol. I, p.200.

¹¹CW, Vol. I, p.21, 41-42.

¹²CW, Vol. I, p.22.

- ¹³CW, Vol. I, p.26.
- ¹⁴CW, Vol. I, p.25.
- ¹⁵CW, Vol. I, p.24.
- ¹⁶CW, Vol. I, p.146.
- ¹⁷CW, Vol. I, p.117.
- ¹⁸CW, Vol. I, p.193.
- ¹⁹CW, Vol. I, pp. 109-110.
- ²⁰CW, Vol. I, p.146.
- ²¹CW, Vol. I, pp. 84-103.
- ²²CW, Vol. I, p.135.
- ²³CW, Vol. I, p.131.
- ²⁴CW, Vol. I, pp. 96-98.
- ²⁵CW, Vol. I, pp. 100-102.
- ²⁶CW, Vol. I, p.161.
- ²⁷CW, Vol. I, p. 175.
- ²⁸CW, Vol. I, p.108.
- ²⁹CW, Vol. III, p.1.
- ³⁰CW, Vol. I, pp. 48-49.
- ³¹CW, Vol. I, pp. 160-171.
- ³²CW, Vol. I, pp. 152-157.
- ³³CW, Vol. I, p.159.
- ³⁴CW, Vol. I, p.53.
- ³⁵CW, Vol. I, p.114.
- ³⁶CW, Vol. IV, Letters, VII, I.

CHAPTER XXX

Eschatological Perspectives in DIRGE

GABRIEL ARANJANIYIL, CMI

Introduction

The *Dirge* composed by Blessed Chavara to be sung in a house where somebody dies, consists of 39 pages and 1162 verses. In the original text there are 46 pages. The purpose of the *Dirge* is to give salutary thoughts to the relatives and friends who come to the house of a dead person. Blessed Chavara presents the theology of death in practical form in a way that can be understood by even ordinary people. The presentation is enriched by Ecclesiology and Christian Spirituality.

The Mode of Presentation

The poet makes the departed soul instruct, advice, and beseech the help of the relatives, friends, and visitors in the light of his experience of death. Therefore it deeply touches the readers.

1. The Theology of Death

Death liberates man from the vanity of creatures, giving true knowledge. Chavara begins the *Dirge* by quoting the statement of Ecclesiastes that the day of death is better

than the day of birth, and it is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting (Eccl. 7, 1 & 2).

First the dead man warns those left behind:
We have enjoyed together
Today I am separated from you.

Yesterday I was like one of you
Tomorrow you will be like me (11-22)

Death is an important reality, which everybody will have to face but is forgotten by all. It helps man with the knowledge that death will catch man unexpectedly and makes him see the world and life in the light of the awareness that death will lead man to eternity.

False and True Friends of Man

The departed Soul first speaks of the false friends who betrayed him at the time of death. He had toiled day and night for them through out his life believing in them. But only at the time of death he came to understand their real nature.

Many are the friends when alive
But none at the time of death
With exceeding love I loved three
Fast bound always as friends (27-33).

During life man thinks that the world, the dear and near ones and his own body are true friends. Therefore he spends his whole energy for them, but when he gets the order to appear before the Eternal Judge, these friends abandon him, leaving him with the knowledge that they are utterly powerless to help him. But virtue, the fourth friends, is the only true friend. The dead man says that he had a happy death since he loved that friend and with his help lived remembering the four ends of man.

I remind you today to remember
 Death, judgment, heaven and hell
 Keeping them always in your mind and pray (205-208).

2. The Theology of Purgatory

Thanking the relatives for their efforts to ease his bodily pains, he reveals to them his real suffering. It is the intense pain of purgatory. Even though a man may be found very holy, since some stains may be found in him in the sight of God, he can enter heaven only after becoming holy by removing them in the purifying fire of purgatory. It is proved by the example of a holy old woman. Even though the Soul was received by Our Lady and the inhabitants of heaven, it was to purgatory that she went since she had some blemishes. When her daughter (who was a religious) and others prayed for her she could enter heaven. The dead man beseeches the hearers of this incident to help him.

After death the Soul cannot change the justice of God into the mercy of God, but those who are still living on this earth can do that for the dead man, by their good works and prayers.

This justice can be converted
 Into mercy by you, this moment
 My time of work over
 Now my cry is not listened to
 If you pray for me
 Then His mercy will favour me (319-324).

An incident is narrated to prove that it is better to suffer here since the suffering of purgatory is very severe but earthly suffering is very light.

A religious, who suffered much from sickness, prayed to be relieved of that ailment. Then an angel informed him

that he could choose either to suffer on earth for some days or to suffer in purgatory for three days and he chose the latter. When the angel visited him in the evening on the day of his death he complained to the angel that he had not been freed from purgatory even though many years had elapsed. And when the angel replied that even one day was not completed, and that if he preferred to go and suffer on earth he could do so, he chose to go back to earth to suffer there. He exhorted his fellow religious to live a life of austerity. The dead man reminds the visitors, that if they would help him realizing that he was suffering such severe pain, then, the listeners also would get help when they experienced his lot (369-480).

It is simply unnecessary to bemoan the dead, long lament is useless. True love is to pray for the dead man, realizing his pain. When king Juvan died even though the queen had offered many pious works, the king appeared and informed her that he was suffering much on hearing that, the queen fasted and prayed zealously making offerings for forty days, and the king attained heaven (551-592).

Since the suffering of the purgatory is very severe, one should not delay at all to pray. An invalid religious was informed by the angel that though he would go to purgatory after death he would have to suffer only for the duration of the celebration of a Holy Mass. When he informed a religious friend about this, he promised to celebrate Mass for him immediately after his death. When the invalid religious died immediately after closing the eyes the friend offered Mass for him and when he was meditating with his brethren the dead religious appeared to him and asked him "Is this your love? Why did you prolong my suffering?" then the friend replied that he had offered the Mass immediately after his death, as he had promised. Then the friend who had entered heaven said that the half-hour seemed to him thousand days.

The man who forgets the souls in purgatory would also be forgotten. A sister called Monica had great devotion to the holy souls in purgatory and many souls were saved from purgatory through her. But after her father died, she forgot to pray for her own father, when ever she went to the oratory, because he had not prayed for the holy souls during his life on earth.

The Holy Souls help those who remember them, when they are in need. When a priest was going to anoint a sick man in the evening, he heard a voice from the cemetery: "We should hasten now to succour the one who helped us." When the priest was anointing the sick man he saw many bright-robed figures standing around the dying man and the demons fleeing. Then the priest realized that the sick man was a devotee of the Holy Souls (727-762).

Realizing that the journey to the other world is very dangerous, one should now earn friends who would help him then. The Holy Souls will never forget what you now do for them (763-794).

Even though without proper merits, God would accept the good works done for the Holy Souls. When a man was going at night to commit an evil deed, seeing the corpse of a criminal hanging on the scaffold, he knelt down and recited the rosary and prayed to Our Lady. Then the dead man endeavoured to prevent him from committing the sin and revealed to him that he had found mercy by the prayer of Our Lady (801-950).

If the prescribed suffrages for the dead are not performed, then there would be calamities and punishments. The procurator of a monastery where there was the law that if a religious dies, his expenses for a month should be given to

the poor, did not do so even though many had died due to a contagious disease. One night the souls of the dead religious appearing to him accused him and punished him warning him that he would join them within four days. As the Holy Souls had foretold he died on the fourth day (950-1028).

Many harmful things may happen because of the departed. A noble man had built a beautiful mansion. But after his death his children could not live there because of strange noises and the appearance of fire. A devout Christian bought the mansion. When he saw one night a man enveloped in flames, he knew that it was the soul of the noble man. He gave alms to the poor, and the mansion was delivered from the trouble.

3. The Communion of the Saints

Since the Church triumphant of heaven the Church militant on earth and the suffering Church of purgatory are joined together by the communion of saints all profit my mutual help. Therefore if the listeners would help him, advise the departed soul, they would reap much benefit.

Upon the communion of saints
By a sacred belief
The church triumphant on above
And the suffering souls in the middle
Three holy churches
By mutual holy help
Would find profit much (1063-1072).

4. The Means of Help

There are three ways to help the Holy Souls:

1. Prayer, 2. Penance and 3. Giving alms.

The intention should be pure. Whatever is performed should be joined to the virtues of Jesus. According to the word of Jesus, when one goes to visit a sick man, one should see Jesus in him. Remembering the example of Jesus who washed and dried the feet of his disciples, one should lovingly nurse a sick man. When the body is buried one should remember the disciples burying Jesus.

Finally, the death man says: "If all these are performed for me what blessedness! You will have prosperity. If you do this for the invalid, Jesus will do everything for you."

Thus, after proving the necessity of helping the Holy Souls of purgatory with his poetic work, Blessed Chavara concludes his 'Dirge', reminding the readers to nurse the invalid with love and to bury the death lovingly (1-73-1163).

5. Evaluation

The important message of the 'Dirge' is how to live to attain eternal life. Blessed Chavara does not attempt simply to present a mere theological theory. Even though he wrote the 'Dirge' in the background of a theological outlook which was very different from that of today I am making an attempt to show that there are many theological currents of thoughts and visions in this poetic work which are valid even today.

i. Oriental Tradition

Now, the importance of oriental tradition is growing in the Church. Austerity, penance and long prayers are very important for the Orientals. Men and women religious, completely abandoning the world and retiring to solitary places, purify themselves, spending their days in austerity and prayer, without postponing the purification to the time after

death. Ordinary people also give much importance to austerity and penance. As mentioned earlier the important thought of the 'Dirge' is to live now, keeping before our eyes, eternal life.

Indian tradition also gives much importance to renunciation and austerity. Attachment to the world is to be completely cut asunder to attain liberation. For that a long strenuous effort is needed. Both these traditions see the present life as a preparation for eternal life.

ii. Contemporary Theology

Contemporary eschatology sees the redeemed man existentially. The future of man depends on the nature of his present decision.¹ Blessed Chavara adopts such an approach in the beginning of the 'Dirge' when he deals with death. It is the reality of death that can shake modern man. For all other things man has a remedy or there are temporary means giving him hope. When man encounters death through acquaintances, friends and dear ones, almost everybody is willing to accept the salvific thoughts which death teaches. Therefore Chavara's Dirge has relevance even today. Quoheleth's thought about the transitariness of man's life on earth, Christ's exhortation to gather up treasure in heaven and the fact that only a virtuous life would save man after this brief earthly life are immutable truths.

Contemporary theology does not pay much attention to the severity of the suffering of purgatory or the justice of God. But it teaches that a radical and severe purification is needed to remove the deep wounds that are caused by concupiscence, they blot out sins and sinful tendencies and to remove the temporal punishments in order that the divine image in the Soul may shine forth.²

Since the Soul after death is liberated from the limitations of matter and enters into the cosmic realm, the field of the activity of the Soul becomes more extensive. Therefore the soul participates in the divine salvific operations in greater measure than before.³ In that sense we can understand what is said in the 'Dirge' concerning the help the holy souls render to those who are in the world.

The 'Dirge' says that those on earth can assist the Holy Souls in purgatory because of the communion of souls. The weak man experiences the salutary presence of angels and saints in the Holy Spirit. The loving interest about the holy souls in purgatory is another aspect of that.⁴ This is a truth that leads to the inner life of the Church, to the mystical body of Christ "if one member suffers, all suffer together, if one member is honoured, all rejoice together" (1. Cor. 12:26). Because of this bond of the living and the dead based on the communion of saints even small actions inspired by love would benefit all.⁵ The importance given to the love of the neighbour also deserves our attention. One should care for the sick seeing Jesus in them, should bury the dead seeing Jesus in them. Blessed Chavara points out that the example of service Jesus has given by washing the feet of the disciples, the words of Jesus in the last judgement and the love with which the Disciples had buried the sacred body of Jesus are the foundation of this fraternal love. This vision is very important in this contemporary age, which speaks much about human love.

End Notes

¹*Sacramentum Mundi*, Vol. 2, p. 59.

²*New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. XI, p. 1037.

³*Sacramentum Mundi*, Vol. II, p. 59.

⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 393-94.

⁵*Catechism of the Church*, p. 190.

The Lord of Heaven and Earth

Chavara Studies in Honour of Fr. Lucas Vithuvattickal, CMI

Editors

Paul Kalluveetil, CMI

Paulachan Kochappilly, CMI

"Fr. Lucas is my personal friend, whom I know very closely. . . I am certain that it was only because of Fr. Lucas that the cause of Chavara was speeded up, and the Venerable was proclaimed Blessed."

"This volume 'The Lord of Heaven and Earth' is devoted to the study of the multifarious personality of Blessed Chavara, the Pioneer of Kerala renaissance. He was a great visionary, a Rishi of the Indian tradition, who dreamt God's dreams for South India, and put his heart and soul to make them a reality."

His Beatitude Varkey Cardinal Vithayathil, CSSR
Major Archbishop of Ernakulam-Angamaly

"Chavara was on fire by the spirit and attentive to the prompting of the spirit. The spirit animated his thoughts, activated his words and empowered his actions. The Blessed was gifted with the divine vision; this mystic dreamt the dream of Deity (Joel 2:28); this zealous Elijah became Jesus' prophetic face and voice in his times. He was guided by the yardstick of Christ's values. He endeavoured to realize the dreams of God concerning the Kerala Church and people."

Rev. Fr. Antony Kariyil, CMI
Prior General



Dharmaram Publications

Dharmaram College

Bangalore - 560 029, India

ISBN: 81-86861-67-X