

Theological Studies on Saint Chavara 3



# **PSYCHO-THEOLOGICAL PARADIGMS**

**IN SAINT KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA**

**Mathew Maniampra CMI**

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**Mathew Maniampra CMI**

2019

**Chavara Central Secretariat**

Kochi 680 030 Kerala, India

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in Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*

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## THEOLOGICAL STUDIES ON SAINT CHAVARA

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

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

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

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

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

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*Foreword*

**FROM 'HOLE' TO WHOLENESS AND  
HOLINESS  
A Holistic Theology in Kuriakose Elias Chavara  
Saju Chackalackal CMI**

“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48) is a standing invitation extended to humanity in the wake of experiencing a ‘hole’ or incompleteness within everyone. The ideal presented for emulation is nothing less than God the Father himself, made available to us in the person of Jesus Christ. In order to understand the nature of perfection aimed at in this biblical verse, it is better that we pay attention to the original expression employed in the Gospel of Mathew. The Greek word used in this verse is *teleios*, which is a translation of the original Hebrew word *tâmîm*, meaning ‘mature’, ‘whole’, ‘entire’, ‘sound’, ‘wholehearted’, etc., thus, referring to completeness or wholeness that must be aimed at by everyone. The call to emulate the perfection of God, therefore, is an invitation to consciously and consistently mirror the character of God, which is understood to be whole and holy (see Lev 19:2).

We come across with such a state of wholeness and holiness in the Garden of Eden, where, created in the ‘image’ and ‘likeness’ of God (Gen 1:26), Adam and Eve walked with God (Gen 3:8) and lived in harmony with everyone and everything. However, as we know from the biblical narrative, as they turned their back to God and walked away from Him as well as from each other in a state of sin, the rhythm of creation was disturbed and distorted, resulting in a ‘hole’ in each person as well as in the whole of creation. As the rhythm

of creation was lost due to the *unwholesome* involvement of humanity, there was a necessity to restore it back, where we see the relevance of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Christ, in fact, was God's perfection offered to us in human form, and incarnation was meant to enable the creation to experience God's perfection and to appropriate the same on the part of each human person through his or her conscious effort. God expects that everyone grows up to the stature of Jesus Christ, which is the perfection that God seeks from among his children. As Saint Paul had alluded to in his letters, "until Christ is formed" in everyone (Gal 4:19) and in the whole of creation (Rom 8:22), we must groan and undergo the pang of childbirth.

In Genesis 17:1, Abraham was asked to "walk before" God and to "be blameless" or to "be perfect." The wholeness that human beings aspire to emulate, at the basic level, therefore, could be described in terms of the moral perfection, where congruence among thoughts, words, and actions of an individual person is fundamental. A person who succeeds to live in such a harmonious state of existence – internally and externally – is indeed adjudged to be whole and, therefore, holy. However, generally speaking, none of the personalities we encounter in the salvation history was perfect; they all had partaken in the human frailties in one form or another. It is in the context of these frailties and failures on the part of human beings that Jesus instructed his disciples to look for the wholeness in God than the apparent perfection that is self-projected by the Scribes and Pharisees. Hence, the disciples were asked to ensure that their life 'surpasses' or 'exceeds' Pharisaic righteousness (see Mt 5:20) and aims at the utmost goodness of God the Father, which we encounter in the person of Jesus and his teachings. Then, it becomes a persistent call to involve in an ongoing

process of appropriating God's perfection for oneself, even if one knows that humanly speaking one would not realize it completely during the earthly sojourn. It is in this context, for example, we see the beatitudes, as Jesus has presented them at the opening of the same chapter of the Gospel of Mathew (Mt 5:1-11): these beatitudes present before us a positive but revolutionary alternative *view of life* which should be adopted as the *way of life* by the disciples who wish to follow Him. In contrast to the all-perfect, omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent image of God in various religious traditions, the God whom Jesus incarnates in his life has the characteristics of being poor, mourning, meek, hungry and thirsty for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, peacemaker, persecuted for righteousness, etc. As for Jesus, being 'blessed' and, thus, seeking wholeness on the part of Christian disciples call for imbibing and incarnating these characteristics in their personal, familial, and communitarian lives. Christ's alternative is so unusual and challenging to the core that His God assumes the generally perceived 'holes' of human existence as integral to Himself, by overcoming them through his death on the cross, so that, through them, He leads humanity to wholeness and holiness and, ultimately, to redemption.

In the life of Kuriakose Elias Chavara, even as a young boy, we see a quest to keep close to God, particularly to Jesus, as he was initiated into Christian devotions by his mother from a very young age; his recollection of his mother praying on her knees early in the mornings and at other occasions, in which he also partook sometimes, offers us a glimpse into his model in prayerfulness and the attitude he had cultivated from his younger days. Young Kuriakose encountering with determination various tragedies in the family while undergoing formation in the seminary at Pallippuram and,



subsequently, by the time of his priestly ordination adopting the motto "The Lord is my portion" (Ps 16:5) attest to his positive attitude towards the total surrender to and ultimate reliance upon God. By adopting the Lord as his portion and by consciously attaching himself to the Lord, Chavara made the ideal step to overcome the 'inherited' human imperfections within himself and aspired to become complete or perfect through his state of life as an ordained priest in the Church. This aspiration was taken to greater heights in associating himself with Malpan Thomas Palackal and Malpan Thomas Porukara, along with Jacob Kaniathara, to initiate a life of consecration in community, thus paving the way for pioneering the first indigenous Catholic religious community in India. Although the original aspiration was to withdraw from "the corrupt and corrupting world" to ensure salvation of their own souls, following the providential intervention made by the bishop and their wholehearted response and the total overhauling of the project by the founding trio giving shape to an active consecrated community helped evolve itself as an altruistic one so that the perfection and the self-sanctification they were aiming at through their life of consecration in the Church were not conceived to be exclusive but accessible to everyone through their association with the people and the pastoral care offered through the multifarious portals opened up by the members of the community in the course of time.

A life of consecration lived out within a community was also a firm step in positively responding to a discernment that a Church claiming apostolic origin had not produced any canonized saint from among its faithful, but remained

sterile (*macchi*) for centuries.<sup>1</sup> In this context, Chavara knew that leadership in the Church should primarily be spiritual, as he was convinced of the truth of a blind leading another, where there is every chance that both will fall into a ditch (Mt 15:14). Hence, concerted efforts were made, personally and collectively, to overcome unwholesome human states of existence by the practice of Christian virtues. Indeed, the Gospel ideal was imbibed and practised by himself and others in communities with a view to overcoming human imperfections and to enhance their potential for religious consecration and pastoral commitment. Interestingly, the self-sanctification that was originally aimed at in constituting a consecrated community was attached to their involvement in the lives of the whole society for the latter's sanctification; in a true Christian sense, self-sanctification of the consecrated would be a spontaneous outflow of their efforts to sanctify others by way of helping them overcome their unwholesome existence in their spiritual as well as socio-cultural life. In other words, the objective of the consecration undertaken by a few as their life's vocation aimed at the fruitfulness (in contrast to the spiritual sterility experienced by the Church) of the whole ecclesial community and the holistic welfare of humanity.

In the perception of Chavara, "much good was left undone" "in the absence of a *tapasubhavanam* in Malabar, even for priests."<sup>2</sup> When the bishop was approached by Malpan Palackal and Malpan Porukara to discuss about living in solitude and leading a life of consecration, they

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<sup>1</sup>Chavara, *Complete Works of Chavara*, vol. 1:146; *Chavarayachante Samporna Krithikal*, vol. 1: 171.

<sup>2</sup>Chavara, *Complete Works of Chavara*, vol. 1:1; *Chavarayachante Samporna Krithikal*, vol. 1:1.

were told that “If you, the only ones who are knowledgeable, go away to live in silence and solitude, who else will be left to teach the people? If you like, you may establish a monastery so that all people can benefit from it.”<sup>1</sup> It was this providential direction from the bishop that fructified in the establishment of monasteries amidst the people, hoping that they would offer spiritual and pastoral animation to people, while the consecrated persons would live in those spiritual sanctuaries. As these monasteries and, later, convents for sisters, evolved under the leadership of Chavara, they tried to strike a balance between the spiritual life of the consecrated members and the pastoral needs of the people. Striking the right balance was always a risky affair, as it is evident from the circulars that Chavara himself wrote later to his confreres.<sup>2</sup> Left to themselves, in the mind of Chavara, both the monasteries and convents were conceived to be *punnyasanketam* (spiritual resorts), though their import was not exclusively restricted to the consecrated persons; the spiritual fervour that is cultivated by the consecrated, according to him, should have triggered their generous commitment to reach out to the needs of the people, especially those who are poor and the marginalized.

Chavara, along with other founders and Bishop Maurelius Stabilini, believed that the charism of himself as well as of the religious communities he had founded was

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<sup>1</sup>Kaniyanthara, 6. It is thought that the first fourteen pages, with the title “History of the Foundation of Mannanam Monastery, of *The Chronicles (Nālāgamankal)* by Blessed Chavara included in CWC I (CSK I), are written by Jacob Kaniyanthara; It is not yet published Malayalam MS kept in Archives of Saint Joseph’s Monastery, Mannanam. See Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 23.

<sup>2</sup>Chavara, *Complete Works of Chavara*, vol. 4:60-74; *Chavarayachante Sampoorana Krithikal*, vol. 4: 89-103.

“to realize all the good that is being shown” (*kannukattapetta nanmakal undakunnathinu*)<sup>1</sup> to him and the consecrated community by God; it refers to the good works revealed to and undertaken by himself and his confreres based on the promptings of the Holy Spirit. This position of being open to God and His will in evolving the apostolic ministries of the Congregation clearly spells out the fact that Chavara could fine-tune himself and his mind to the Divine plan in such a way that responding to the needs of the society was not merely based on his own human imagination and ingenuity but, more foundationally, in developing an ability to discern Divine inspiration and in stepping up everyone’s powers to realize the plans accordingly. It was made possible by Chavara’s constant efforts to know the mind of God through his focused steps in developing closer proximity to the person and teachings of Jesus as revealed in the Gospels. It called for preparing his mind to reflect the mind of Jesus in an undistorted manner. Various meditations of Chavara and innumerable verses in the *Atmanuthapan* confirm that he had gone far ahead in understanding the person of Jesus and imbibing his fundamental teachings. As Chavara was certain that the lost wholeness of humanity was fully restored in the person of Jesus, he knew that cultivating an intense and inclusive communion with Jesus and fine-tuning his own vision to that of Jesus would spontaneously pave the way for the flow of Divine Grace. If Chavara could cultivate an inclusive and universal vision in all the apostolates he had initiated, it was a confirmation that those apostolates were indeed taking shape from the promptings

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<sup>1</sup>Permission Letter issued by Bishop Maurelius Stabilini, Vicar Apostolic of Verapoli, 1 November 1829, Mannanam Chronicles, vol. 3 (Mannanam Archives, CMI Special-C, Golden Records).

of the Spirit in view of the holistic development of the society. Those who mirror the mind of God in their discernment and, thus, belong to God are, as Saint Paul puts it, “competent, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:17).

Indeed, Chavara did know that his vocation is not a once-and-for-all finished product, but an on-going process and project, guided by the Holy Spirit and established in the grace of God. Hence, he endeavoured, along with his confreres, to be alert and to remain on the right track of redemptive *kenosis* opened up and inspired by Jesus’s own life example. Chavara’s holistic understanding of life and ministry took seriously the two-dimensional practical understanding of the commandment of God, which placed the love of God on par with love of the neighbour (Mt 22:37-39). It was, therefore, natural for him to cultivate a personal and intimate relationship with Jesus, whom he addressed as *ente appa*, meaning “my beloved father.” Chavara could spend hours in front of the Eucharist, immersed in adoration and personal intimacy;<sup>1</sup> for him, spending time with the Lord, even when he was busily engaged in various temporal matters, was like a person spending quality time with the beloved, both being comfortably settled in each other’s presence. Even when he was involved in social affairs, he could ensure that his personal intimacy with the Lord was not broken or disturbed: he was comfortably established in Jesus and his gaze was intently fixed on Him.

In this process, it was natural that the person of Kuriakose Elias Chavara was groomed to become a holistic Christian. There is no better attestation to his personal sanctity and grace-filled existence except his own declaration on the deathbed that he never lost his baptismal

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<sup>1</sup>Valerian, *Malankara Sabhamathavinte Oru Veerasanthanam*, 258-259.

innocence, which was also corroborated by the statement of Leopold Beccaro, his long-time confessor and spiritual director; it is said that Chavara led a life like Blessed Mother Mary, who was full of grace.<sup>1</sup> One of his spiritual sons Fr. Louis had affirmed that Chavara lived in “constant union with God.”<sup>2</sup> In a letter he wrote to the sisters, Chavara advised them what he had already practised: “Abide in the love of Jesus Christ. Continually remain before His eyes. Walk side by side with Him. Incessantly speak and listen to Him.”<sup>3</sup> All these statements and other testimonies from his contemporaries confirm that Chavara proactively responded to his quest for communion with God by being committed to and interested in the affairs of the Lord. His holistic outlook can also be identified from his commitment and interest in the affairs of the Lord, which was translated in the form of his involvement in the affairs of his brethren – be it within the consecrated community, or in the affairs of the Church, or in the existential needs of the society at large – with the same intensity and commitment.

Similarly, we also see that the commitment of Chavara complete in anything that he had undertaken. Whether it was the foundation of the first monastery for men or the first convent for women, or the installation of the press, once convinced that it is the will of God and that it would serve the common good of the people, come what may, he would launch himself with full vigour and would also enlist the support of his own consecrated confreres as well as the

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<sup>1</sup>Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Chavara*, 4; see also Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 390-391.

<sup>2</sup>Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Chavara*, 6.

<sup>3</sup>Chavara, *Complete Works of Chavara*, vol. 4:82; *Chavarayachante Sampooma Krithikal*, vol. 4:112; see Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Chavara*, 123-124.

general public. While remaining a trailblazer all through his life, he had the unique ingenuity and sagacity to make every project a project of the community. His initiatives were invariably social in character and his leadership participative. This ensured that he could enlist the support from everyone. A telling example is his involvement in thwarting the entry of Bishop Roccas, which resulted in the disunity of the Church. While remaining adamantly firm on his conviction of the unity and integrity of the Catholic Church despite threats to his own life, his genuine attempts to gather information from the highest office of the Church as well as setting up defence of the Church and its unity<sup>1</sup> were basically collaborative in character. Moreover, we also understand the integrity of Chavara from the fact that he did not yield to any pressure from the group that supported Bishop Roccas, who had offered him even episcopacy, provided he would support them in the conflict. Similarly, he remained unmoved even when his name was proposed by the Vicar Apostolic, in the context of the trouble originating from Bishop Roccas's arrival, to be consecrated a coadjutor bishop of Verapoly: his character was such that he could not be enthused by personal advantages; he could be moved only for the love of God and his neighbour. Alternatively, from his style of operation, we could gather that he would budge from the chartered course of action only if he was convinced that it would aid Christ being formed in everyone (Gal 4:19).

Communion with the Lord and commitment to the people, in the vision of Chavara, required of him, as a consecrated religious and an ordained pastor, integrity of

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<sup>1</sup>Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Blessed Chavara*, 11; see also Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Chavara*, 29-30.

character. Apart from the attestations from various persons, the moral integrity of Chavara was praised by a judge in his observations made during a trial procedure carried out in the context of a criminal litigation filed against him by Mathan Kalapurackal of Muttuchira. During the trial, the judge observed that "This priest indeed is a man of God; those who complain against so great a man must be grossly wicked and deserve God's anger."<sup>1</sup> Although it was a false allegation filed by a former employee of Mannanam monastery, who had unjustly appropriated property of the monastery but had gone for a lawsuit against Chavara, he forgave him unconditionally. Apart from the support that he had offered to the same person during his lifetime, being a true disciple of Jesus who had unconditionally forgiven his enemies, Chavara instructed his confreres in his final testament that Mannanam monastery should extend support to Mathan's family.

Following the invitation of Jesus, extended to us in the Beatitudes (Mt 5:1-11), to be pure in heart, to be merciful, and to be a peacemaker, Chavara ensured that he remained blameless in all his involvements. It was not an easy achievement for Chavara to declare that he never lost the baptismal innocence; it attests to the fact that Chavara remained in the grace of God all through his life. Further, such a state of grace made him merciful and an instrument of peace in the society. His merciful attitude was already referred to in the instance of Mathan Kalapurackal of Muttuchira, who was not only forgiven but also Chavara had instructed his confreres in his last testament that Mathan's family should be positively cared for.<sup>2</sup> His

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<sup>1</sup>Cited in Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Chavara*, 222.

<sup>2</sup>Valerian, *Malankara Sabhamathavinte Oru Veerasanthanam*, 289.



involvement at the final stages of the Bishop Roccas event also attests to the attitude of mercy that prevailed in the person of Chavara. Although Roccas had created such a lasting and devastating damage to the Church, when he finally agreed to return to Bagdad from where he had come to India without the papal permission, Chavara showed the true face of a merciful shepherd. Not only did Chavara make all the arrangements for the safe return of Bishop Roccas, but also made provisions to ensure that he could return without facing any humiliating situations; moreover, Chavara even made arrangements to pay for his return trip to Bagdad.<sup>1</sup> The very appointment of Chavara as the Vicar General in the context of the arrival of Bishop Roccas itself is a clear indication that his presence and involvement in the ecclesial affairs would effect peace and unity among the faithful. Apart from his success in restoring peace and harmony within the Church, Chavara was also considered to be an acceptable figure to resolve disputes between families and communities. Even in his old age, while suffering from various ailments, there were requests for his presence as many believed that if he were present, even without any direct involvement, peace would prevail. Indeed, being a peacemaker, Chavara qualified himself to be a *child of God*: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Mt 5:9).

Practice of transparency in the life of Chavara is also very evident. When he undertook some projects, after having been convinced that it is a necessity for the people around him, he did not initiate them with any solid financial backing; instead, he launched every project relying on the Providence of God and the support of the people. He was

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<sup>1</sup>Valerian, *Malankara Sabhamathavinte Oru Veerasanthanam*, 292.

sure that the funds would come if it is the will of God; in every project he had received immense support from the people. In some instances, Chavara had received excess fund to complete certain projects and he insisted that the balance amount should be returned to those who had contributed to the project. Thus, during the construction of the convent in Koonanmmavu, they received double the amount as contributions from the people and Chavara insisted that the balance should be returned to the benefactors.<sup>1</sup> It is worth-noting that people contributed generously to many projects that he had planned and executed. Obviously, though some of them were wealthy, there were many who contributed their little might out of their poverty (Lk 21:4), but based on their conviction that it would be instrumental in realizing the common good through the instrumentality of Chavara and his confreres. As Kochumuttom opines, Chavara and his confreres “did not expect any monetary gain from this venture, nor did they consider it a profit-making project. Their only objective was the benefit of the people and the building up of the kingdom of God!”<sup>2</sup> Ultimately, it was Chavara’s virtuous life as well as practice of accountability and transparency that played out the magic formula in all his apostolates. Like Abraham he *walked before God* by being *blameless* and aspiring to be perfect (Gen 17:1).

Thus, Chavara’s life attests to the fact that he aimed at the attainment of a holistic state not only for himself, but for all those who were associated with him. If the first parents *walked away from God* in their state of sin, following the examples of Jesus, his spouse, and Blessed Virgin Mary, his

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<sup>1</sup>Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Chavara*, 7.

<sup>2</sup>Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Chavara*, 40.

own heavenly mother, Chavara lived constantly in a state of grace and was, thus, enabled to *walk before God blamelessly*; indeed, this is the holistic state that Chavara could attain. All the activities that he initiated in the society through the religious communities he had established were aiming at the attainment of such a state of grace for the whole society. It is interesting to note that with the support that he could harness from the society, he ensured that, along with the members of his own community, everyone, particularly the poor and the marginalized too were cared for. Their integral welfare was his goal; he had an inclusive approach by which he made sure that the benefits from all these projects were accrued not only to members of his own consecrated community or ecclesial community, but anyone, without the distinction of caste or creed. Accordingly, he conceived of a number of projects which either he directly managed or executed with the support of other partners: but he was clear in his vision that they all would ultimately serve in restoring the image and likeness of God in himself and his brethren, and in re-establishing the common good of the society. He was committed to lead his brethren from their unwholesome existence to a holistic state, or a state of perfection and grace, which ultimately defined his person and achievements, and made him a true child of God as well as a perfect disciple of Jesus Christ.

*Psycho-Theological Paradigms in Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara* by Mathew Maniampra, the third in the series of "Theological Studies on Saint Chavara," makes a bold step in capturing and interpreting the life and activities of Kuriakose Elias Chavara from the perspective of holistic theology. Being an expert in holistic theology, who is also trained in positive psychology and professional counselling, Maniampra delves deep into the inner recesses of the life of

Chavara and brings out the pearls of wisdom, offering us a new and positive outlook on his person and ministry. Unlike many other earlier studies on Chavara, here is a unique and appreciable attempt made by the author in unravelling before the readers the positive and dynamic personality of Chavara; instead of following a dogmatic approach, following the procedures and principles of holistic theology, and integrating it with the emerging science of positive psychology, Maniampra has made possible a new reading of Chavara's life and mission. Although, true to his approach, the author does not make any dogmatic claims, his presentation of the events in the life of Chavara and his interpretations become so compelling that the readers would find the narrative as well as arguments convincing and persuasive.

Although positive psychology and holistic theology are relatively new disciplines, especially in the ecclesiastical circles and some of the procedures and principles adopted by holistic theologians may not be in congruence with the traditional paradigms of theologizing, this work *Psycho-Theological Paradigms in Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara* opens up the avenues for fresh or alternative readings into the life and mission of Chavara. Even if the conclusions in this study may not be definitive (which holistic theology does not aim at), a new approach inaugurated in this work will certainly leave a trail for subsequent researchers and, hopefully, further insightful readings would be made possible. Instead of looking at such alternative readings in opposition to the dogmatic approach in theology, considering them as complementary would make the whole exercise of theologizing more positive, effective, and down-to-earth in its approach as well as content.

The quest of life that is unveiled in the pages of this work naturally places before us a huge challenge in emulating the holistic principles of life that Kuriakose Elias Chavara had followed. While he had no theoretical understanding of positive psychology and holistic theology, Chavara's approach in every field was adjudged to be both positive and holistic. Even if he or his companions were to face 'holes' in their lives (which they really did) and there were no chartered courses of action to overcome them, he was not ready to settle with easy solutions either in the form of the status quo or fate. He dared to dream the divine dream, the dream of God, where all His children would live a positive and holistic life, as all of them were created in His image and likeness. Chavara's grooming in divine grace and the nurturing of his creative abilities made God's mind to be mirrored in his own mind, and to extend God's creative and redemptive mission in and through him and all that he had established during his lifetime. Indeed, a positive and holistic mission was the life of Chavara; God had bestowed upon him a life that is *whole and holy*. His success in bringing about a wholesome life for the society paved the way for establishing his holiness as well as that of the whole society he was involved in and he had care for.

The Nativity of Our Lady  
8 September 2019

Saju Chackalackal CMI  
Chavara Hills, Kakkanad

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many books have been in print on Saint Chavara in the past couple of decades, examining and studying the saint from different perspectives. Fr. Saju Chackalackal CMI, General Councillor for Evangelization and Pastoral Ministry, encouraged me to make a different study that Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara may be introduced to the sections of the society who like to see life in terms of experience and wholeness.

I have based this book on the source materials published by the Chavara Central Secretariat for promoting the cause of Saint Chavara. I mainly depend upon the English translations of the *Complete Works of Saint Chavara* which is published in four volumes. Two other scholarly books I rely on are books by historian Mathias Mundandan (2008) and acharya Thomas Kochumuttom (2013) on Kuriakose Elias Chavara. I read these books in the light of psychology and theology. Theories and principles of contemporary social sciences have been integrated to theological notions and precepts, and endeavoured to make a synthesis, as I see Chavara's life as a synthesis of all that is good and hale. Through the ten chapters of this work, Saint Chavara's personality is explored by giving glimpses to the theological paradigms beneath it by personal observations and reflections.

Writing a book is no solo endeavour. All fruitful things are the net result of collaborative efforts. I am grateful to the help and backing of all my colleagues at Dharmaram College and DVK Faculties who have been checking on me and encouraging me to complete this project. To make this journey so far on a different path, I am indebted to many

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The Nativity of Our Lady  
8 September 2019

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## ABBREVIATIONS AND MEANINGS

AK	<i>Adhyatmika Krithikal</i> (Malayalam), CSK III
Am	<i>Atmanuthapam</i> ( <i>Compunction of the Soul</i> , poetic work by Saint Chavara in CWC I and CSK I)
Apostolic Vicar	Delegate or representative of the Pope, the Vicar of Christ, with special powers of jurisdiction in the assigned territory especially when things are in a fluid state
<i>Besrouma</i>	A house on hilltop (reveals the desire to have God experience associated traditionally with holy mountains)
CSK I, II, III, IV	<i>Chavara Achante Sampurna Kritikal</i> in 4 Volumes (Malayalam)
CWC I, II, III, IV	<i>Complete Works of Blessed Chavara</i> in 4 Volumes (English)
<i>Darsana Veedu</i>	House of vision (a place set apart for divine reflection and high spiritual ideals)
DS	<i>Dyana Sallapangal</i> (Malayalam), CSK III
<i>Malpan</i>	Rector of the indigenous seminary patterned after the Indian <i>Gurukulam</i> where students used to stay with the Master
Schism	Discord and conflict in the Church on grounds of differences in belief or practice leading to the setting up of breakaway organization
SK	<i>Sahitya Kritikal</i> (Malayalam), CSK II



Syro-Malabar  
Church

One of the ancient Eastern Catholic  
Rites of apostolic origin from Saint  
Thomas the Apostle, also known as  
Saint Thomas Christians

## A SHORT LIFE SKETCH OF SAINT KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA

Kuriakose Elias Chavara was born on 10 February 1805 as the youngest of the six children of Kuriakose and Mariam, in Kainakary, a village of Alappuzha district. As was the custom, he was baptized on the eighth day and was dedicated to Blessed Virgin Mary's shrine in Vechoor. His initial education was in a local village school. He was not very happy as he reflects about it later, for he had to be part of Hindu social practices. In 1818, he was admitted to Pallipuram seminary to pursue his seminary training for priesthood. He was ordained by Bishop Maurelius Stabilini, the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly. Though senior to him, he joined with two other Malpans - Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara, seminary Rectors of the time - and shared their vision and goals. Thus, Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara and Kuriakose Elias Chavara bound together by their sense of mission, became the instruments in founding the first indigenous religious order, Carmelites of Mary Immaculate, in Kerala. As the senior *Malpans* left for their eternal reward, Chavara spontaneously assumed the reins of the new community upon himself.

Chavara, by his tireless efforts and dedication, broke new grounds in the social and ecclesial life of Kerala. No field was alien to him. Everywhere he was innovative and farsighted. At a time when literary field was very foreign to Christians and was not admitted by the literal elites, he stepped in and produced many literary works. He is revered as a social reformer and the pioneer of the revolutionary education movement in Kerala. He was a pliable instrument in the hands of God to accomplish so much in a short time.

Nothing was black and white before him: he struggled often as he was working under many constraints of the socio-political and ecclesial contexts. The people who took note of the good changes happening in various fields asked him to open more religious houses and with the generous help and assistance of the faithful he could open many religious houses during his life time. His cherished dream of starting an indigenous religious congregation for women was realized when he joined hands with an Italian Carmelite missionary Leopold Beccaro. In 1861, as a schism occurred in the Kerala Church, Chavara was appointed the Vicar General to confront it and bring the strayed faithful back to the Catholic fold. He remained the Prior General of the Congregation (CMI) he founded until his death in 1871. Amidst his diverse and manifold activities he remained all the more a man of God. His unbeatable energy was mainly drawn from the Blessed Sacrament. Liturgy and devotional practices received a new life through his reforms. He stayed in close communion with God permeating his spirituality all around. He spent his last days in Koonammavu monastery. He was totally blind towards the end of his life. In those suffering times, he firmly fixed his inner eyes upon the Lord whom he always addressed as *Ente Appa* (my father). On 3 January 1871, heaven received this great soul to be a beacon of light for the coming generations. Chavara's canonization process began in 1955. In 1986, he was declared Blessed by Pope John Paul II during his pastoral visit to the scene of his life and activities, Kottayam. He was raised to the status of the saints of the Church for his heroic life and virtues on 23 November 2014. As he was seeing life and humanity through the eyes of God, he was able to integrate all that is good in his life and, thus, became a model of wholeness and integration for the succeeding generations.

## PREFACE

Human behaviour and experiences are studied in the light of psychology, sociology, anthropology and such allied sciences. Still, we may miss the real individual, if we leave out the spiritual and theological dimensions of human life. In psycho-theology, psychological and theological notions are linked to have a better understanding of the persons as well as their missions. The task of holistic theology is to aid humanity in dissolving dualism and helping it learn to live within the tension of the complementary opposites within its own nature. Psycho-theological integration aims to honour the dual aspects of our nature: the ego and the soul, the past and the future life, also, such integration aims at seeing that all realms are sacred and arise from the same life stream which is whole. Chavara was a whole person with a unifying pattern of thought and feeling which gave coherence to everything he did. A well-integrated life does not mean a placid life with all conflicts solved. In fact, the life of Chavara exemplifies this unpleasant truth. Many people have been inwardly tortured; nevertheless, far from being at loose ends within themselves, they could organize their lives with a psycho-theological vision.

Perhaps Teilhard de Chardin's definition of human as "spirit-matter" who can never be split into an "either/or" can help us to have a broader understanding and to make more sense to the theological notions that govern our Christian life. Attempting to deny our human feelings or our divine heritage will lead to the repetition of the old lessons mechanically. Unless, we turn inward we will be living the same inauthentic life, living our lives from the borrowed truths of others. Once in a while certain

luminaries who appear on the horizon help us to validate our inner and outer experiences and such can be adopted as a guide and mentor to our lives. We know the psychological part of us strongly influences our life, outlook and self-realization; all the while divine milieu is independent of our thoughts and beliefs. Our ability to relate this mysterious plain is related to the developmental states of the psychological self. In this book, an attempt is made to see Saint Chavara and his life and works in the light of psychology and theology. Humans are neither body nor spirit. Our tendency is to stress one and lose the other. Today's understanding is that humans are embodied spirits; so a balanced and integrated understanding of all elements related to these spheres can render humans a sense of wholeness. We can get a glimpse of holistic theology and psycho-spiritual integration as we explore this amazing life. As a man of his time, he was not free from the prevailing socio-cultural and theological notions and precepts that existed in his surroundings.

Chavara was a man of synthesis and transcendence. As embodied spirit, our main task is to dissolve the dualism, and learn to live within the tension of the complementary opposites within our own nature. Our holiness consists in that. Chavara was trying to attain a holistic change and growth in his time which would be the leaven, salt and light of Christ to his Church and society. The two aspects of our nature are opposite to one another, yet complement each other. Examples abound like feminine-masculine, earthy-airy, dark-light, personal-transpersonal, dense-transparent, intense-light-hearted – in form as in spirit. Many people, in fact, never make that synthesis of opposites in their life space to become an effective psycho-spiritual human in the

world. That is to become an undivided “in-dividual” and Chavara was one of such.

From the beginning of psychoanalysis Freud cautioned against inviting a dialogue between the disciplines of religion and psychology, stating that religion was an illusion; according to him, it derived its strength from the fact that it falls within our instinctual desires (1933). Because Freud wanted psychoanalysis to be seen as an objective science, thus joining the momentum of the growing scientific movement in Western Europe, he declared a strong stance against matters of spirit. It is interesting that as we move further into the twenty-first century, it is the “objective sciences” that have provided evidence that have opened doorways to rethink the artificial divide between psyche and spirit. Discoveries from neuroscience and physics have helped us reexamine beliefs about the human psyche and also challenge the early psychological theories based on mechanistic linear observations and hypothesis. From the field of physics, the development of relativity and quantum theory served to challenge fundamental assumptions that were at the base of Freud’s materialistic model.

As new discoveries in physics challenge our assumptions around linear causality, time, matter, and energy, new doors are opening to the examination of energy as the spiritual part of the self that has yet to be connected to the larger whole of psychic experience. Understanding the deeper self and its theological, mystical and psychological dimensions help us to have a better grip on our own lives and the lives of the saints we hold in esteem. So, I invite readers to have open curiosity around the intersection between psychological and theological constructs and practices. A circular

exploration of psychology and theology leaving aside the linear one will help us to notice our blind spots.

Instead of understanding mind which influences and shapes everything, we assume that the spiritual self influences the mind that they have a mutual interaction and influence. When and where influences merge and create new reality is beyond our grasp at this moment. This uncertainty need not prevent us from exploring and researching, so that we may be found better than yesterday in our understanding of faith and faith experience each day. Chavara was an unsophisticated person and was free of abstract formulas and doctrines that sometimes hamper human unfolding. I relate Chavara like a mariner in a storm who slackens sail, waits, hopes and doing his best in the emerging scenario.

One of the distinctive marks of Chavara's spirituality is his intense desire to see God, a longing for the vision of God. It is this desire of Saint Chavara which led him to the depth of prayer and the high trail of action. Saint Chavara was a man of prayer and action. Integration of *Jnana, Karma and Bhakti* made him a different personality. The various kinds of enthusiasm in different kinds of action did not defraud his basic orientations to God.

Few people can hold earthly horizon and heavenly horizon together in a loop without losing sight of one against the other. Saint Chavara was an authentic person of the nineteenth century Kerala whose mind and heart were equally raised to heaven, as well as fixed on earth. By his finger touch and presence he was bridging the gap between the sacred and secular, spiritual and material by unleashing the forces of integration.

I believe that no one can do justice to individuals, unless they have a holistic understanding of life and personality.

Initially, Chavara and his committed team planned a religious life for their self-sanctification. Being open and authentic, by listening to the revelations of his own deeper self as well as paying attention to the promptings of the Spirit from the larger ecclesial community, he developed a holistic theology to guide his life more fruitfully, bringing greater good to the Church and society. His spirituality and theology were down to earth and people-oriented so that heaven was not a place far off. His reformist actions were to raise earth to heaven and bring heaven to earth.

In view of the renewal of ecclesiastical studies, on 29 January 2018, Pope Francis promulgated *Veritatis Gaudium* (Joy of the Truth), a new Apostolic Constitution for Ecclesiastical Studies and Faculties. The Joy of Truth, as explained by the Pope, makes the heart of every man restless until he finds, dwells and shares with all the light of God. Good theologian has an open, thus an incomplete thought, open to the *maius* of God and of the truth. The Holy Father underscores the need of holding fast the apostolic faith handed down through the Scripture and the Fathers of the Church, but at the same time making it more meaningful for the proclamation of the good news in the changing socio-cultural conditions of the world. If theology is to make sense today, naturally it must happen in the backdrop of modern secular society. In a globalised society, all sciences are related to one another in the unity of human consciousness. The Apostolic Constitution exhorts theologians to use the findings of sociology of religion and psychology of religion for scientific analysis of theological data and for their comprehensive interpretation. Pope Francis proposes an interdisciplinary methodology in order to understand the reality and to draw insights and inspirations from all sciences and disciplines. The book is a



humble attempt along this line as Pope Francis proposed it in the *Veritatis Gaudium*.

A short life sketch of Saint Chavara is given for the fresh readers to start with. This book may not be read for any historical details and its precision, but rather shall be looked on with the glasses of holistic psychology and theology. These disciplines are still in their infancy and have not yet evolved with clear concepts and principles; nevertheless, you may not fail to see the grandeur of this God-designed saint, because he is a larger than life phenomenon, transcending the limitations of the tools. Therefore, I take solace in and place this work before the readers so that, as I have been touched and inspired by this spiritual genius, you may also be stirred up and illumined by this multifaceted personality.

# Chapter 1

## A PSYCHO-THEOLOGICAL PROFILE OF SAINT CHAVARA

Psycho-theology is the natural outcome of the interaction and association of psychology and theology that occurred in the past few decades. Each discipline is trying to find the value of the other in its respective domain. Psycho-theology claims that the psychological creates or strongly influences theology and human experience. It aims to control human's overwhelming negative emotions towards deity and allow those emotions and feelings to renew and refresh in order to take it to a new direction. Because our soul is a psychological and theological phenomena both can reciprocally enrich each other. It is from this perspective Chavara's profile is portrayed here. The process of human development involves personal crises of growth in physical, psychological, and spiritual dimensions. Psychological wholeness is not an absolute for spiritual growth and God realization. Sometimes psychological wounding serves to fuel and channel life energies in such a way that make spiritual attainment possible. Saint Chavara developed an integral personality which he crafted by the pre-eminence of a spiritual self acting as the hub of integration. We shall now look into how this spiritual self displayed itself through his multi-layered personality giving a holistic touch to everything he was associated with.

### **1.1. In the Light of Theological Anthropology**

Theological anthropology assumes that human persons cannot be fully understood without reference to God.

Without a God who is interested and having a positive relationship to man human beings cannot find meaning and sense of purpose in life. We are defined and determined by our relationship with a God who wants to render good things to complete the humanity. Anthropology won't be complete without a theology. What it means to be human is unintelligible without a God who is present in human life. We may not be able to address the complex issues like right to die, abortion, homosexuality, racism, and sexism if God is absent on the scene. G. C. Berkouwer expressed it so well: "The relation of man's nature to God is not something which is added to an already complete, self-enclosed, isolated nature; it is essential and constitutive for man's nature, and man cannot be understood apart from this relation."<sup>1</sup> In Chavara's poetic work *Atmanuthapam* (Com-punction of the Soul), his whole life and mission is conceived in terms of his existential relationship to a loving God. If Chavara knew who he was and why he was there and, therefore, how he should live his life, it was because of a theological anthropology that he developed in his being and functioning.

Socrates said: "Know thyself." The more a human being was trying to understand himself independent of God the more he became a puzzle to himself. Chavara's self understanding and self realization were in relation to God. He recalls in the *Atmanuthapam*:

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.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God*, 23.

<sup>2</sup>CWC II: *Am* 1:17-20.

His whole life was a telling example that human life and its value derives totally from God and God alone. Theological anthropology focuses on this defining and determining God factor in human life. Chavara experienced a kind of in-built drive towards God in all things.

The life and mission of Saint Chavara can be better understood with a grasp of the nature and being of God. God is self-existing. His creation is depending on him. He is independent of his creation. He not only has life; He is the life and source of all. The quality of God's being finds expression in his personal name 'Yahweh', meaning 'I am who am.' This means He is the one who has being in himself. The abundant life that Jesus promises flows from this fullness of being. Saint Chavara was connected to this being level and was drawing the fullness of life Jesus had promised. "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (Jn 10:10). He never grew weary and lacked the vital energy he needed to complete his mission despite all the odds. Mannanam Chronicle records: "He labored much for the Holy Church, for this religious congregation, and for the salvation of souls and toiled hard for the good standing of the faithful."<sup>1</sup>

The classical Christian view holds that the whole human being comes into existence when the living body comes into existence; persons begin all at once but they do not begin with all their faculties fully developed. Rather, they begin with a wide set of inherent capacities, most of which will not be useable until much later. These abilities unfold through proper human development. Human beings, therefore, have a principle of continuity which makes them the same person from the beginning to the end of their lives, namely, the

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<sup>1</sup>See *Chronicles of Mannanam Monastery*, III:267.

soul. They have a principle of change which develops and unfolds over time, namely, the body. But throughout all change and development, a single being continuous with himself over time endures.

## **1.2. The Defining and Determining Factors**

Endowed with a spiritual soul, intellect and free will, the human person is from his very conception ordered to God and destined for eternal beatitude.<sup>1</sup> In humans true freedom is “an outstanding manifestation of the divine image” (CCC 1776). God is calling each one to himself to have self realization through growing in the holiness of God. God is holy and we are commanded: “be holy, for I am holy” (Lev 11:44) and “be holy and blameless before him” (Eph 1:4). It is this spiritual and theological awareness of human destiny that made Chavara to yearn for consecrated life and, finally, to become the founder of two indigenous religious orders – “Carmelites of Mary Immaculate” (CMI) for men and “Congregation of Mother of Carmel” (CMC) for women. In the scripture we have numerous indications of what things are not holy. Holiness as a positive virtue is something difficult to define. Holiness in the positive sense is nothing other than the measuring up to the character of God by an intimate relationship. Holiness is not a quality God has among others; rather it defines his character as a whole. Beatitudes are an invitation and challenge to grow in the character of God by loving, forgiving, and by being merciful and generous in the all gamut of relationships.<sup>2</sup>

Jesus in his public life often referred to one defining factor of his life that he has come to do the will of his father

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<sup>1</sup>Karipatt, “Spiritual Response to the Culture of Pleasure,” 390.

<sup>2</sup>Karipatt, “Spiritual Response to the Culture of Pleasure,” 380.

and completing his work is his food (Jn 4:34). This means Jesus drew his life and energy in doing the will of the father. During his agony in the garden Jesus said: "Father If you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will, but yours be done" (Lk 22:42). At the annunciation Blessed Virgin Mary said: "Thy will be done" (Lk 1:38). Mary was aware of the troubles in store when she said 'yes' to God but she dared to say so. Saint Joseph, knowing the shame that might fall on him in the society if he accepted Mary, committed himself to do the will of God at any price.

Saint Chavara, having all these examples before him and in the habit of contemplating on the word of God, was naturally concerned about doing the will of God on all occasions in his life. He saw it as the shortest way to sanctity and holiness. To love God and keep commandments, humans need humble disposition to put God above all and to do everything as God wants one to do. God is always with us, and is willing to guide and protect us provided we humbly approach him, giving preference to him and to his will than to others.<sup>1</sup> To him doing the will of the loving God always and everywhere was the most significant thing in life.

### **1.3. Surrendering the Will**

In holding on to our desires stubbornly, we become more of a victim. In letting go and letting God control, we win. The attitude of Jesus, namely, "I seek not my own will, but the will of Him who sent me" (Jn 5:30) is the best approach to be a winner in life. So long as we are doing our will, many things surely will assume the power to hurt us. In doing God's will, one's relationship with God is the top priority.

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<sup>1</sup>Mampra, *Chavara Retreat*, 15.

Then, humans will achieve and receive what will truly satisfy them. "Seek first the Kingdom of God and his justice and all these things shall be added to you" (Mt 6:33). Anyone who looks back on life, will see how God made one to move or get moved from one place to another; from one ministry to another; guiding to take the next step and allowing to get through tense situations, the rough spots of one's personality would be chipped away, sanded, and refined, thereby, finally one becoming a better instrument in the hands of God to experience a sense of wholeness. Charles Stanley, a Protestant pastor, wrote: "As long as we insist on living life according to our desires, he cannot impart his desires, or guide us into his wholeness, fruitfulness, and blessings." True strength lies in submission which permits one to dedicate his life through devotion to something beyond himself. True beliefs in the goodness of God and in one's goodness allow the best use of one's strength, the best means of putting one's virtues into action. Our Saint Chavara was ever mindful of God's goodness. As a child of God, he had an inner conviction that all the good of the Heavenly Father naturally belongs to him as he is a beloved child.

Psalm 111 says: "Fear of the Lord is the beginning of the wisdom." The fear referred here comes from knowing the greatness and majesty of God in contrast to one's own finitude. In Chavara, we witness the salvific fear which every authentic human feels because of his creatureliness. Chavara's contempt for his own self and its sinfulness expressed in *Atmanuthapam*, an autobiographical sketch, can be better understood in the light of what Saint Augustine speaks in the *City of God*: "Two cities have been formed by two loves: the earthly by the love of self, even to the

contempt of God; the heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self.”

#### **1.4. Family and Vocation**

It is in the family all formation and transcendence begin. Our inherited tendencies and characters are waiting to be modelled, trained and disciplined. If the characteristics are weak or not so good but the environment is good, the inherited or predisposing character has a chance to be overcome. However, if the environment is bad, even the good characteristics cannot attain their genetic potential. The environment plays a critical role in the development of personality. Family environment and parents are the most important factors in the development of the personality. Chavara was blessed to have a family that helped him to develop his personality. The need to be loved and wanted is a universal need. This need is primarily met in one's family. Scholars and laymen, saints and sinners affirm this fact. To learn to love is a hard work unless you have a loving experience from the family. It is proven that children grow best in an environment of security and affection. As we grow with our faith, we are challenged to go beyond the inherited dispositions and characteristics. Along with the developmental problems we need to see the possibilities inherent in humans. When Erikson begins with health rather than illness or pathology as Freud did regarding the developmental theory, he echoes our Christian belief that good is prior to evil that human beings are created good and are meant to develop into the fullness of Christ.

By discerning his vocation as a young boy, Chavara embarked upon the plain of self transcendence. At a time when Malpan Thomas Palackal was visiting Chennankary parish, people flocked to the Malpan who was known for



his wisdom and sanctity. There, in that little flock gathered, was Kuriakose, a lovely young boy with exceptional qualities. The Malpan sensed by his intuitive faculties that this child is destined for greater things. He called the boy and conversed and expressed his desire to take him to the seminary. It was like a “come and follow me” (Mt 4:19) invitation from the Lord to the disciples. Being young, that it may not make a shock when removed from home, he was allowed to remain in the nearby parish rectory for a while. This helped young Kuriakose to see his parents occasionally, along with some preliminary preparation to join the seminary at Pallipuram. Speaking of his vocation as a divine gift, Chavara pours out his heart in *Atmanuthapam* which reveals the kind of his tender and endearing feelings towards God as well as to the Church, the mystical body of Christ:

Perfect one; it was your Holy will  
 Impeccable, that let me born on earth...  
 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 retards his onward march.<sup>1</sup>

### **1.5. On the Path of Self-Transcendence**

“Take up your cross and follow me” (Lk 9:23), says the Lord. It is purely for the love of Christ and His mission that a religious becomes capable of facing and enduring any

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, II: *Atmanuthapam*, 1:136-140. Volume two consists of three poems, first one being *Atmanuthapam* or *Compunction of the Soul*; the other two are *Dirge* and *Anasthasia's Martyrdom*. Hereafter, in referring to the *Atmanuthapam*, the Canto number will be indicated next, which will be followed by verse number.

sufferings in one's vowed life. Self-transcendence goes beyond oneself, impelling a person to search for the meaning in life based on the virtues of love and hope. Within each individual, there is a desire for growing better and improving our situation. It is the driving force behind evolution; it encourages people to train and develop their capacities.<sup>1</sup> This inner aspiration for self-transcendence is an important feature of human nature which we witness in Chavara from his early days. According to Frankl, experiential, creative and attitudinal values are merely surface manifestations of something much more fundamental which he calls supra-meaning or transcendence.<sup>2</sup>

The self-transcendence is manifested in the ability to be at peace with oneself, others and God. There is a mysterious oneness between God and our inner selves and consciousness of this oneness is at the centre of every spiritual experience. A self-transcendent person is one who is well aware of oneself. He/she has touched the innermost part of one's own self. This right attitude towards self, others and God makes the person happy and contented. A self-transcendent person breaks the cocoon of his comfort zone and moves out freely to relate with all. A feeling of oneness with other fellow beings urges the individual to move out to others in service and love. Jesus who laid down His life for others becomes the greatest model for all religious who are called to commit themselves to God and to the whole humanity.

Self-transcendence is the capacity to expand self-boundaries intra-personally (toward greater awareness of

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<sup>1</sup>[http://www.biographyonline.net/spiritual\\_articles/self-transcendence.html](http://www.biographyonline.net/spiritual_articles/self-transcendence.html).

<sup>2</sup>Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul*, 116.

one's philosophy, values and dreams), interpersonally (to relate to others and to environment), and trans-personally (to connect with dimensions beyond this world).<sup>1</sup> Wellbeing is a sense of feeling wholeness and health. Wellbeing is an outcome of self-transcendence. Self-transcendence is a necessity for human beings to make life meaningful. The human faculties like intellect and will are used in achieving this end.<sup>2</sup>

Like his master Jesus, Chavara maintained an inner freedom. The freedom that Jesus experienced helped Him to move freely to people with the message of love. A self-transcendent person is a free person who can love and serve others freely. Jesus was free to love without reserve the poorest of the poor as well as the rich young man. His concern and friendliness towards the outcasts and the marginalized appalled even the Pharisees and the religious leaders. Jesus was free to die to give up his life for the kingdom. He was not attached to anything or anybody, not even to his own life or the success of His mission. His freedom knew no limits because his trust in God knew no bounds.

Chavara as a transcendent person was free from attachments, crutches, need for success, and reputation. Fears, worries, obsessions, and compulsive behaviours began to fade into the background. Discovering the truth about oneself initiates the process of personal liberation. Discovering the truth about today's world, an open and honest recognition of what is happening in the human world and the universe as a whole, can be a liberating experience. The experience of oneness with everyone and

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<sup>1</sup>Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, 136.

<sup>2</sup>Maniampra, *Holistic Growth: 100% Life*, 164.

everything in the universe frees one from the tyranny of one's isolated egos. Trust in God makes one to be fearlessly open-minded, free to explore new avenues of thought. The inner freedom enables the person to love without reserve accepting oneself and others as they are. The gradual process of detachment removes the obstacles to love and we soon find that we are free enough to love the whole universe as Saint Francis did.<sup>1</sup> The genuine freedom of the children of God helps the person to venture into the new areas of service and commit oneself to the acts of love, care and concern.

### **1.6. Fundamental Call to Love**

Charity is the theological virtue by which we love God above all things for his own sake and our neighbour as ourselves. The practice of all virtues is animated and inspired by charity, which binds everything in perfect harmony. Charity upholds and purifies our human ability to love and raises it to the supernatural perfection of divine love.<sup>2</sup>

Our fundamental call is to become lovers – lovers of our own selves, humanity, and God. This lovability of our selves is unmistakably brought out in the Sacred Scripture. God loves each one of us personally; it is not merely a collective love for humanity. Psalmist says: “You formed my inmost being; you knit me in my mother’s womb” (Ps 139:13). God’s plan for humans is collective and individual. Individuals can easily realize their God-given nature when there is community that fosters and supports it. Maturity can easily be measured by my ability to love and be loved. It

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<sup>1</sup>Nolan, *Jesus Today: A Spirituality of Radical Freedom*, 219.

<sup>2</sup>Curran and Fullam, *Virtue*, 147.

is in this sense that I view Chavara as a great personality. If I am not lovingly relating to the people around me, I cannot claim that I have developed a healthy and strong personality. One of the classical definitions of a weak ego is the person who is incapable of genuine relatedness.<sup>1</sup> It is by becoming a great lover that I realize myself and become more fully human. Salvation is to be understood as the full blossoming of our humanity. It is restoring our humanity in Jesus to become an ever-expanding vessel that holds out God's love to others.

Personality integration is the blending of our human faculties and gifts into a harmonious whole. For, divine grace to operate fully in the individual the capacity to cooperate with grace must be present. This is dependent upon the individual's personality integration. A balancing of various elements of life like work, leisure, prayer and apostolate helps the person to be integrated. Healthy integration happens when both behaviour and attitudes are motivated by the supreme force called 'love'.

### **1.7. Unworthiness: A Psycho-Theological Phenomenon**

"Take up your cross and follow me" (Lk 9:23), says the Lord. It is purely for the love of Christ and His mission that a religious becomes capable of facing and enduring any sufferings in one's vowed life. Self-transcendence is going beyond oneself, impelling a person to search for the meaning in life based on the virtues of love and hope. Within each individual, there is a desire for going one step better and improving the situation. It is the driving force behind evolution; it is what encourages people to train and

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<sup>1</sup>Kelsey, *Christo Psychology*, 65.

develop their capacities.<sup>1</sup> This inner aspiration for self-transcendence is an important feature of human nature which we witness in Chavara from his early days. According to Frankl, experiential, creative and attitudinal values are merely surface manifestations of something much more fundamental which he calls supra-meaning or transcendence.<sup>2</sup>

### **1.8. God-Given Self-Worth**

One striking feature of Saint Chavara's life is his great sense of unworthiness which is coming out in many instances in his work *Atmanuthapam*. As he realized more and more the immensity of God's all encompassing love that surrounded and saved him from many life-threatening situations, he could not find right expressions of gratitude for the many gifts continually flowing to him. In fact, this basic gratitude became the channel of further graces. As he found unable to express his experience of the depth of God's love, he began to feel unworthy of gifts and showed ingratitude. The words that occurred to him when addressing his own inadequate self, thus, assumed different expressions, apparently self-derogatory for psychologists or secular people. The words such as sinner, weakling, prodigal, renegade, deserter, etc., are natural for humans who seriously embark upon a spiritual journey. Until one experiences the flash of the divine, generally, one's own ego is in the forefront. With the divine flash on soul, one begins to view one's own self in a totally different way. Chavara who had the touch of the divine began to view himself and held firm to the attitude of

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<sup>1</sup>[http://www.biographyonline.net/spiritual\\_articles/self-transcendence.html](http://www.biographyonline.net/spiritual_articles/self-transcendence.html).

<sup>2</sup>Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul*, 116.

"I am not worthy." The same feeling is expressed in the whole Bible when holy people encountered the Divine. It is reflected in the prayer of the tax collector (Mt 8:8); it is expressed by the centurion (Lk 7:6). In the holy presence of the mighty creator of majesty and grandeur, a creature is nothing in itself. All saints and mystics gave thought to the creatureliness of humans. It is the presence of grace simply given at no merit of one's own, one becomes valuable and is incorporated into God's own family and enters into his kingdom. "Because he created me in His image, I feel inner stirrings and the desire to yearn for you and wanted to seek you. Because you had left imprints of your finger prints in me now I long for you. So, everything is your bounty your generosity who am I to receive this kind of graciousness and kindness," he wonders all through *Atmanuthapam*.

Because he was experiencing the primacy of God's all-encompassing love, his own unworthiness was always in the forefront of his mind. In proportion to the depth of one's divine vision of God's glory and grandeur, one may experience one's own unworthiness. He always emphasized the primacy of God's love in making things happen; hence, he remarked in the *Colloquies*: "I am not worthy of exalted virtues, nor can I meditate deeply. Is whatever God has permitted me to achieve, of my merit."<sup>1</sup>

Saint Chavara was always mindful of God's merciful love that surrounds him. He felt the merciful love has been continuously pouring in gifts of all kinds regardless of his unworthiness. He asks to himself why God has created him and finds the answer in God's merciful love:

God who is master from the beginning  
Has created me also as the son of Adam.

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, III: *Colloquies*, 1.

What is the reason for this?

Nothing your mercy, oh God who has no beginning.<sup>1</sup>

His sense of unworthiness can be likened to the Rudolph Otto's *Mysterium tremendum et fascinorum* in his work *Idea of the Holy*.<sup>2</sup> Chavara imaged himself as the prodigal son returning to the father. This imagery helped him to perceive the goodness of the Abba, Father.

Any devotee who can grasp an iota of this Great Other, naturally will plunge into the abyss of unworthiness to behold such a Mighty Being. Humans naturally have a dialectical experience before this God. He feels far away and unworthy to be close to this being. Christian theology and human religious experiences tell that this God is a personal God and relates with humans in a very special way. In Jesus, this mighty God has assumed our human nature and identified with us, thus, becoming our neighbour. He is now Emmanuel God – God is with us (Mt 1:23). When Chavara calls God or dares to address God as *Abba, ente appa*, it is a privilege he was exercising with a great sense of pride and filial love. The word *Abba* is a very intimate word. It expresses trust, safety, belongingness and, most of all, intimacy. It does not have the connotations of authority, power and control that the word father often invokes. On the contrary, *abba* implies an embracing and nurturing love that comes to us from our fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, spouse, friends and lovers.<sup>3</sup> From his *abba* experience flows humility and gratitude which we always witness in his whole life. Thus, he asks the questions to himself:

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, II: *Atmanuthapam*, 1:1-4.

<sup>2</sup>Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 32-35.

<sup>3</sup>Nouwen, *Spiritual Direction*, 75.



How did you reach so far? Who called you away from your home? How did you get being ordained? How did you come to Monastery? How was the order formed? Who called you 'Prior'? How did you come here? Are you fit or qualified for any of these? Surely No! All that can be said is God's will.<sup>1</sup>

These words of Saint Chavara remind of the words of the Psalmist: "What is man that you are mindful of him and the son of man that thou visit him?" (Ps 8:4).

As a member of the tainted humanity, he acknowledges himself how unworthy he is. It is his willingness to confess the corrupt human nature which he has shared as a mortal, stirred him to speak with great humility.

Thou art the Lord of all, all blameless, all pure  
 I am a worthless sinner, thy weak servant;  
 Thou art my father and my creator  
 Your love is unchanging and sure  
 Yet when I think of my sins  
 How can I dare to appear before You?<sup>2</sup>

### **1.9. An Integrated Personality**

Personality can be defined as the sum total of one's behaviour, temperaments and emotions. It is the integrated image of all psychological, intellectual, emotional and physical characteristics of an individual as they are presented to other people.<sup>3</sup> Chavara's success as a priest, religious, administrator and social reformer reveals a personality so unique that he developed by virtue of his spiritual outlook and values. He was loving, cheerful,

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, III: *Colloquies*, 1.

<sup>2</sup>CWC, II: *Atmanuthapam*, 5:142-150.

<sup>3</sup>Hurlock, *Personality Development*, 5.

gentle, peaceful, and approachable: equally, he was authoritative administrator and a wise teacher with caring, comforting, and mentoring skills.

Social dimension of his personality is well revealed in his ability for self disclosure, being able to sustain friendship and intimacy. Only in relationship with one another our human existence has its meaning and value. Optimism, emotional maturity, humility, etc., support the social dimension of life to its successful phase. Moral attitudes and values help one to live a life in society with real meaning, dignity and respect for one another. Human personality's different dimensions do not stand apart from one another, they are all interrelated. Higher values induced in the personality are capable of controlling lesser values of peripheral and evanescent in nature. Chavara's intimate relation to and his constant communion with Jesus in prayer and austere spiritual practices gave all other dimensions of his personality a spiritual touch and divine energy; hence, he was able to see everything as Jesus saw. In Chavara's responses and reactions, we see a desire to do the will of God all the time with a spirit of service and humility. Chavara by his constant communion with God was able to translate the Gospel values in his life. He had "put on Christ" and had the "mind of Christ" (Rom 13:14). Thus, Chavara reflected the personality of Christ. His intimate relation with Jesus enabled him to be caring, comforting, forgiving, and ministering the needy. All the while, he made provisions to be in silence and prayer, just as Jesus did it during his public life. In his *Colloquies*, Chavara states:

In order to grant all my heart's desires, and permitting me to ask without any hesitation for whatever favour I

like to have, He deigns to dwell day and night continuously very close to my room!<sup>1</sup>

We are told, on many occasions he was found before the Blessed Sacrament when he was not found in the familiar spots.

Frustration tests our threshold of tolerance on a scale from patience to impatience. Saint Chavara used his patience and humility to diffuse volatile situations. In dealing with erring priests, he showed immense patience and boldness. Anyone who paid attention to his life and apostolic activities couldn't fail to notice his emotional intelligence. He was calm and composed in the face of oppositions and faced them with courage. He was willing to undergo suffering and pain to achieve greater good for his people. He could hear the voice of the voiceless and took measures to uplift them. Even though he knew numerous languages his primary language was language of love after the model of Jesus his master. He maintained high moral credibility without much concern for immediate gratification and reward.

### **1.10. Inclusivity**

During Jesus' public life all people – sinners and saints, believers and non believers, rich and poor, pundits and illiterate – found welcomed by him. All could be beneficiaries of his goodness but he shared personally certain things to his close disciples and maintained an inner circle of intimate friends who had the privilege of special moments with him as it occurred, for example, in transfiguration and the institution of Eucharist. The question of salvation outside the Church is still being

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, III: *Colloquies*, 19; CSK, III: AK, 40.

debated with different nuances and interpretations. Probably, infinite God has infinite ways to deal with baffling questions to which we have often only one type of answers. Living in the context of multiplicity of religions and religious practices, the only thing that Chavara could do was expressing his faith in its gentleness and quiet beauty. Perhaps he could see the elements of truth and grace in different degrees as well as the seeds of Word and rays of truth that illumines all humankind in them, as Vatican Council puts it (AG 11, 15, 18; NA 2). It is as if he had anticipated the Vatican Council's insights to exercise in his cultural milieu; he maintained good relationship and collaboration with people of other faiths to promote the social, spiritual and moral values. Even when he was closely collaborating with people of all sorts, he maintained his theological position that Church is necessary for salvation and that Christ is the only mediator between God and humans (LG 14) and, therefore, the Church must continue its mission. Jesus was the master and the preeminent model of Chavara's life. Jesus walked in the company of tax collectors and Samaritans. He ate with them rendering them special favours and dignity. Chavara too like his Master couldn't feel any discomfort and uneasiness in the company of non-Christians and worked and sought their cooperation to initiate social action and to bring out the common good. He frequented their homes and ate with them, conversed on issues of common concern so that amicable solutions for common issues could be arrived at. Because of his authenticity and genuiness he was revered. His life had the witnessing power. By his positive presence and charity, with humility, he became the good news to all in his lifetime. The schools he put up by his acclaimed edict as Vicar General had the characteristics of universality and inclusiveness. In

the edict, three things were reiterated of which the third one deserves our special attention. All people without any religious distinction and standards of life shall be given admission in the school. He was bent on insisting that all services offered by the Church should be beneficial to all.<sup>1</sup>

### **1.11. Resilience and Flexibility**

Four elements that determine the resilience in a personality are social competence, problem solving skills, internal locus of control or autonomy, and a sense of purpose for future. Social competence means people who are more responsive, active, empathetic, and have good communication skills.<sup>2</sup> Family related protective factors that contribute to resilience in Chavara's life include a secure attachment relationship, high expectations, and encouraging support from the family of origin. In all these, he was well placed to have had a caring, faith-filled and wonderful family. Later, the religious fraternity in which he was growing happened to be a model of genuine bondedness by means of faith and supernatural outlook on life. This further strengthened his already existing resources to cope with the painful times. An attachment relationship refers to positive relationships or a close bond with a caring adult, not necessarily a parent.

Being placed between the community and its genuine needs, and the Apostolic Delegates' different views on practically everything, Chavara was on a tightrope walk. The congregation he was nurturing and supporting was given a different name as well as a religious habit which neither he nor the community had asked for. As a man of inner strength he could accept what he could not change in

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<sup>1</sup>Sanjay, *Ee Kadalasu Marikkukayilla: Chavaraachan*, 83.

<sup>2</sup>Masten, "Ordinary Magic: Resilience Processes in Development," 227.

the given scenario. He had developed a lot of flexibility and resilience psychologically and spiritually. Traditionally, models of resilience portray resilience as a personality trait that is stable over time. However, contemporary perspectives of resilience emphasize a transactional-ecological model of human development where the individual is constantly interacting with the environment and adapting to its demands.

Ann Masten defines resilience as a class of phenomena characterized by good outcome in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development. Resilient responses to adversity are common across lifespan as all humans encounter a variety of challenges as they journey through life. Resilience is a basic human adaptive system reinforced by secure attachments style and a sense of autonomy and a good self image. People who have goals and beliefs that give direction to life are in a better position to develop greater resiliency and a sense of wellbeing. Saint Chavara with his singular goal of achieving religious life in Malabar Church was ready to be flexible and firm with a sense of discernment for the sake of achieving greater good.

### **1.12. Passion and Compassion**

Archbishop Bacinelli, in the letter appointing Chavara as the Vicar General of the Syro-Malabarians, wrote that he was convinced of the necessary qualities that Chavara possessed for the office such as courage, prudence, and wisdom. Chavara disciplined himself and subjected strictly to the laws of the Church and the Congregation without exception. But, when compassion or understanding was called for, he could readily show it without any fear or favour. When Fr. Kalathil Scaria wanted to visit his sick uncle, the strict laws prevailed at the time in the religious community was not

helpful. Chavara's tender emotions and the family spirit he had maintained looked for ways to help Fr. Scaria against the disciplinary attitude of Fr. Leopold. Finally, he prevailed. Deep down in his heart, he knew that there is no greater law than the law of love. Chavara was a man of compassionate and merciful love. Compassion in the Buddhist sense means disapproval of one's own and others present state of suffering and the preparedness to redeem oneself and others from it.

### **1.13. Gratitude of a Good Finder**

He is keenly aware of the grace that sustained him in a lofty manner from the very beginning of his life. So, we see in his reminiscences:

Yet another favour, Oh Lord you have granted me  
 Kings and princes there are,  
 And also men rich, similar to kings.  
 Had I not been born one similar to them,  
 What would I have been!  
 You Oh Lord did not create me the richest, or the lowest  
 Thus, I live safe today.<sup>1</sup>

Chavara's gratitude and selfless sharing found expressions in striking ways. He gave more than what he took from life. Once he got a sack full of tasty mangoes from a well-wisher; he relished the taste of it. So, he wanted the kind of those sweet mangoes to be made available to all the religious houses around at that time. He planted the mango pits, very carefully nursed them, and when they came up strongly, sent the sapplings to all the houses. It was his gratitude to the almighty who supplied such tasty fruits and his desire to share the good things which he received by the grace of God

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, II: *Atmanuthapam*, 2:89-96.

that made him to do things like this. It was a simple act of gratitude and the willingness to share everything with others. All what he did in life was out of this gratitude and desire to share God's gifts with other people. God saw the generosity and gratitude of this saintly soul; finally, the mango trees he nurtured came to be known after his titular name, 'prior mangoes'. Though the name he gave initially to those trees were *Dukranon* - memory - God willed it be known in his name among the subsequent generations; thus, his name was immortalized also through the nature itself. Indeed, he himself was a good tree that bore sweet fruits all the time in season and out of season. Anyone could go near to its shade and could experience the serenity that it gave while relishing the sweet fruits. Because it was full of fragrant and sweet fruits it drew attention of the humanity and thus elevated to the sainthood to be emulated and inspired by the positivity he manifested all through his life. God willed that the truth about Chavara's life be presented to the whole world with a striking parallelism of the mango tree he had nurtured. The sweetness and generosity of this saintly man is still perpetuated by the species of prior mangoes. To give without reserve was his motto of life. He was not giving something, but the best and the most needed things to the Church and society.

As any tree attracts some types of people who rashly collect fruits without being mindful of the tree and sometimes even bruising the tree by pelting stones at it, this tree too has bruising experiences. But no tree ever withdraws its fruits on account of it. As if such things never happened they continue to flower and carry fruits and invite all to its shade. Without having access to sharing platforms or social media networks such as *WhatsApp* and *Facebook* in his time, Chavara could connect with many by having



initiated genuine interactions and meaningful human gestures of love and interest in other people. By sharing the mangoes he received, he showed the trait of a good leader, that is, by sharing the best with team members. Through his 'mango networking', Chavara pointed to the need of sharing every good thing of life, even those seemingly simple or unimportant things. Truly, in this manner, he was not only sharing but multiplying the gifts of nature.

We know that some trees don't let anything grow along with them. It takes its own space spreading out with shoots and branches, so that other smaller plants are slowly pressed out. Those smaller plants may not even get light or the required environment to grow and, hence, they will perish. Whereas there are some other trees that let other plants grow underneath and on the sides, as well as let them creep on them and nest many other creatures on its branches. It was easy for others to grow and blossom along with Saint Chavara, for he was able to offer cool shade and enough light to everyone. True men of God grow and let people grow along with them. Saint Chavara's giving and sharing mentality are reflected in all his spiritual and social actions. He always felt that he received a lot; hence, any amount of giving back to others was not enough. In his *Testament*, he asked the congregation to be grateful to all benefactors who helped them in God's providence. He asked, in fact, to remember the Carmelite missionaries and their families who served and helped in the growth of the congregation as well as the Syro-Malabar Church.<sup>1</sup>

Handing down the *Testament* to the families, namely, *Nalla Appante Chavarul*, to his beloved family members as well as parishioners, he said: "The omnipotent God most kindly

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, IV: *Letters*, 71-74.

brought me into this world. As I have been born in this family and from these parents, it is but natural that, in the order of charity and justice, I am bound to be grateful and to serve you." He expressed his confidence in the goodness of what he was bequeathing to the subsequent generations. He said: "This script will not perish even when I am dead and gone."<sup>1</sup> It was a prophetic statement of a man who lived his life authentically and genuinely. The prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi is worth remembering here: "It is in giving that we receive." Saint Chavara was continually giving; the more he gave, the more he received. Gospel reminds us to give in abundant measure: "Take heed what you hear: the measure you give will be the measure you get, and still more will be given you" (Mt 4:14).

Chavara exhorted his congregation to be grateful to the missionaries. Thus, he said: "We are greatly obliged to remember the benefits Archbishop Meneses and the Jesuits, who had come from the kingdom of Portugal, have rendered to our ancestors lest they fall a prey to Nestorianism. But they were not able to unite us in the band of charity. We do not know who is at fault, us or them? It will not be so from now."<sup>2</sup> He didn't fail to notice what the Carmelite missionaries rendered despite the odds sometime he faced. He could see the good and bad he received and was able to discern good from bad but he chose to focus on the good. He could see God's hand worked in and through them, though they were not the best tools but the architect who used the tools being the best, everything was perfectly crafted in the end. Chavara always maintained a

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<sup>1</sup>Chavara, *Chavarul* (150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition), 7; see also CWC, IV: *Letters*, 16.

<sup>2</sup>CWC, IV: *Letters*, 72.

transcendent vision which enabled him to look beyond the trivialities of the present.

#### **1.14. Evangelical Virtues**

Our deepest self has an innate ability to promote the unfolding of the whole person in a way that activates and integrates all human potentials. In the initial stages of Christian life or religious life, humans tend to promote negative virtues, promoting exercises of denial, detachment, sacrifices, etc. Positive virtues happen only when one attains psycho-spiritual wholeness, by having spiritual maturity and autonomy we are called to proclaim to the world: we are rich and not poor! We are rich because Christ is ours and God is with us. Poverty as a positive virtue is primarily concerned with the willingness to share one's being – one's faith, hope, love and all one is and all that one has. Chavara in his consecrated life developed this being level of positive virtue. Without this, no sharing will take place in the external forum and true gospel poverty will remain elusive to many religious.

In order to love like God one needs a lot of prayer, reflection and mature self. To love human beings and not try to hold on to control them, to possess or be possessed by them is the celibate love. Chavara loved others sometimes with a filial love, other times fraternally, and still other times paternally. He never lost his ability to love and nurture others. He was a man with tender and affectionate love.

Obedience to him was simply not a surrender of the will, but a willingness to actively listen with openness and the willingness to grow drawing inputs and insights from everyone he was in touch with. He was open to criticism and observations from others. He maintained a willingness

to correct himself and was able to make balanced decisions with a sense of responsibility. The value of service without looking for reward and the capacity for delaying gratification, which were epitomised in the life of Saint Chavara, are the gospel values and constitute a sign of psycho-spiritual maturity in consecrated people.

### **1.15. Integrity in Emotions and Values**

Chavara was a man of integrity. Integrity is not automatic as trees or plants bear fruits or flowers in due season. Integrity is the result of an ongoing effort to live an upright life consistently.<sup>1</sup> The person of integrity is governed by his sense of duty and moral self. Integrity finally is the ability to recognize right course of action and consistently adhering to it. Thus, it is the fruit of a progressive refinement of conscience. Chavara was refining himself every day. The compunction of his heart, which is poetically brought out in his work *Atmanuthapam*, is the result of this refinement. What made Chavara a joyful person did not consist in material possessions or knowledge he had gathered, but love, friendship, compassion, and integrity, which we cannot procure from anywhere in the market. They are to come from within by means of a spiritual vision.

In sacred scripture, a man of integrity is called 'just'; Noah (Gen 6:9), Simeon (Lk 2:25), and Saint Joseph (Mt 1:9) were addressed as just men. Justice here refers to more than economical justice and relations. It is an interior perfection of the person, practically equivalent to holiness.<sup>2</sup> The greatest enemy of integrity is egoism, a disordered love for oneself, which puts oneself above others and is intent on

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<sup>1</sup>Lorda, *The Virtues of Holiness*, 54.

<sup>2</sup>Lorda, *The Virtues of Holiness*, 52.

satisfying one's own aspirations, even at the exclusion of others. Hardly anywhere in the *Chronicles* Chavara authored, he puts himself in the forefront. He was always eager to honour others and to bring others to the limelight; he gave preference to others. Therefore, whether inside the consecrated community or outside with the general public, he never had to collide with others. The Kerala society and the Christian community slowly realized the greatness of this person, though it is regrettable that it occurred only after a century.

People of integrity seek the good of all and not their own advantage or the social group they belong to. People of integrity overcome the natural tendency to protect themselves from others, hiding intentions, habits and defects from other people. Their behaviour and words match. Undoubtedly, it gives a special charm to them. It is this kind of integrity that gave Chavara a great appeal. One of the most beautiful tributes given by the Lord is found in the gospel, when Jesus referred to Nathanel: "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile" (Jn 1:47). Jesus condemned only hypocrites in the gospel. They received the harshest condemnation.

Chavara was a man who possessed beauty without vanity, courage without ferocity, and all virtues without their corresponding vices. He was fully connected to his emotions and personal values, while at the same time being well aware of the realities on the ground. He knew his limitations; he knew his continued service and existence of the congregation he had to put up with the temporary inconveniences and less ideal contexts. As a man of God, with a holistic understanding, who could easily see the immediate realities and wider horizon at one and the same time, chose to be resilient and flexible in the light of faith.

Even though there was dissatisfaction among the members of the newly established indigenous consecrated community regarding the high-handed way of affiliating the congregation to TOCD, he tried to pacify them in the light of faith and the need of obedience as a sign of true religious.<sup>1</sup> A life lived with full awareness is often full of pain, but has its own blessings too in the long run, as the life of Chavara exemplifies.

### **1.16. Life of Grace**

Grace, as Aquinas sees, is “special love of God,” deeply but freely influencing our life. The presence of God is silent, active and unobtrusive even as it leads to eternal life. Even the active prophetic figures spent most of their life in silent dialogue with God. This is true in the lives of Elijah, Catherine of Sienna, Francis of Assisi, and Saint Chavara. Despite all its shrines and saints, Catholicism is slow to acknowledge the ‘miraculous’. In Church’s theological view, God works powerfully and invisibly in the lives of people. To our saint, faith is not sustained by miracles but by the simple and earnest daily life. In his ordinary life with its characteristic ups and downs, he could witness the miraculous. Faith means the risked acceptance that there is something more than the laws of physics. It is this faith vision that helped Chavara to accept the forceful registry of his religious order to the Carmelite Third Order, while he knew that the desires of the founding fathers were the contrary. Faith is a way of seeing life in the midst of powerful forces that make choices contrary to the laws of physics, choosing the world of spirit real but unseen. The interest of most missionary priests and Vicar Apostolic of

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<sup>1</sup>CSK, IV: *Kathukal*, 99-100.

his time was just to tide over problems they faced from the Marthoma Christians as they feared their identity as traditional apostolic community was threatened.

Standing in the middle of the Marthoma Christians (Saint Thomas Christians) and Latin Prelates, he tried to advance the community by introducing many reforms liturgically and devotionally. Saint Chavara was made Vicar General in the backdrop of Rocco's schism. The Prelates felt that it was beyond their reach to keep the faithful together in the fold; but Chavara succeeded in it. Chavara experienced constraints all over, from all quarters. His faith did not look for the miraculous but believed in a God who works through and through these adversities of everyday life. Even though Archbishop Baccinelli wanted to make him Co-adjutor Bishop and sent word to this effect to Rome, but when serious inquiry came from Rome, because of strong opposition from other missionaries, he backed out from the proposal.<sup>1</sup> Church historian, Mathias Mundadan, in his work *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara* (2008), gives a list of 10 areas of Church life where Chavara could effect visible changes and renewal. In spite of all these, he was not able to draw the due recognition he deserved. He experienced opposition and put down as he continued with his good works. This happened when he tried to complete the first monastery at Mannanam. The faith of this man was a faith that can overcome all odds. As Saint Paul puts, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" (Rom 8:35). It took long years to complete the project of proposed religious life as he experienced unfavourable attitude from the hierarchy time and again.

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<sup>1</sup>Kadanakavil, *Chavara: A Multidimensional Saint*, 127.

### **1.17. Missionary in His Own Right**

Recent studies on the understanding of Christian mission have laid considerable emphasis upon the contextualization and the notion of the receptor-orientation of the Christian proclamation.<sup>1</sup> The Christian Gospel is recognized to address specific situations and to contextualize those notions of salvation in those particular situations. To those who are oppressed spiritually, economically, or socially, the Gospel offers a message of liberation. To those who are burdened by the guilt of personal sin, the good news brings them forgiveness and pardon. The Gospel is, thus, related to the specific situation of its receptors. In the multi-cultural and pluralistic context, Chavara's mission was to bring people to greater moral perfection and to help them experience their own human dignity and worth by receiving love and affirmation in the particular context. Everyone who personally associated and engaged with Chavara, Christian or non-Christian, could feel the closeness of God and God's liberative love through him. Mother Teresa was a missionary of this type in our modern time.

### **1.18. Final Stage of Wisdom and Discernment**

Chavara had an insatiable hunger for knowledge. He was acquiring knowledge not for its own sake. He did it, out of his desire to help his fellow human beings. Armed with the knowledge he acquired, he wrote good prescriptions for the malaises of the society. He was striving to learn Spanish at the advanced stage of his life. At a time when no language labs and linguistic schools existed, he studied most languages by his own personal effort. It is amazing to see that he mastered Tamil, Italian, Syriac, Latin, Portuguese,

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<sup>1</sup>MacGrawth, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 413.



English, and Sanskrit. Lastly, he wanted to have mastery in Spanish because he wanted to read and assimilate *The Interior Castle* of Teresa of Avila from the original language so that he may not lose its richness and the experience she acquired. However, owing to external reasons, he could not proceed much in this direction having no assistance. Towards the latter part of his life he moved away from the intellectual pursuits, elevated himself from the mundane to the spiritual and was totally looking for God and God alone.

He realized like all saints and like Teresa of Avila that God alone suffices. Without any specialized schooling in Bible or theology he was able to equip himself in all those disciplines as he always kept a thirst for knowledge. He was acquiring knowledge and was applying it in all fields. His sense of right discernment and judgment flowed from the wider knowledge he acquired.

Erikson speaks of the final stage of life not as old age but as *age of integrity* or *age of wisdom*. "It is a sense of comradeship with men and women of distant times and of different pursuits who have created orders and objects and sayings conveying human dignity and love."<sup>1</sup> Besides comradeship with all and the past, it is the acceptance of one's own life cycle and the people in it who have become significant to it and free of the wish that they should have been different, and an acceptance of the fact that one's life is one's own responsibility. Such wisdom emerges from one beginning to feel immense gratitude for everything that happens in life whether good or bad. When everything is seen in a new light, without remorse or guilt, all occurrences and apparent tragedies become source of growth.

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<sup>1</sup>Erikson, *Identity and Life Cycle*, 98.

For Erikson, wisdom is more than knowledge; it is gratitude and hope here.<sup>1</sup> It can create a lot of energy and a sense of meaning. Chavara being a man of positivity had the gift of gratitude which brought grace upon grace on him. He could see the gift of meaning hidden or buried beneath everything even in negative episodes of life. Lacking this integrity or wisdom, one may land up in despair. The Emmaus disciples were in a state of despair (Lk 24:13-35). They could not see any meaning in the death of their Master. In their sharing with Christ Jesus, finally, it dawned to them that the death of their dear Master and friend was a life-giving one and everything took place in the wise plan of God. In turn, they returned to wisdom and integrity - the ability to hold on to their heart with a sense of meaning. Physical and cognitive diminishments are part of the final stages of life. People may lose their autonomy, space or initiative on many counts. In Chavara's final stage of life, he experienced these kinds of diminishments on account of bodily ailments like lack of sight and rheumatic fevers. Despair never griped him which is the opposite of wisdom. "Regardless of what diminishment is, integrity and wisdom come as a result of not only mourning the diminishments but ultimately finding the gift in it."<sup>2</sup>

Wisdom dawns when finally humans realize that nothing is an entitlement but gifts received according to the wisdom of the donor. By recalling and maintaining positive memories all the times, Chavara chose to accumulate wisdom and integrity as he was nearing the final stage of his life. It is this integrity and wisdom we witness in his Testament, *Nalla Appante Chavarul*. Wisdom comes not just

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<sup>1</sup>Linn, et al., *Healing the Eight Stages of Life*, 204.

<sup>2</sup>Linn, et al., *Healing the Eight Stages of Life*, 208.

from old age but a lifetime of giving thanks and gratefully embracing the present moment. Chavara was well aware of his 'divine sonship' received through Jesus. So, he felt a great sense of gratitude always for this sonship. Wisdom is the practical wisdom of the cross, which, though includes reason and prudence, can transcend them and leads to the very source of life that does not die, namely, knowing the father, the only true God, and he who sent Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup> In the last stage of his life, Chavara had become a *Paramahamsa*, to borrow an expression from Indian *sannyasa*. *Hamsa* is a permanent pilgrim on earth, always on the move taking the alms from people; he lives always in the presence of God. *Paramahamsa* is the highest form of *sannyasa* when one has complete control of his body, senses, mind, thought and lives totally detached from the world. He is then fully engrossed with the desire of seeing God. *Hamsa* is a legendary divine bird which has got some unique characteristics which distinguishes it from other birds. Firstly, it flies very high, above and over all mundane things. A *sannyasin* should have similar characteristics that while living and moving in the world he should be able to stand above the world, should be able to transcend the body, matter, and world. The second trait of *Hamsa* is its power of discernment. Discernment to distinguish what is worth and having permanent value *vis-à-vis* what is ephemeral and transient. Pure milk is supposed to be its food; if this milk is diluted with water or any other liquid, *hamsa* has the ability to distinguish it and will draw and consume only the milk element from the mixed liquid.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Pope Francis, "The Holy Spirit, Protagonist of Any Authentic Discernment" (Address to the Newly Appointed Bishops).

<sup>2</sup>Thottakara, "Foreword" to *Christian Life amidst Many Religions*, xi.

Anyone who observes Chavara's life can easily identify how these *paramahansa* ideals are embodied in him. He could see the beauty and worth of everything with its passing nature. In *Atmanuthapam*, we easily come across these gifts of discernment and detachment:

The fresh green grass of today, by morrow  
Shrivels, turns seer in the heat of the sun  
Lose their shades and fragrance in the air  
Momently they change and fall on the ground,  
How transient its wealth of beauty and form!<sup>1</sup>

In Chavara one is able to observe a positive attachment in his detachment. He renounced everything for the sake of the Kingdom of God not merely for a world-negating, life-denying spiritual path. The quality of his interior detachment made him free to involve fully in the world to give vibrancy and liveliness to many who were really in need of them. To him the distance between body-soul, matter-spirit, and sacred-profane were not tightly compartmentalized. In fact, we can see in Chavara's life a start up of integration, the catchword in today's psychology, theology, spirituality, etc. He could integrate *jnana*, *karma*, and *bhakti* yoga in his short life. About this personality's worth and merit Fr. Marceline speaks: When the house at Mannanam was canonically erected, it was Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara, who was found worthy to be appointed Prior of the Monastery. Even if he was the only Flower that blossomed at Mannanam, the labours of Fr. Thomas Palackal and Fr. Thomas Porukara must be considered to have been amply fruitful.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>*Atmanuthapam*, 312-316.

<sup>2</sup>Berardi, *History of True Religion in Malabar*, 19.

### **1.19. Chavara's Great Amen**

Salvation was to restore humanity to its fullness rather than saving souls. If God was not interested in every sphere of human existence, he would have left Israel in Egyptian slavery for all times. God revealed in the Scripture is one who is interested in the whole person. Psycho-theology strives to take the whole person to the transforming and sanctifying power of the spirit. Though Chavara was active and had been engaged in numerous ministries and missions, he knew that none of those things will be sustained with external support and material assistance. Structures and systems, according to him, are not enough; he understood this truth as a spiritual visionary. Hence, he wrote: "The firmness of a monastery does not consist in the firmness of its walls, but on the virtue and zeal of those who dwell in it."<sup>1</sup>

The founding fathers were very clear about their objectives in founding the first indigenous religious order. Primarily they looked for union with the Lord through contemplative prayer and penance; they were also making good efforts to renew the Christian life through their ministries in the parish context. The twin objectives were earnestly followed up after the founding of the monastery, as they could dedicate themselves for their own spiritual life by continuous prayer and penance as well as the preaching and teaching in the parishes.

Chavara's life was a continuous 'amen' to God's call. He always responded without wavering, an attitude and mindset that he had developed even at the age of 13 at the time of joining the seminary, which he further developed all through his life of 66 years. His 'amen' resounds in his life

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, IV: *Letters*, 94.

and works. The 'amen' to God's word and God's will was so powerful in the salvation history that, by virtue of them, the word was made flesh in the womb of Mary. By Chavara's 'amen' the word again became enfleshed, alive and active, in whatever ministries he had stepped in. Thus, he was able to affirm at the end of his life, "... never did I have the occasion to be deprived of the grace I received in baptism."<sup>1</sup>

Psycho-theological paradigms push the boundaries of the old distinction between psychology and theology. An integrative approach helped Chavara to become all that he is called to be. At no time in life he was at a finishing point; he was in the process of becoming whole with the spiritual self he was endowed with. It never left him impoverished and diminished. Growing up in a theologically conservative Christian community that maintained an Apostolic tradition rigidly, he desperately wanted to be part of the larger Christian faith and part of a greater humanity transcending the pool of faith he was swimming in. Glancing through the annals and episodes of his life, we witness the intentional nature of his journey that is to become a whole person. There is only one route to be fully whole and human, that is, by being deeply spiritual.

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<sup>1</sup>*Positio*, 548.



## Chapter 2

# HOLISTIC THEOLOGY OF SAINT CHAVARA

The term theology is defined in multiple ways based on the bent of the authors and writers. Theology is the study of the divine in its simplest meaning. As divine is so inexhaustive, deep and vast, it has assumed varied names and forms based on the socio-religious and cultural milieu. Christian theology is faith-reflection designed to promote Christian life and growth. Theology in the past could not transcend the dichotomy between theory and praxis. Maintaining a healthy balance between these entities helps us to be free from extremes. Theology reigning in the aristocratic domain was brought down in the recent decades to face the contemporary challenges. Thus, we have today more integrated theological disciplines which bridge the gap between theory and praxis. For, "truth does not terminate in abstract contemplation that faithful living flows from truth as water flows from a fountain."<sup>1</sup>

### 2.1. Implications of Holistic Theology

Authentic living in the modern world requires that a person views life holistically rather than in fragments. In order to be more effective in Christian witnessing and to discharge the mission in the globalised and pluralistic world with its challenges, we need new paradigms for doing theology. Catholic theology to be holistic shall integrate revelation, scripture and tradition, and the Church *magisterium* into a

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<sup>1</sup>Lewis and Demarest, *Preface to Integrative Theology*, 26.



meaningful synthesis. Saint Chavara's life reveals a paradigm shift to this effect in a groundbreaking manner.

Holistic theology is practical theology that relates to the belief and practices of the Church with reference to the community and context. Holistic theology is Word-centred and Spirit-led, allowing integration from the insights of other human, social, or natural sciences, because all truth is God's truth which is seen in varying degree in all fields of positive human action.

When theology becomes practical, it naturally becomes more experiential. In this sense, it is psycho-theology. When the second century Father of the Church Saint Ireneus said that the glory of God consists in man to be alive and fully alive, he was sowing the seeds of holistic theology. Though, his saying was lost in the subsequent centuries, in the last part of the twentieth century, it has been rediscovered with its deeper implications in Christian anthropology, theology, and eschatology. Holistic theology deals with the rejected and neglected part of human self in theology; this calls for paying greater attention to the physical, social and psychological dimensions of the human person.

## **2.2. The Need of a Big Picture**

Living in an era of information explosion in all fields, ordinary mortals are at a disarray of how to make sense of the bits and pieces of information that is constantly bombarding them. To develop a unified worldview encompassing all relevant knowledge and truth is really strugglesome. The radically different kinds of experiences of people in East and West, North and South complicate the challenge of relating areas of learning cohesively on a shrinking globe. Even within the same culture people's interests vary greatly. This dilemma does not absolve us

from developing meaningful, integrated, and wholesome disciplines whether in social sciences, theology, or spirituality. Seeing things in bits and pieces without a big picture is the basic problem in theology and allied disciplines.

For Christians, the only example of life and mission is Jesus of Nazareth; for there is perfect coherence between his life and teachings, between his preaching and attention to multiple human needs. One who is called to holiness in Jesus' model is not called alone in an individualistic manner, rather through a lifestyle that boarders all human realms. In this regard, Thomas Kochumuttom rightly observes:

While thinking of the establishment of a religious house their intention, obviously, was to be able to do the many good works that would otherwise be left undone in the church and society. It should be "a house built on hilltop (*bes-rauma*)" for all others to look at and be inspired, a 'mirror of virtuous life' (*punnyattinte kannati*) looking at which all can easily learn what it means to lead a virtuous life, and a 'spiritual resort' (*punnya sanketam*) where all are welcome to come and be spiritually refreshed and revitalized.<sup>1</sup>

Later, in establishing religious life for women too, Chavara was thinking along the same line that there may be greater good in the Church and society at large. Chavara in all his endeavours held that establishing connectivity between heaven and earth is a goal for the church; he did not lose one for the sake of the other. As an authentic person, he was always illumined by the light of earthly and heavenly horizons. Holistic theology suggests a profound and holistic relationship between salvation and holiness, conversion and

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<sup>1</sup>Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 23.

lifestyle, personal and communal life, Church and society, and faith and radical obedience.<sup>1</sup>

Without the 'big picture' it is difficult to determine wisely what values are worth-living and -dying for in a fast-moving, pluralistic world. Francis Schaeffer diagnosed the basic problem of Christians, for example, in America in the following way: "They have seen things in bits and pieces instead of totals." In the social issues of life, it is important to be able to detect the underlying assumptions about reality (metaphysics) and about how we know reality (epistemology). God knows, sustains, and gives purpose to all that is. God provides a focal point not only for our limited personal experiences of special interests but for all thought. The question for Christians is not whether they will relate all their fields of knowledge to God's purposes, but whether they, as stewards of God's truth, will do so poorly or well.<sup>2</sup>

### **2.3. Wholeness by Integration**

Integration brings together things which are found apart. It assumes that these things which were found apart actually belong together. Therefore, when they are brought into proper relationship with one another, they will be better understood, more likely to fulfil to their real purpose. Chavara, a man who could see the connectedness of all the phenomena with his deeper theological vision, could easily pick up the purpose and unity that is beneath the apparent diversities. Thus, he stepped into a lot of activities of apparently secular nature. The opening of the Sanscrit school testifies to Chavara's love for Indian culture and the

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<sup>1</sup>"Wesleyan Theology: A Holistic Theology" [online].

<sup>2</sup>Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 12.

positive attitudes towards the true and holy elements in other religions about which the Second Vatican Council made revolutionary remarks:

The Church therefore has this exhortation for her sons: prudently and lovingly, through a dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions and in witness of Christian faith and life, acknowledge, preserve and promote the spiritual values and moral goods found among these men and women, as well as their values in their society and culture (NA §2).

He knew how the secular could be employed to accomplish sacred purposes. He could see the sacred and God's purpose and will in many things which led this soul to be a pioneer in many spheres of human interests.

To borrow the language that was very common in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there are "two books" we must study to fully understand our world: the book of Nature and the book of Scripture. Both books are authored by God – God's world and God's Word – to put it in another way. Obviously, since these two books are both authored by God, they ultimately serve a single purpose. Though they belong together, they are found apart. This reality makes it imperative to have a holistic understanding and integration – bringing together things that are found apart. In fact, it seems extremely appropriate given the fact that God has chosen to grant human beings knowledge from two sources, not just one.

The fact is that holistic approach does not always work as smoothly as we would like. We bring up things together to mix and match but they do not always integrate well. Sometimes the process of integration is resisted from both within and without. Still other times, integration may happen, but may not produce the desired result, perhaps

even whipping up riots instead of harmony. In a fallen world, none of these outcomes is surprising. Very few things work the way they are supposed to work, but that does not mean we discard the vision. Faced with stiff indifference and opposition, Saint Chavara held on to his integral vision. Nothing happened in his life overnight. As a man of holistic vision who could see God's hand at work along with him, he could let God and God's time to work out things, while he was committed to fulfil his projects. It took a long time to materialize his dream of founding congregations for men and women. He realized that God is the active agent in the history that humans are instruments in bringing transformation and, thus, he could always insist upon, "Gods will always and everywhere."

#### **2.4. Wholeness from Church's Mission**

One of the challenges facing the twenty-first century Church is providing an active theological response to a rapidly changing society by respecting the word of God as well as the teachings of the Church. Saint Chavara took up this challenge in the nineteenth century itself and presented a model of contextualized theological response taking the ground realities of the given world. Saint Chavara was not an academic theologian. As an integrated man he could bring faith and learning together and resisted the common tendency to make all things separate and compartmentalized. Thus, no ministry was alien to him. He rejected a Christian faith that is limited and confined to some areas and excluded other.

Church is a sign of the Kingdom and agent of transformation. The metaphors of the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Mt 5:13-16) show how the people of God fulfil their role through interaction with the world.

Jesus through these metaphors helps us didactically to find answers to existential questions. Who are we? What is our reason for existence in the Church? Church can be the sign and agent of transformation through the people who live up these metaphors in a meaningful way. In every era, Church is blessed with saints, mystics and prophets who became salt and light to the world. In the nineteenth century Kerala Church, it was Saint Chavara who became the light and salt to his people.

The Church exists in the time marked theologically by the tension between 'now' and 'not yet'. In Jesus Christ the Kingdom of God has interrupted history, thus, it is both a present reality and a promise yet to be fulfilled. The word Kingdom does not refer to a territorial kingdom in the present or to an eschatological kingdom in the future, rather the power of God manifest in Jesus Christ. With this perspective, living in eschatological tension between the inauguration and the manifestation of the complete Kingdom, the Church is called to be an agent of change in society. Chavara who could see this ecclesial dimension naturally became an agent of transformation in the Church and society through his holistic life and personality. Holiness in Christian life implies total surrender to God and placing the centrality of life completely on Him; the exterior then is determined by the expression of God's love to one's neighbour. Failing to show charity, for Chavara, is failing the purposes of God. So, he reminds his own brethren:

However numerous the monasteries may be, all of you should love another as if you are children born of the same mother and grown up drinking her milk. This love

should never weaken, but keep growing stronger and stronger. Bear this in mind as my most important advice.<sup>1</sup>

## 2.5. Catholic Perception of Holistic Theology

Holistic theology in the Catholic tradition involves a set of non-contradictory assumptions and hypotheses on topics significant to the Christian life and service. Being a comprehensive discipline, it tries to draw upon relevant lines of evidence from God's word responsibly interpreted by the empirical sciences, and from internal experience as responsibly interpreted by psychology, ethics, epistemology, and ontology.

Holistic theology shall preserve the values of systematic theology. It shall, however, avoid its weaknesses. For example, while systematic theology involves *apriori* conclusions and organizing principles, holistic theology cannot maintain such *apriori* principles by its very nature. In order to avoid pitfalls the methodology of integrated theology does not start with indefensible presuppositions. It will accept only those proposals that cohere with adequate evidence from special revelation and general revelation. The criteria are designed to permit only as much integration as the data of scripture revered and experience permit.

Nevertheless, the method emphasizes difference between what is *given* in divine revelation and what is *taken from* it by human interpreters. Holistic theology claims no finality of interpretations, or conclusiveness on every point beyond reasonable doubt. It does not claim to our full comprehension of any complex reality such as God, humans, historical events, or the Church. Holistic theologians

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, IV: *Letters*, 71; CSK, IV: *Kathukal*, 100.

consider their own position as one among many hypotheses to be verified or invalidated.

If systematic theology involves a closed system, integrative or holistic theology can never be completely finished and its content as presently formulated can never become a final and closed system. It is always open to new discoveries about the significance of God's word and God's world. The verification method sees all truth as God's truth, wherever it is found and holds that all truth is ours (1 Cor 3:21-23). In this approach, one need not fear the re-examination of any doctrine. If what has been held is not properly understood and interpreted, it ought to be revised; if what has been held is true, it will stand re-examination. If systematic theology is taught by indoctrination, holistic theology is not. Given its methodology, it cannot be communicated by sheer indoctrination, but only be challenging the coming generation to become sharers of the adventure of doing theology for them. If systematic theology fails to exhibit its relevance, holistic theology has a built-in demand to do so.<sup>1</sup> It endeavours to display the contemporary relevance of the doctrines formulated without reducing theology to a trendy tract for the fleeting times.

Holistic theology assumes that anyone who seriously undertakes noble tasks in the Divine sphere is illumined by the Holy Spirit. No valid theology can formulate revealed truth in interaction with contradictory options in theology, philosophy, science, religion, and cults. Saint Chavara was very keen on this. He always stood to defend the orthodoxy of the faith handed down to him and, at the same time, made efforts to make it more meaningful in the given context. The confidence the Vicar Apostolics placed in him

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<sup>1</sup>Bouma, "Integrative Theology" [online].



is clear from the fact that they gave him special faculties to reconcile the excommunicated persons, and to absolve censures against priests.<sup>1</sup> A more wholesome reform was the main mission given to Chavara as Vicar General. In fulfilling his assigned duty, he succeeded in promoting an integral renewal of the Church covering domains such as spiritual, social, cultural, missionary, and liturgical.<sup>2</sup>

## **2.6. Interfaces of Psychology and Theology**

We believe that there is special revelation as well as general revelation. The first one consists of the Word of God, including its hermeneutics, theology, etc., that are significant in its proper understanding. Thus, we should study Bible by considering issues such as cultural context, language, literary forms and so on. The methodology of scientific method is different. Scientific methods of science belong to the general revelation. Since data sources and methods of analysis are different, we would expect to find differences in the conclusions reached by each discipline. These conclusions, in the form of psychological theories and theological constructs, are at once interpretative, tentative and summarize the best data in each area. There shall be a theological and biblical reflection upon psychology and psychological reflection upon theology and the Bible. The guiding principle is that both are products of God's revelation and both portray humanity although neither is exhaustive in its own description. Conflicts between psychology and theology are due either to error in biblical interpretation or error in using the scientific method, or both. Since each derives from revelation, accurate findings

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<sup>1</sup>See *Positio*, 363.

<sup>2</sup>Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 240.

in each will not conflict; all truth is God's truth. So, we adopt an eclectic approach, tentatively accepting those psychological principles that have good research evidence. Theological conclusions must be tested by using valid biblical and psychological insights. There is also room for deferring judgment on a particular idea until more information is available.

Saint Chavara could bring down Christian theology and scriptures closest to the people of God, namely, to the living context of people. While he steadfastly held on the substance and essentials of faith he inherited, in the details of its execution he took into account the socio-cultural environment he lived. He loved God and the neighbour in a profound way; consequently, everything arose naturally as a corollary of the essence he held. Drawing energy and life from faith, he deconstructed the society and the Church which was in need of a fresh air in its lungs. He downed the curtain of division of spiritual and secular by engaging in ministries that merged the sacred and the secular together. He wanted to transform faith that it can meaningfully relate to the humans here and now.

Saint Chavara as a great visionary had dreams and clear understanding about family, society, Church, liturgy, spiritual formation, religious life, etc. Though his environment was not very conducive for flourishing within the given state of life, he could restructure the life of the society and the Church he was closely connected with. Although himself was not a trained theologian, in the life and works of Chavara we come across with seeds of holistic theology. He was an administrator, formator, mystic, spiritual counsellor, preacher and teacher. No one can touch such sublime heights unless there is a holistic vision characterized by philosophical and theological dimensions.

Today theology is trying to make itself meaningful and whole by embracing different disciplines and their insights. He was illumined by a theology that was down to earth human and enlivening life at every step. Holistic theology integrates the insights of psychology and other human sciences, for everything is part of revelation in different degrees. Historian A. M. Mundadan notes:

He [Chavara] had no great opinion for the intellectual and moral qualities of the Chaldean clergy, as he had for the missionaries of Europe. He preferred enlightened missionaries rather than Chaldean prelates. He freely borrowed from Western, Latin and Indian traditions to foster spiritual as well as social and cultural development of his Church and society.<sup>1</sup>

### **2.7. Blossoming Holistic Vision**

A holistic theology cannot move along without grasping the significance of incarnation. Chavara's incarnation theology finds its beautiful expression in his poetic work *Atmanuthapam*. Each stage of the Christ event is unravelled without losing the transcendent beauty of God. It is the fine expression of mystical theology. The work becomes a flowing river of inner desire to see the multidimensional and all-encompassing personality of Jesus.

Chavara's life and mission unfolded as a natural corollary of his Christian anthropology and theology. It is the very person of Jesus Christ who inspired him to stretch himself beyond the barriers and limits placed on him by the ecclesiastical structures and civil society of the time. In the early period of his priestly formation, Fr. Palackal, his rector-malpan, noted in this young seminarian, extraordi-

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<sup>1</sup>Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 266.

nary intelligence, devotion, prudence, maturity and divine destination.<sup>1</sup> Saint Chavara accorded the highest honour to his malpan for the holistic and sound theological understanding he received from him in the following words: "From my childhood onwards Malpan took care of me, looked after my bodily needs and spiritual needs, taught me and helped me in my all round growth."<sup>2</sup> There could be many good things in one's environment: one may be surrounded by good people, still one need not become a whole person unless such a vision and mission is already imbibed. Chavara did imbibe such a vision from the early days of his home milieu and by the good parenting, and thus he was able to make use of the available opportunities offered to him later. Because of his openness and faith vision he was able to develop a whole personality that could embrace the multiple dimensions of his priestly life.

Chavara, along with his Rector-Malpan, felt that people miss a lot of good due to the absence of religious houses and grieved over such situation; he wanted to overcome this state by opening up religious life. When time arrived, he chose to do immense good by all means. As a visionary by nature, he had dreams and clear understanding about society, family, Church, liturgy and spiritual formation, and religious life. He walked by doing good, loving and embracing all that is good after the model of his Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

At a time when there was no erudite person in the whole Kerala Church and society, he self-tutored himself, learned many languages so that he could deepen his own faith and fortify the faith of the people of God. As he proceeded in his

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<sup>1</sup>Kalluveetil, "Pioneers of the Congregation," 29.

<sup>2</sup>CWC, I: *Chronicles*, 52.

life path pursuing holiness, he synthesized the vertical and horizontal dimensions of life; he integrated *bhakti marga* and *karma marga* into the ecclesial dimension. As a man of God, he loved people and the Church and always tried to foster unity in the Church and genuine charity in his religious communities.

In the nineteenth century Kerala Church and society, Saint Chavara could leave some indelible marks because he had holistic vision. Men of God always draw respect and credibility in India. But mostly it was in the narrow confinements of the respective religions. But Chavara could draw peoples' respect and love beyond his religious affiliation. This he could achieve because of his love for humanity.

His spirituality opened him completely to God and God's people. To him God's people meant all humans created in the image and likeness of God. He believed in the fatherhood of God and brotherhood of the humankind. He had realized this much before the Second Vatican Council that the Kingdom of God is a larger reality than the Church. He could see God's kingdom reflected in the poor, lowly and down trodden, because they all believe in the goodness of the creator God. Jesus promised the kingdom of God to all - the tax collectors, prostitutes, the sick, and even the little children. Jesus kept company with sinners and announced: God rejoices in sinners coming back (Lk 15). God's favour presupposes nothing; separation and judgment come only at the end. All these refer to God's salvation and saving acts to all. In the preaching of the historical Jesus, the kingship of Jesus is never the eternal rule of the creator, but the eschatological kingship which has intervened in these very days, through Jesus without cosmic

transformations or the political reconstitution.<sup>1</sup> It is this kind of kingdom present through Jesus, Chavara was displaying by his holistic vision. It has taken into account the sense of urgency to shed the rays of the kingdom in his socio-cultural and religious context. Thus, he became a trailblazer of the kingdom of God in his time to his society.

Jesus proclaimed the imminence of the kingdom of God in his preaching and life. Chavara felt the same sense of urgency to bring the closeness of God through the mission he inherited from Jesus to the unenlightened and under privileged of his time. Thus, they may have a glimpse of the kingdom at least in a remote way as a preparation to receive it in full in *eschaton*. Ultimately the Kingdom of God and its realization is God's own work according to his time and design. So, leaving aside those concerns, doing one's mission according to the call one has received was Chavara's practice-oriented theological mind. This is exhibited on various occasions in the life of Chavara. For example, after many roadblocks, Chavara was finally given permission to resume the construction of the monastery with no means at his disposal. He writes:

From that day I began to consider myself as a full-fledged ascetic and was determined to keep away completely from my blood relatives and to give myself up to the monastic pattern of life with all my income going to the common funds and all my needs met from the same.<sup>2</sup>

His innovative ways in education, social welfare, charities, and publication all were small ways of shedding the rays of the kingdom of God in the best possible ways in his time.

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<sup>1</sup>Hunnerman, "Reign of God," 1975: 1352.

<sup>2</sup>CWC, I: *Chronicles*, 27.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta could not get rid of all slums in Calcutta, but her model of personally relating to the individuals in those slums gave them dignity, honour and self-worth enough to die as a human beings. The kingdom of Jesus was present in her actions. Chavara adopted the model of 'doing all good' for God's people. Hence, no human domain was alien to him. He bought land to cultivate and feed people so that the institutions he founded may have sustainability. He was not waiting for the big things to happen. He showed in his life the value of sacrifices which encouraged people to save a handful of rice (*pidiyari*) for the starving and needy. Kingdom is all about announcing and realizing the good news of God's wonderful love and kindness. It may be done in wonderful ways, diversified manner depending on the person engaged. William James, an American Psychologist said: "The best use of life is to spend it for something that outlasts it." The truth is that only the kingdom of God lasts; only God and his designs will last. Anything we do to God is part of his kingdom; so, our committed service to humanity, love, worship, fellowship, nurturing others' growth, etc., are worthy tasks and projects in his kingdom and will last forever

Chavara lifted his own platform, that is, Christianity to a higher level, that all could see the value and worth of religion in the public sphere. He elevated Christianity from its cultural and institutional constraints. He gave Christianity in Kerala a viable secular platform that has contributed to the overall growth of Kerala.<sup>1</sup> As a man with deep spiritual roots, his vision naturally became more

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<sup>1</sup>Chatterjee, "Foreword" to *The Life and Legacy of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, iii.

holistic and all-encompassing. To those familiar with only a western type of Christianity with its more aggressive styles, he offered an alternative Indian and eastern style by his personality and functional ways while living with the constraints of the Church institutionalism of the time. Chavara contributed to the fostering of organic diversity in Kerala's social space through his humble yet farsighted personal initiatives.<sup>1</sup> It is with the aim of wholesome development of the society that he initiated all his new ventures.

### **2.8. A Man of Synthesis**

In Gestalt psychology, mental health is related to wholeness that is bringing the split parts of multidimensional personality to the experiential level, accepting the polarities and exercising all its multiple aspects. Each of us is born whole, but when we start living we pretend to be a person who is not ourselves because of pain or for the need of immediate comfort and, thus, become fragmented. Frederik Pearls, a champion of gestalt therapy, stressed a holistic approach to personality in which every element of a person is connected to the whole. Human beings are whole-makers: synthesizers of a wide variety of bodily, perceptual, cognitive, behavioural and spiritual experiences.

Chavara's holistic vision and outlook made him to look beyond the here and now. He knew what makes humans complete and leads to self-realization. As an informed man with solid spiritual foundation for his life, he evolved a synthesis of secular and sacred values. He could symbolize the spirit of Indian epics as well as Gospel values. The spirit

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<sup>1</sup>Chatterjee, "Foreword" to *The Life and Legacy of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, iv.



of world is divisiveness and polarization as we see it today. Looking for unity in diversity demands virtues like tolerance, generosity, humility, and unconditional love for the humans. Saint Chavara cultivated all human and divine virtues so that he could rise above the petty minds of his generation which was suffering from exclusivity. Jesus was an inclusive man. All found welcome in Jesus' presence. It is this inclusivity of Jesus, Chavara bequeathed as a legacy. Sitting with the Lord daily in prayer and meditation and conversing with him personally, he appropriated the heart and mind of Jesus. In our increasing drive for greater globalization, uniqueness of faith and culture is losing its individuality and space. Chavara without losing his own faith and its unique expression in the Syro-Malabar rite could take in all that was identified as good. He could adopt from other traditions and could make liturgy and worship of his time more people-friendly and meaningful. It is sad to see today's trend of enforced homogeneity in faith expressions in the name of perpetuating traditions or patrimonies. In a land of cultural plurality, one needs to be concerned about how much exclusion is really needed to keep one's identity. To keep one's identity, exclusiveness is not the right way, but more inclusiveness and synthesis without losing the essentials. Chavara showed a great example of this kind of synthesis so that our social systems and institutions may carry greater power to lead people to wholeness.

Small minds cannot create such holistic environments for people to blossom; it needs great minds with solid spiritual foundation. Only spiritual values of a higher order can hold the bond of humanity and help us to go forward. Chavara was rooted in his Church and faith and rose above it with a

heart that could hold the multiple dimensions of God's Kingdom.

## 2.9. Wholesome and Dynamic Theology

Being a wholesome person is to be a dynamic person. Chavara's theological outlook and understanding underwent a gradual change. The proposal made to the then Bishop Stabilini by the founding fathers was to have a secluded life away from the world.<sup>1</sup> Though he joined with other *malpans* in this idea, following the direction offered by the bishop, slowly he felt the need to be in the midst of people so that all may benefit from the fruits of religious life. He was slowly moving towards the understanding of the God's universal will of salvation. He was able to accept the modified proposal of Bishop Stabilini to live and work with people. Through his closeness with Jesus, he realized the kingdom God in himself and experienced the blessedness of the beatitudes and he wanted this gift to be shared with all families and the society and the Church at large. This understanding led him to take initiatives in renewing families and parishes.

A battle is not won by sheer physical forces. It needs people who can see a bigger picture and larger landscapes. Battles for noble causes need faith and hope in a God who works along with humans as they make their best efforts with wisdom and planning. O. N. V. Kurup, a renowned Malayalam poet and lyricist, writes: "Chavara could absorb the positive energy that the culture of this land possessed, and it was this power that enabled him to associate with and

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<sup>1</sup>Plathottam, *Biography of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 71-72.

touch people of other faiths and in turn enrich them through his own.”<sup>1</sup>

To strike a balance between two extremes – between evangelization and human progress, between human salvation and human liberation – is a difficult task. Often the pendulum will go to one or other extreme. Second Vatican Council sensed humanity’s desire for freedom, dignity and justice. The Council could hold these values in the mission and evangelization that the Church envisaged. Thus, we have a decree on *Church in the Modern World*, where the unity of creation and redemption along with the dignity and freedom of humans were conceived inseparable from salvation. Humans are “in the world and not of it” paradigm was understood by Saint Chavara before it became a theological maxim in the post-Vatican period. The problems often occurred in the way we understand the word ‘world’. God’s creation and God’s designs cannot go wrong. It has an intrinsic value in itself. The spirit of the world – as life is lived out and the choices made in the functioning – is often inimical to God and Gods project. Saint Chavara did not split the spiritual and the social. The visionary saint sensed that the more the world is pouring its values of secularism and godlessness to Church and the people of God, the more the Church is in need of rushing to the Word. Church cannot be away from the people and their existential dilemmas. Chavara understood that there cannot be any mission or evangelization in the Church while keeping itself away from people and their needs. Vatican Council envisioned Church as the “visible instrument of

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<sup>1</sup> Kurup, “The Great Awakening,” *The Life and Legacy of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 57.

Christ and the universal sacrament of salvation.” She is meant to be the Church of all men and women.

We relate to God with our whole being. Reality is larger than any single model. Many in the past, even saints, had a handicapped consciousness having rejected the psycho-social dimension of human life. In the person and personality of Chavara, we witness a different way of being. Physical and psycho-social growth disposes one to prepare for the spiritual growth through which he realizes his essential nature. The first two phases are naturally part of becoming a spiritual person. Chavara’s spiritual consciousness encompassed and influenced all other dimensions of consciousness. He saw the social, affective and physical wellbeing not as an end in itself but as a way to reach the essential spiritual nature and its realization. In his poetic engagements, his interest was not to be a renowned literary genius but to make those media as pathways to express one’s spiritual self. He had developed a strong ego self that can stand to the tensions and struggles of life. A person who stands before God is someone with emotions of courage, fear, anger desolation and grief. It is to this total person that God interacts. Accepting one’s weakness and limitations is a primary requisite in growing spiritually and becoming whole. Chavara deemed himself as a prodigal son who was in need of the mercy unbounded.<sup>1</sup>

Holistic theology focuses on promoting abundant life that Jesus promised. The good news of the gospel is to be experienced here and now, and hereafter. A whole life encompasses all the width and depth of human consciousness. It has a balanced view of all that makes human consciousness into a whole. In Saint Chavara, we see

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, II: *Atmanuthapam*, 1, 96-100.

this interest to touch all realms of human activities to enlarge human consciousness.

### **2.10. Experience of Transcendence and Immanence**

*Transcendence* comes from the Latin prefix ‘trans’, meaning ‘beyond’, and the word *scandare*, meaning ‘to climb’. Many theologians see mystery as God’s primary attribute. Karl Barth said that “God is ultimate mystery.” Karl Rahner views God as “mystery” and theology as “the ‘science’ of mystery.” Nikolai Berdyaev deems “inexplicable Mystery” as God’s “most profound definition.<sup>1</sup> God’s transcendence means that he is outside space and time and, therefore, eternal and unable to be changed by forces within the universe. It is, thus, closely related to God’s *immutability*, and is contrasted with his *immanence*. A significant verse which balances God’s transcendence and his immanence is Isaiah 57:15.

God is said to be immanent within creation and transcendent from creation. Both truths are taught in Scripture. Jeremiah 23:23-24 and Acts 17:27b-28 speak of his Immanence. Isaiah tends to emphasize God’s transcendence (Is 58:8-9; 6:1-5). Immanence means God’s presence and action in creation, in the human race and in space and time. As such His influence is all-pervasive in nature. Transcendence means that God is not merely a quality of nature or humanity but stands above and beyond them as a supreme being. Kierkegaard’s “infinite qualitative distinction” between God and us is expressive of this “wholly otherness.” God’s holiness and purity transcend our own nature absolutely. If we emphasize immanence, we risk identifying God with the world, making him one with

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<sup>1</sup>“Introduction to Christian Theology” [online].

us. If we emphasize transcendence we lose sight of His reality and emphasize God's absence and, in his stead, focus on human effort to reach God.<sup>1</sup>

The dialectical experience of transcendence and immanence of God is, thus, clearly seen in mystic saints. Saint Chavara experienced God of infinite might, glory and holiness before which he felt his creatureliness absolutely insignificant. Reading Chavara's works, one may sometimes doubt whether his attitude towards God was characterized by fear. We read in the second chapter of *Athmanuthapam*, as it is rendered in the prose style by a renowned Chavara scholar Thomas Kochumuttom:

Who else could be as greatly unfortunate as I am! What a fool am I! My lamp extinguished without my knowing. You gave me a powerful torch that I might guide others; but I changed it into darkness! I am immensely sorry that alas even as a child I lost all my spiritual beauty... With pain I crave for your pardon.<sup>2</sup>

His attitude to prayer can be compared to that of Moses on Mount Sinai; he was fearful at the sight of Yahweh but he returned from mountain with joy, peace and radiance.<sup>3</sup> What is surfacing in Saint Chavara's meditational conversation is his integral understanding of the Godhead with might, majesty, glory and tremendous powers. On the other hand, he has heart-level knowledge and experience that this God is a God of holiness, compassion and unconditional love and forgiveness, and he doubtful as to whether he could return anything in the same proportion. So he wrote:

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<sup>1</sup>[https://www.nbseminary.ca/wp-content/uploads/image/THS\\_540](https://www.nbseminary.ca/wp-content/uploads/image/THS_540).

<sup>2</sup>Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Kuriakse Elias Chavara*, 331.

<sup>3</sup>Kadankavil, *Chavara: A Multidimensional Saint*, 43.

And I know that it is due to your love for this ungrateful man...

Oh my heart, remember your deeds  
and also how ungrateful you have been.<sup>1</sup>

To know about the wrath and justice of God without seeing and experiencing God's merciful love which is towering over all other attributes of God may bring one to excessive fear and guilt. Whereas to stress the mercy and love without his holiness and justice can lull people into a false sense of security and a lack of concern for spiritual issues and responsibilities.<sup>2</sup> God is spirit and infinite; man is finite and subject to the limitations of matter. God's infinity as to space is called omnipresence. His infinity as to power is called omnipotence. He is transcendent above nature and equally immanent in nature. Having experienced the divine love in its vastness and depth, Chavara was able to disperse it to the community and people he cared.

The best thing that can happen in life is to have the vision of God from the Christian revelation and faith. Chavara was a blessed soul in this respect. He knew that it is the incarnate word Jesus, the one in human form becoming Emmanuel in order that we may experience him as real God. His Christological focus is very emphatic in the *Atmanuthapam*, a poetic work which is autobiographical to a great extent. In this work, Chavara wants to experience the divine through the person of Jesus who lived like anyone else, going through all human experiences and, at the same time, keeping all the loftiness of the Son of God. As he meditates, he is filled with an intense desire and longing to see the incarnate Word's humility as well as splendor.

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, II: *Atmanuthapam*, 2:56-64.

<sup>2</sup>Collins, *Christian Counseling*, 817.

Just as the Apostle Thomas wanted to see Jesus and touch him, so that he may recognize and experience Jesus in a personal way, Saint Chavara too yearned to see Jesus' life in a very personal way. Humans have that spiritual capability of creative imagination through which spiritually advanced persons can recreate past realities in a personally experiential manner. In the third canto of *Atmanuthapam*, for example, Saint Chavara has expressed his intense desire to see the different phases of Jesus' life and action.

### **2.11. Christian Anthropology and Wholeness**

All disciplines are striving to be holistic or integral in our time. Theology or any other social science is no exception. Every discipline wants to assist the human flourishing by assisting in one's mental, social and spiritual health. Psychology, spirituality and other sciences need an adequate conception of human being to promote human flourishing and wellbeing. Psychology and theology need a more accurate understanding of body-soul relationship and its integral nature. The tendency to split the human being as in dualistic way, body-soul or in triadic way existed all the time. Treating body, mind and spirit as watertight compartments of life won't help humanity to flourish and attain a sense of wellbeing. Christian anthropology looks on humans as substantially one, created by God in his image, but weakened personally and interpersonally because of sin, and invited to become members of the body of Christ and flourish in the personal and communal sense.<sup>1</sup> God sent humans to earth to flourish without losing the identity of God's children. Saint Chavara always kept the sense of

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<sup>1</sup>Brugger, "Psychology and Christian Anthropology," 1-5.



identity as a child of God and treasured this feeling highly in all the moments of life.

God created us to share His love. Since God is love, as scripture puts it, our life has that characteristic of love too. God being the creator and humans as creatures with a personality, the deepest desire of our heart is to have a closer relationship with God and others. Life is a dynamic movement towards God and others. Deeper meaning is found out by greater relationship and interaction with God and other persons. Authentic love gives meaning to life. Created in the image of God, humans can create communities modelled on the Holy Trinity. Thomas Aquinas interpreted that this image is first reflected in our intellect and free will as well as Gods' presence in our lives. This presence lies deeper than the life of body or soul. For Saint Thomas this presence and friendship constitute the Kingdom of God.

We are created to become like God. God announced this intention right at the outset of creation: "Let us make human beings in our image and likeness" (Gen 1:26-27). Chavara sensed the implications of this great truth. Perhaps, he did not know what this entire image covers, but surely he knew some aspects of it. We are spiritual beings: our spirit is immortal and it will outlast our bodies. We are intellectual: we can think, reason and solve problems. We are relational, capable of forming bonds and can belong to something or someone. We have a moral consciousness: we can discern right from wrong and as moral beings we are responsible for what we think, say and do. According to Chavara, being created in the image of God is a privilege, responsibility and destiny. His spiritual works *Atmanuthapam* and *Colloquies* underscore this truth.

The freedom Saint Chavara enjoyed was the freedom of the children of God. Like a string attached to the kite, his sense of belongingness to God helped him fly high and maintain the relationship through the cord of belonging. Saint Chavara, through his meditations, cherished the personal bond and relationship with the Lord. He interpreted the event of incarnation as personally related to him. He could listen to words such as this: "I stepped down from my throne to find you; that you may have no fear of me... I was born for your sake."<sup>1</sup>

"God became human in order that human might become God." This refrain may be understood as the soteriological reflection of the Eastern Christian tradition. The divine *logos* is imparted to humanity through incarnation. Salvation consists in the human participation in the being of God through the incarnated word. This can happen only in different degrees and different ways as no culture and humans are alike. It seems that Chavara in his life and mission has concluded that the *logos* merely did not assume the specific human existence of Jesus Christ but that of human nature in general. As a consequence all human beings are able to share in the deification which results from the incarnation. Human nature was created with the object of sharing in the being of God; through the descending of the *Logos*, this capacity is finally realized.<sup>2</sup> It is this possibility of deification that made Chavara to feel how sublime is the call he has received and how grave is his duty to himself to become more Christ-like that made him lament about his inability and sinfulness. Only, one who perceives the grandeur and dignity of the call feel one's moral

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, III: *Colloquies*, 10; CSK, III: Ak., 26.

<sup>2</sup>Mcgrawth, *Christian Theology*, 413.

imperfections. Chavara's guilt and blame in *Atmanuthapam* may be understood from this perspective.

### **2.12. Theology of Desire**

In the religious circles, desire is often looked with suspicion. It is viewed to be a stumbling block on the path of perfection. Chavara, like other Carmelite mystics, blazed desire rather than suppressing it. He looked deeply into himself to identify the authentic desires. Like John of the Cross he developed his holy desires. In *Atmanuthapam*, his genuine holy desires are revealing in exquisite ways. As the gravity and intensity of those desires grew, he was growing attached to the object of his love. Saint Augustine, who kept this holy desire in abeyance, lighted up it later and remarked thus: the life of a Christian is, in fact, an exercise of holy desire. Holy desire continually purifies the human soul and detaches itself from inordinate desires.

In his poetic work *Atmanuthapam*, he constantly repeats his desire to be in the presence of his loving Father. In the second and third Canto of *Atmanuthapam*, he ardently expresses his desire to see the miracle of incarnation and the allied life events in the life of Jesus. Chavara's God experience and understanding start with the *Abba* relationship: his God experience becomes more intensified as he longs to see the various moments of the life of Jesus vividly. He intensely desires to see, touch, and feel all that is related to Jesus. The reader can feel and experience his powerful Spirit-filled desires to behold the incarnate son with all its majesty. He could see with his inner eyes the glory of the humble one while in manger.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, II: *Atmanuthapam*, 3:12-20.

He concealed in his form  
 The effulgence that dim the stars  
 The nativity of God the Highest  
 From mercy, the virgin, I long to see.

The birth of God in a Manger  
 From the town rejected, I long to see  
 God's 'kenosis' to chide  
 The pride of man, I long to see.

Canto III of *Atmanuthapam* is a rhythmic presentation of Chavara's desire for divine epiphany. In later cantos his desire, as if actualized, he saw it within himself. There is a discernible movement from his desire of perceiving to narrating what he actually sees. In *Atmanuthapam*, we get a true glimpse of Chavara's personality, mystical journey and the deeper conflicts in the soul from a divine perspective. His spiritual journey has the smell of an ordinary mortal; it is this beauty that makes him all the more closer to us.

### 2.13. A Life of Being

Holistic theology is deemed to be the natural corollary of the life of being. Being is characterized by love, vitality, overflowing vibrancy, creativity and reorganization as reflected in the life of Chavara. Being involves process, movement and experience. Life of having, on the other hand, comes from our need for power, from which Chavara always kept a distance, as it is associated with survival, dominance, and aggression. Being oneself truly and fully requires making oneself empty and poor and ready to give up for others.<sup>1</sup> According to Meister Eckhart, being or wholeness is through an action of non-action. It is a form of

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<sup>1</sup>Fromm, *To Have or to Be*, 93.

letting go of oneself. While we recall that Chavara was an activist and contemplative at the same time, we find to be paradoxical. As we know, the greatest truths of life are paradoxical in nature. Journey towards wholeness becomes natural through prayer and intimacy with God; for, human nature is essentially spiritual.

Neither the East nor the West has the patent for holistic life. It cannot be and should not be identified with any culture or discipline. Without some level of contemplative prayer and lifestyle, holistic life will turn out to be merely a nice sounding verbal exercise. Psycho-spiritual wholeness is an invitation to face, recognize and appreciate all our human potentials. It draws us beyond ourselves to others and to God. To be fully human is to be spiritual, to be oriented towards the transcendent, and to go beyond our physical and psychological needs. Here we witness the grandeur of a holistic theology that Chavara lived. It involves both receptivity and assertiveness from our part: receptivity to the influence of God and assertiveness to organize our life towards a definitive goal.

Chavara was a good Christian, an exemplary religious and a devoted priest of the Catholic Church. All these things may not be nothing more than external conformity to the behavioural norms of the Church and its traditions, unless one has a spiritual vision that surpasses the individual roles one plays out. It is easy to go through life mindlessly doing one's roles with pietistic ideals. Chavara surpassed this ever present danger in Christian life and was found always in the process of becoming whole. If it does not happen, it would seriously limit the fullness of life and depth of humanity. Our naturalistic understanding is that we are human beings on a spiritual journey. Equally, it is true that we are spiritual beings on a human journey. Toggling these truths will

render a robust identity to humans that might stir up wholeness and holiness. Chavara lived his life connected to both heaven and earth at the same time. His theology and spirituality bear the holistic character having maintained the awareness of these two reference points. Our relationship with both is vital to be holy and whole.



## **Chapter 3**

# **DYNAMIC ELEMENTS IN THE PERSONALITY FORMATION**

Psycho-theology integrates insights of psychology and other human sciences as every discipline is part of divine revelation. Today, all human sciences try to be more and more integrated and wholistic in approach. We need a theology that acknowledges the need of wholeness in human person. Christian theology underscores the fact that God created humans as whole beings bestowing His image in them, though humans lost the original grandeur on account of sin. So, holistic theology underscores the original wholeness and this view shall be the start up for a Christian anthropology. In Jesus the lost original wholeness was restored. The original wholeness naturally was challenged by the freedom of the will and the power to make choices. This truth is exemplified with the help of mythologies. Now, our understanding of wholeness in personality formation is through the grace and communion given through Jesus Christ, the whole man.

### **3.1. Faith Elements and Personality Construct**

A theoretical model reflects the personality of its constructor. Theories of Freud, Maslow, Frankl, etc., point out to this fact. Many social scientists do not believe in God. Their theoretical constructs reflect their biases. The extent to which scientists exclude from their thinking, the concept God, will directly influence the kind of models they build to cope with the data they observe. For example, reliance upon



strict cause and effect assumptions precludes divine interventions and miracle.

We cannot understand human nature when we look at it in a fragmented state. Only an integrated person can give us a true picture of what is meant to be a human person. Jesus is the model of the integrated person. Jesus life exemplifies what humans are capable of. We are told, except in sin, he identified with us, though he was in the form of God (Phil 2:4-6). Christian virtues are to be practised and cultivated out of one's strength rather than from weakness. When personality and character strength are undeveloped, virtues become a mask or a defence to protect the vulnerable self. A mature and healthy personality can develop virtues much easily than a weak and immature personality. Now, therefore, we shall explore the basic attributes and virtues needed for a holistic personality and how Chavara's early childhood and environment were contributing to the same.

Born in a village on 10 February 1805, as the youngest son of a traditional Syrian Catholic family, young Kuriakose grew up in a God-fearing and faith-filled family.<sup>1</sup> About his baptism he made later reminiscences in his work *Atmanuthapam* referring to it as a privileged opportunity and status conferred on him: "... through baptism you made me your child and extended to me the bliss of salvation."<sup>2</sup> The creation story of human beings in Genesis proclaims that we enjoy an inalienable dignity as children of God by virtue of God's love that shapes us prior to any personal achievement or social status. Chavara was always mindful of this dignity – sonship conferred upon him without any merit from his part.

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<sup>1</sup>Porukara, *A Short Biography of Father Chavara Kuriakose*, 24.

<sup>2</sup>CWC, II: *Atmanuthapam*, 1:42-46.

He always cherished positive memories about his childhood. Positive memories of early days lay foundation for developing a holistic understanding of life. The power of love exhibited through meaningful gestures and actions in the family become foundation for a whole life; lack of love, on the other hand, hurts. God's love is first experienced by means of parental love and this leaves a lasting imprint on a child. It is rather easy for children who are loved and cared for by parents to naturally turn to God. We love God, because God has loved and affirmed us through our parents. Being brought up in an exemplary catholic family, Chavara received God's own love and, in turn, developed corresponding virtues of life.

According to Erikson's psycho-social developmental theory, at each stage of life one develops certain strength or virtues. These virtues are significant in developing proper spiritual perspectives. Chavara recalls how his mother gently taught him all the basics of Christian faith and he exults in joyful praise of God for the same.<sup>1</sup> A child that receives love and care from parents, especially from the mother figure, develops the ability to trust others, people, and God. In Chavara's life, the ability to trust was so natural and he voiced it in different ways in his writings and reminiscences. He traces and attributes all beautiful things to God's providence and goodness. Those who receive ample love during childhood can easily place trust in God's providence and goodness. The parents of Kuriakose infused in him love and compassion for other human beings as well as a sense of obedience to the higher laws. Regarding his vocation he wrote: "As I reached the age of ten, you out of

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, II: *Atmanuthapam*, 1:61-86.

great kindness called me and sowed in me a sacred seed of wisdom. It was a firm resolve which changed my destiny.”<sup>1</sup>

It was a custom in devoted families to repeat the name of Jesus into the ears of a child as he was breastfed. Thus, along with mother’s milk, he was imparted the name of Jesus. Such acts of faith from parents and other family members have definitive influence in the faith life of children as they grow up. To children this is an opportunity to imbibe the power of Jesus’ name unconsciously. As we look into the scripture, we come across a lot of positive reflections on the past incidents of life. Whenever troubles the Old Testament people underwent were recollected as the acts of Yahweh and they drew strength from them. In troubled times, spontaneously they looked back to the history, and then they could see the gracious and generous acts of God, which became a positive memory to heal them and to infuse in them hope and strength again. The Old Testament people celebrated Passover meals for centuries in order to recapture the positive memories of Yahweh’s faithfulness to their forefathers under Egyptian slavery. In the New Testament Eucharistic celebration, again, a reminiscence of Gods great love is manifested in and through the paschal mysteries of Jesus. Positive memories facilitate healing by allowing us to focus less on the problem and more on the love we have received.<sup>2</sup>

James Fowler developed a stage-wise developmental theory of faith.<sup>3</sup> He proposed a framework for spiritual development in which he suggests parallels to the frameworks of other aspects of human development. By

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, II: *Atmanuthapam*, 1:114-116.

<sup>2</sup>Linn, *et al.*, *Healing the Eight Stages of Life*, 21.

<sup>3</sup>Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 119-213.

doing this he suggests that spirituality is a basic aspect of human existence that develops in predictable ways, just as cognition, social behaviour, motor skills, or the ability to feed. Fowler does not define faith through any particular religion but describes it as a particular way of relating to the universal and of creating meaning. We cannot fully subscribe to this theory, as Fowler is concerned more with the structure of faith than its content. Faith may be different thing for different people: as for a devout Christian, it is faith in God and Jesus. God becomes a transitional object, but a unique transitional object, because he is not tangible and observed by the child. Saint Chavara's God concepts did not change over time radically but it had its natural transitional growth. Object-relations theory emphasizes that objects are mental representations of the external world which exist even before object permanence develops. Object permanence is the understanding that objects continue to exist even when they cannot be perceived (seen, heard, touched, smelled or sensed in any way). A fully developed God concept requires object permanence: God is there even if he is not fully seen and detected by senses. When the mother disappears to kitchen or doing some chores nearby the child fears but the child is able to hear and feel the presence of the mother on the other side. Sooner or later, the child feels about the reassuring presence when she comes back and with this type of experience occurring often, the child begins to develop a faith that objects are out there and need not be always before my presence that I can relate to the objects at a differed time or when the object desires it. Child slowly reconciles with this available and not available presence of the objects. It is the consistent presence and absence of the mother and its cyclic patterns help the child to trust the outside world and the invisible.

When religious images and related objects are conveyed by means of strong developing senses they also assume the characteristics of real objects and the child begins to form relationship and interactional traits according to the objects and images represented.

The relationship with mother or any other significant person in life sows the seeds of faith in God and trust in God's world. Young children project human qualities on God and that is natural. The characteristics of God are closely related to the experiences children have had with parents. By the age of three or so, a child begins to realize that God is in heaven, a far off place; but He comes down from heaven to influence the things and events in the world. Slowly, this faith moves to a higher level seeing God more not as a part of this world but available to everyone by prayer and good life. Stories, images, and rituals in the family become the vehicle of transmitting faith and it will have a lasting imprint on the child's mind. Looking on to the life of Chavara, we notice how the family contributed positively to his faith. Kuriakose Eliseus Porukara observes:

The boy from his childhood excelled in humility, pleasing manners, modesty, piety, intelligence, eloquence that he was loved by God and men. He was sent to Pallipuram to study under Fr. Thomas Palackal.<sup>1</sup>

According to James Fowler, it is in the mid-twenties to late thirties that people come to individualized reflective faith, which is also understood as a stage of angst and struggle. The individual takes personal responsibility for life and beliefs. Conflicts are reconciled either by leaping into the darkness of faith or adopting a more rational approach. It

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<sup>1</sup>Porukara, *A Short Biography of Father Chavara Kuriakose*, 29.

seems that Chavara adopted the former, for he sensed that reason cannot take him so far in his faith life.

### **3.2. Development of Self-Trust**

A child has many needs. The dilemma of the child is that it has no language to express it. Somebody should discern the needs and shall provide it in time. The child may feel helpless and frustrated when parents or significant others do not care for them as they do not understand their needs. The needs of a child are mainly food, loving touch and the need to interact with caring and loving persons. A child that receives love and nurturing in the early stage of infancy decides that the world is good, that people are good, that it can trust the world and can happily in the world. The universal image of trust in painting and sculpture is a child nursing at its mother's breast. Not only the child decides that it can trust the world and people, it will also decide that it can trust itself, because it sees its needs bring good responses.<sup>1</sup> The child concludes 'something good happens when my needs are conveyed, my needs must be good and I must be good.' With such experiences it is rather smooth for the child to enter in the next stage of development. Now, the child has a solid foundation of self trust and self image. Young Kuriakose who was brought up in a loving, caring and God-fearing environment developed a solid foundation of self trust and self image.

It is often our poor image of self that makes us anxious. Saint Chavara always cherished the feeling that he is the loved child of God. All the Christ events - Christmas, Good Friday, Easter and many feasts and celebrations boldly told him that he need not appease an angry God, but there is a

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<sup>1</sup>Linn, *et al.*, *Healing the Eight Stages of Life*, 36.

God who rushed out of His home to meet him before he himself set out to find Him. This kind of feeling enabled him to portray himself as the prodigal son, who was welcomed into the hands of God as is found in his poetic work *Atmanuthapam*. It is He who has found us, has embraced our humanity with all its ills and dirt, with its achievements and waywardness. When the incarnation of the word of God is understood in its full depth, no one will have problem to affirm one's own self for a healthy human development. It is our faith and hope in the Lord that lets us maintain our personality and identity.

### **3.3. Development of Intimacy**

Now, we shall look into what happens to children in the absence of true trust. Such children probably withdraw to themselves, eventually moving out even from other relationships, and consequently distrusting the world and oneself. Naturally, such children will blame and distrust God too when they are grown up. Lack of faith in oneself and others eventually leads to a pessimistic outlook on life and reaches to the level of indifference to the world and God. Trust underlies all moral and ethical behaviour too. With lack of trust in others naturally a child is inclined to believe that God also belongs to the same category, unmoved and uncaring for the human needs and cries. Children deprived of love grow up with a basic inability to trust, thereby, resulting in a long struggle to feel God's presence as a positive one. Saint Chavara perceived the unique role his family played in developing his faith life. He could experience God as one who was so close to him; as a result, he could address God as *Abba*; he spontaneously employed a personal and endearing expression to address God as "*ente appan*." In growing up, Chavara's relationship

to God and other humans remained very mature but intimate. In referring to the religious fraternity at the monastery, he employed the word *koodappirapukal*, i.e., children born from the same mother. His life was rooted in the strong conviction of the fatherhood of God and fraternity among human beings.<sup>1</sup>

If a child develops so little trust and hope in early days, he may begin to see himself and God with mistrust and despair. The image of God then may be that of a wrathful parent. With such a perception one may look at sufferings as evil experiences deliberately sent by God as he is not good and deserving any amount of afflictions. It seems that the theologians and pastoral guides who shaped the Christian world in the past had distant images of God who imagined a God who could not be easily pleased. The anger and punishment that God has reserved for humanity's ills and follies were more in the forefront than the loving God who cares and be trusted.

Erikson, in his psycho-social developmental theory, opines that the trust and love received in the early stage leads to the religious virtue of hope. Erikson views on parenting not only shapes how we trust in God, but also how we trust in God who shapes our parenting.<sup>2</sup> Parents who have authentic religious faith can impart in their children basic trust. Looking on to Saint Chavara's life, we observe he had a basic trust and sense of security even in odd situations, which, in all probability, he imbibed from his parents and their faith. The moral influence of his mother and family upon Saint Chavara is well brought out in his statement that "the very look of my mother was

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<sup>1</sup>Elizebeth, "Chavara Visionary and Karmayogi," 120.

<sup>2</sup>Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 251.



sufficient for me to distinguish between the right and the wrong.”<sup>1</sup>

### **3.4. Role of Family**

It is the lack of proper attachment in the family that is suspected to be the cause of most sexual aberrations in the society. According to Elizebeth Moberly, homosexuality and lesbianism are generally rooted in a failure to establish a basic trust with the same sex parent. A failure in same sex bonding and identification prompts in the later years a search for same sex love and identification, and the inability to enter the more unknown world of heterosexual relationships. Therapy in such cases includes giving the missed same sex parental love. This allows making up for early emotional deprivation, establishing a foundation of basic trust with persons of the same sex, and then naturally developing a capacity for heterosexuality.<sup>2</sup>

Child rearing authority Selma Fraiberg writes that children deprived of love and touch which build basic trust are likely to become bondless hollow men and women who may end up as part of criminal population. The non-attachment leaves a void in the area of personality where conscience should have developed. Babies who don't have opportunities for warm relationships in the beginning of infancy are being robbed of their humanity.<sup>3</sup> It is the love and care that Chavara received and the warm relationship he enjoyed in the family that led him to become the champion of family apostolate. He learned from life and reflection the role of the family in one's religious experience

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, II: *Atmanuthapam*, 1:83-84.

<sup>2</sup>Moberly, *Homosexuality: A New Christian Ethic*, 96.

<sup>3</sup>Fraiberg, *Every Child's Birth Right*, 62.

and never missed any opportunity to highlight or inculcate it. His last *Testament* was on family life which tells how highly he prized the family and its wellbeing in Christian faith life.

### **3.5. Vocational Growth**

An oak tree that grows to a giant size starts from a small seedling. Every living organism starts in humble ways; in the course of time it assumes proper shape and strength. Biologically speaking, humans need more time to grow up and to become mature persons. Growing up is a project and responsibility one has to keep up consistently. A child who is blessed to have a proper parenting with love and care from value imbibing parents offers a spurt towards growth. Chavara was a child who received a spiritual awakening from his parents from the early days because of the traditional family prayers, devotions and value inculcation from the Christian family ambience. The desire to become a priest was stirred up in his early days. A casual meeting with Malpan Thomas Palackal at his home gave a definite direction to his already existing desire to become priest. It seems that he had a burning spiritual desire to commit himself to the Lord. Every desire of the human heart grows when one focuses on it. When human desires are mixed with definitiveness, purpose and persistence they become reality.<sup>1</sup> All achievements should begin with an intense burning desire for something definite.

### **3.6. Changes, Losses and Identity**

Holistic understanding of life has its roots in one's sense of identity: Who am I? It is a question humans tend to ask

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<sup>1</sup>Hill, *et al.*, *Life Changing Secrets*, 13.

throughout their lives, sometimes consciously and at other times unconsciously. I believe that the desire to know who we are really has been placed within us at the time of being created in the image of God. Jesus knew his identity at the age of twelve. When he was missed and found in the temple by his parents, he responded to the confronting question of Mary and Joseph in a succinct manner expressing his identity: "Why were you looking for me? Did you know that I should be in my father's house?" (Lk 2:49). Jesus refers here to His divine sonship and his need to be with his Heavenly Father.

Losses in life will affect us badly when we don't have a true sense of identity. Most people build their identities upon the roles and the emotional attachments to places and persons. When I cannot do things I used to do which defined me and my role, I tend to ask myself, now, "Who am I?" I am no longer a worker; being retired and old now, my health does not permit me to do the work I did. I am no longer a superior, a principal, a teacher, a writer, or counsellor. So, then, the question resounds: "Who am I?" When he lost his parents and siblings in the tragic contagious disease that occurred in his adolescence, young Chavara could stick to his sense of identity. Bodily changes and social changes in the environment may also pose the questions of identity. According to Erickson, who introduced the concept of identity problems, identity is a subjective sense of an invigorating sameness and continuity. Every loss is an occasion to probe into our true identity and the meaning of life. Every consecrated person experiences blocks and hurdles in his/her way to wholeness and holiness. Tragedy is inseparably connected with man's dignity and grandeur as is illustrated in dramas featuring the characters such as Oedipus and Orestes. At each stage a

religious has let go of the past and find new meaning and horizons of life as he/she moves on.

An authentic life is a process of stripping ourselves to find what is real in us. We peel of different layers in order to come to the core. At the beginning of one's spiritual life one tends to say "This is me." Every loss in life and every change in life goes on to reinforce that "This is not you." Real growth brings us face to face with positive and negative potentials. Uncertainties, problems and dilemmas are an essential part of growing. Chavara could see God's hand or providence in such situations. Though in every person God has deposited the capacity to transcend theocentrically, the divine call encounters limitations of various kinds inherent in the human person due to our flawed psychological structures.

Humans are endowed with freedom and the power of choice. Continually humans are faced with multiple options that can make or break them (Dt 30:19). Free choice requires that one is able to understand desirable opportunities, deliberate over competing alternatives, and intellectually envisage the benefits and burdens that each one holds out. But orienting and directing ourselves towards alternatives once they are adopted is something added to our knowing. Freedom adds to rationality the capacity for self-direction. Through freedom humans exercise an executive function over their lives. Healthy volitionality means humans are not inexorably moved to their ends but rather move themselves to their proper ends. In the language of philosophy, humans are "self movers." The laws of physics and instinctual movements of nature are not sufficient for moving humans to achieve their proper fulfilment. Rather, to flourish they must understand what corresponds to their wellbeing and shall pursue it.

Every time we make a choice, we are turning the central part of us, the part of us that chooses, into something a little different from what it was before. Taking our life as a whole, with all its innumerable choices throughout our life, we slowly turn this central thing either into a heavenly creature or into a hellish one. Being a heavenly creature is to experience joy and peace, knowledge and power. To be the other means madness, horror, idiocy, rage, impotence, and loneliness. Each of us at each moment is progressing to the one state or the other. Wholeness is not a static reality. It requires a disposition and attitude to further growth of oneself and others.

### **3.7. Interpersonal Relationships**

Chavara was a man of relationships. Without any modern means of communication, he was able to maintain a network of relationships. It is these dignified and noble relations that helped him achieve a lot in a short span of life. It is noted that children while growing up having no experience of personal interaction with care-givers are likely to be loners and tend to withdraw to their shells when they encounter problems. The research of Moskowitz in the late 1970s indicated that interpersonal relationships are necessary for more complex forms of human development, like language development. James Lynch compiled extensive research demonstrating the significant relationship between interpersonal companionship and biological health. John Bowlby's research into attachment styles illustrates the importance and impact of primary relationships, especially parent-child relationships, in developing healthy relationships in later life.

Christian anthropology understands the example of Christ to be a paradigm for interpersonal relationships.

Christ's example illustrates that relationships are founded upon reciprocal self-communicative acts of giving and receiving, though their form differs according to age and development. Adaptive and healthy expressions of interpersonal self-communication proceed from a commitment to self-giving love in which a person wants and wills the good of another for the other's sake.

### **3.8. Assertiveness and Flexibility**

Assertiveness and flexibility are often understood as part of a healthy personality. Assertiveness is the quality of being self-assured and confident without being aggressive. It is a learnable skill as well as a mode of communication. *Dorland's Medical Dictionary* defines assertiveness as a form of behaviour characterized by a confident declaration or affirmation of a statement without needing proof. This affirms the person's rights or point of view without either aggressively threatening the rights of another. Assertiveness without flexibility leads to disaster. Chavara had realized this psychological truth. Saint Chavara manifested this trait whenever he was exercising public office and acting for the common good. In matters related to him he was able to "let go" and "let God." This is a spiritual phenomenon which will not last without that psychological health. One may break one's own body and emotional system in the absence of such an attitude. "Let go, let God" is essentially related to forgiveness. Forgiving does not mean that, what happened does not matter, or that it is all right for someone to violate you. It simply means releasing the negative feelings you have about those events and the persons involved. Sometimes people cling to negative events and relationships from the past as well as the present; there, however, others

who do not permit to see themselves as victims and, thus, assume an air of moral superiority over the offenders.

Even at a young age Chavara was able to have this “let go” mind and flexibility. When Malpan Palackal sensed that here is a young boy with spiritual interest and maturity beyond his age and wanted to bring him to the seminary, he told the family of Kuriakose about his desire. Young Kuriakose having had such a desire in his heart from the childhood agreed to leave home and join the seminary. But being too young, parents and relatives felt that he should stay back home at least for some more time. But then a solution came up by the involvement of all concerned. A respectful member of the family proposed: “Let him stay near the home in the parish rectory. By this way, he will slowly learn many initial things needed in the seminary and then can be part of the seminary.” In the light of social sciences and Christian anthropology it is accepted that the adolescents need natural home environment and relations to grow. Here also young Kuriakose showed flexibility and grace. He could adopt, as a young boy, the consensus that emerged in the family. It did not upset or disturb him. He neither showed his will aggressively nor interfered in the decision of the elders in the family. Probably, he took a lesson from this episode which he could have reflected upon his life in subsequent years that will of God often comes through the collective deliberations and dialogue rather than the drives and urges that one has. In later years he did not have any issue to get along with the decisions of superiors or the community concerned.

Saint Chavara, though obedient always, assertively told the bishop the need to be at the work site of the monastery where the construction work was half-way through. Being in a distant parish, he wanted some new arrangements and

spoke to the bishop, letting his mind known in this regard. He received stern rebuke for the same and, naturally, the plea was turned down. As a priest subject to his bishop, he was flexible to give up and apologize. He was flexible enough to show his obedient attitude without being reactive. As a result of that no sooner than later he got what he looked for. Refusing to let go of past events, whether positive or negative, means throwing away a part of one's life's energy, which may tend to handicap one for sure.

On a couple of occasions, Fr. Leopold OCD tried to impose his will reminding all the religious members that the spirit of the congregation and its charism are that of the Carmelites. This, according to him, implied that the members cannot go outside to visit the family members or cannot be part of any material transactions. Chavara objected, at least once, to this position of Fr. Leopold when Fr. Scaria Ephrem desired to visit his cousin priest who was seriously ill. Fr. Chavara contented that it is visiting the sick which is a holy act that traditionally such things were done even during Fr. Palackal's time. However, Fr. Leopold was unrelenting. According to him, it was against the spirit of the Carmelites. Fr. Chavara proposed a voting and he himself voted first showing where he is leaning. Only one vote of Fr. Leopold was negative. This evidently irked him. Though Chavara got what he wanted, he did not take any glee out of it; for, it was not by a consensus with missionary Leopold who was his own spiritual director. He wanted to keep the unity and strength of his community in the best manner, cooperating with the superiors. This event did not rupture the relationship and warmth of the collegial leadership and friendship. Chavara was great enough to take in differing views and accept and accommodate divergent personalities. Sitting with the Eucharistic Lord he



had transformed his consciousness like that of Jesus so that he could see things from the Lord's point of view and could reconcile with all. Along with his physical eyes he had the gift of inner eyes – an eye with which God sees and judges everything. It is this inner eyesight that helped him to put up with heart-wrenching and distressing experiences.

### **3.9. Kindness and Forgiveness**

Kindness and forgiveness were deeply woven into the personality of Chavara having put on Christ's mind and heart. While speaking of Kudakachira, a former seminarian, Chavara speaks of the qualities of his mind and his ability to study and the skills of leadership. But he, in his over enthusiasm and smartness, later slipped from the right track and was supporting the schismatic Bishop Roccas who arrived in Malabar without proper ecclesiastical credentials. Though on many occasions Kudakachira had created troubles for Chavara, while mentioning his name Chavara prayed to the guardian angel to save him from leaning to the right or left and asked for the grace to be objective when he speaks of him.<sup>1</sup>

Love in everyday life means forgiving constantly. Chavara had realized, most often, it is the human likes, dislikes, and attitudes that one develops torment us rather than a specific event itself. Sometimes, it is better to accept simply the temperamental qualities and personality traits of those who interact with us and just get on with life. If we are determined to analyze and examine the motive of everyone, we may not judge it correctly and will put ourselves in the danger of making wrong judgments. Because there is

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<sup>1</sup>*The Chronicle of Mannanam* III:183-184.

something in everyone's nature that causes suffering to others, humans need to leave a margin of error to all.

He dealt very kindly and politely with defeated Roccas and negotiated his return to Bagdad and saw him off from Kochi.<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis declaring the special year of mercy said: God's name is Mercy and the motto for the year of Mercy is, "Be merciful just as your heavenly Father is merciful" (Lk 6:36).<sup>2</sup> For many, forgiveness is the hardest thing in the world. They would rather give up a friendship or marriage or their own spiritual wholeness simply because they cannot forgive. The expressions such as 'I am sorry', 'I forgive you', etc., are hard to come by. As a result, many walk about as wounded persons, bleeding psychologically. In a society that values power and one-upmanship, not to forgive is the norm. We shudder to think of ourselves as being victimized or taken advantage of. A poor self-image is one reason for our unnecessary struggles. People who have discovered where their true self-worth lies would have no problem to forgive. If I consider that my self-worth consists in other people's opinion and views about me, and if I am looking to other people's good behaviour, gestures, and words to boost my morale, then my self-worth is going to let me down, and I am going to be hurt; as a result, I will find it impossible to forgive.

Chavara did not consider that his self-worth consisted in other people's opinion and views about him; he was not

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, I: *Chronicles*, 91-92; CSK, I: *Nalagamangal*, 108-110.

<sup>2</sup>Jubilee of Mercy was formally declared through the papal bull *Misericordiae vultus*, issued on 11 April 2015, which emphasizes the importance of mercy and the need to 'gaze' on it; the bull also recalls the need for the Church to be more open, keeping alive the spirit of the Second Vatican Council.

looking to other people's good behaviour, gestures, and words to boost his morale, and self-worth. With low self-worth one may find it hard to forgive. A certain man Mathan Manjooran, once the steward of Mannanam Monastery, had unjustly appropriated some property of the monastery. He even filed a complaint against Chavara in the criminal court of Alapuzha. Finally, the court dismissed the case as a fraud. The Hindu judge, who dismissed the case, was greatly impressed by Chavara's noble and forgiving personality and remarked: "Fr. Prior is indeed a man of God. Those who complain against such a great man should be grossly wicked and deserve God's anger." In a letter to Mannanam community, Chavara, however, exhorted to help Mathan Manjooran if he was in financial strait.<sup>1</sup>

It is easier to forgive those who offend us when we are loved and affirmed. Mother Teresa tells about a woman whom she found in the alleys of Calcutta. She was dying of hunger and disease. When Mother approached her she mumbled, "My son did this to me." Evidently, she did not think of her pain, sickness, and hunger. Her pain was from the sense of desertion and ingratitude from the dear son she had given birth and nurtured. She received gentle and loving treatment from Mother Teresa. Before the woman died, she said: "I forgive my son." Love and forgiveness come easily to humans when they experience it first, either directly from God or through other humans. Chavara, who experienced God's love and forgiveness, expressed his gratitude for the same in many different ways, especially in his *Colloquies* and *Atmanuthapam*. Having the sense of an abundant recipient of God's gratuitous love and forgiveness, it was rather easy for him to offer the same

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, IV: *Letters*, 73.

forgiveness to others. Chavara developed a forgiving nature as our Saviour did. Forgiveness is the other side of the coin of love. God loves and forgives us constantly. As a man who treasured the beatitudes in heart, Chavara felt the need to bear his cross with dignity, love, and forgiveness as Jesus did.

Christianity is not a macho religion. We are called to show courage, the courage to forgive even in the midst of pain and personal loss. By deciding to forgive like Our Saviour, one is slowly easing out the torture with a sense of dignity and strength of character. No weakling can forgive: only one who is strong in the spirit can do it. When we decide to forgive, the God of consolation will visit us with soothing balms to anoint our open wounds. If our wounds are great, only God can heal us. By our willingness to forgive, we are opening ourselves to the Lord's love to heal us. We should forgive before the sunset. Saint Paul says: "Never let the sun set on your anger or else you will give the devil a foothold" (Eph 4:26-27). "The freedom in a simple act of forgiveness saves the expense of anger and the high cost of hatred," remarks Wayne Dyer in his book *Wisdom of the Ages*. It relieves us from the burdens of resentment and past grievances and is just another word for simply letting go and acquire immense internal freedom.

### **3.10. Affective Maturity**

Emotion is primarily a subjective experience. Emotions have adaptive and motivational functions. Anger mobilizes energy for action. Shame motivates development of skills and competencies. Guilt fosters reparation and development of personal responsibility. So, even negative emotions properly handled may lead to positive growth. Positive emotions groom us more in the likeness of God, i.e., love,

peace, and joy. Negative emotions in lesser degree motivate us to complete our human self leading towards the realization of the potentials; but in excess they constrict and stunt human growth. Neither total expression of one's emotion nor total holding in on is advisable. Direct expression of one's feelings may not be helpful for healthy relationships unless one is in a therapy group or participating in a therapeutic process. The other extreme, namely, repressing emotions strongly may lead to psychosomatic difficulties as well as employment of defence mechanisms. A third alternative position is of controlled verbal expression, where the emphasis is placed on one's feelings, not upon what other person said or did. There is recognition of actual emotions felt, along with confession and restitution. In the emotional life of Chavara, we see positive and negative experiences but he did not swing to any extremes. Emotional regulation is part of the developmental process and human maturity.

Affective maturity covers a wide range of behaviours and attitudes and thus serves to be a critical measure of human development. Maturity in the emotional life begins with awareness and managing of emotions that are evident in consistency between external behaviour and internal dispositions. Growth in affective maturity is a prerequisite to bring integration and wholeness. The ability to know what one feels and expresses those feelings in an appropriate way in different contexts and different phases of life are the general understanding of affective maturity. In the ecclesial life also this kind of affective maturity is all the more significant. In Chavara, we witness this affective maturity developing over time, manifesting intellectually, cognitively, emotionally and spiritually.

Kevine McClone views affective maturity as having the relational skills to be in touch with, understand and appropriately expresses one's real feelings in a variety of contexts and with diverse range of persons with whom one interacts.<sup>1</sup> For a spiritually journeying person, affective maturity is much more than what we have said above. The affective maturity that Saint Chavara revealed in his life touched all dimensions. It involved the capacity for healthy solitude and self disclosure and an ability to listen, to trust and to be trustworthy. It is wonderful to note how Chavara rides smoothly through the socio-cultural and spiritual realms. He enjoyed smooth and pleasant relationships and could enlist the support of all sections of people because of this emotional maturity. Renowned historian A. M. Mundadan comments about his social grace quoting Chavara's contemporaries:

The presence of Chavara was awe inspiring. He had no qualms to mix with all sorts of people, both high and low, even with children. He treated the youngsters sweetly and affectionately.<sup>2</sup>

He was, thus, a man in whom we see a wholesome affective maturity that shall be essentially part of religious priestly vocation. Affective maturity involves a lifestyle which shapes one's attitudes, actions, and perceptions and to some degree even feelings about things, persons and events. On the level of relationship, affective maturity cherishes and nurtures other peoples' being and becoming without establishing bonds of mutual emotional dependence with them. It is the ability to establish warm and deep

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<sup>1</sup>McClone, "Intimacy and Healthy Affective Maturity," 8.

<sup>2</sup>Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 451.

relationships with others by loving them and being loved by them in a non-exclusive and non-possessive way.<sup>1</sup>

In the medieval periods, flight from the world to save one's soul was emphasized. Carmelite contemplative tradition of the West had inherited this legacy. Working under the Carmelite missionaries and Vicar Apostolic, naturally the founding fathers thought of seclusion from the world to become holy people. As they initiated the founding, it slowly shaped in such a way under the guidance of the Holy Spirit that they felt the need of engaging in this world to become its leaven. What then happened was a process of affirmation, negation and transcendence. We all are constantly challenged not to conform to the values of this passing world, but rather to allow God to transform us through a renewal of our minds (Rom 12:10).

### **3.11. Growing Sense of Mission**

In the beginning, what was envisaged as *Darsanaveedu* – a house of vision and *Thapasubhavan* – slowly materialized when Mannanam Monastery was open. The contemplative vision now realized in the *Besrauma* – hilltop at Mannanam – became a centre of incessant prayer and austere spiritual practices. Away from the world now they could pray, celebrate liturgy, and could seek the Lord in solitude. Slowly, other dimensions of life were integrated. With the opening of seminary along with the monastery, it became an integrated centre of learning, study and work. Things developed in such a manner that gradually the ashram became a hub for other pastoral activities. The ecclesial community was in need of the prayers as well as ministries

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<sup>1</sup>Manalel, *Priest as a Man*, 25.

derived from the power of their ascetic life and prayer. The more they grew in spiritual life the more they felt the need to be with the people of God in order to be at their service.

As the Apostle Peter and a small band of disciples got to experience the divinity of Jesus on Mount Tabor, this small band of people at *Besrauma* was awakened and enlightened by the new experience that brought them down to the valley from the top to be with the people of God in all their genuine needs. The Apostles initially wanted to remain at the special place of theophany, and Peter even uttered the desire to remain forever in the security and pleasantness of that divine experience. But, as Jesus exemplified in his life, they had work to do amidst the people; they had to be part of everyday life and had to experience the challenges of life far from the initial safety and security they experienced at Mount Tabor. Similarly, in the case of Mother Mary, as soon as she received the Word in her womb, she went in haste to the house of Elizabeth to be with and to serve her (Lk 1:39-40). It is the task and privilege of the divinely touched persons to proceed to the routine of life in order to serve in a wholly different manner in accordance with the sublime beauty and love they experience. In Chavara's life too, every blessing he received became a stimulus for him to act with a greater sense of mission and a renewed thrust for God's Kingdom.

### **3.12. With Right Balance and Discernment**

Christians in Kerala, particularly the Malabar Church communities in the eighteenth century, found themselves in a chaotic situation of ecclesial administration. Some people were put under the *Padruado* administration exercised by Spain. Some groups were under the Latin rule of the Apostolic Vicars who were mainly Jesuit missionaries and



later Carmelite missionaries. Syro-Malabar Christians wanted to throw off the yoke of Latin rule but could not do it because of the colonial power enjoyed by the authorities. Many attempts were made to get bishops from Chaldea (Bagdad), having maintained a Chaldean relationship with regard to liturgy. Working under the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly, Chavara was caught up in the middle. He was not able to let off the longing of the Marthoma Christians for their own rite bishop, so that they could continue their traditions and liturgy intact. Saint Chavara, being an obedient son of the Church, obeyed the Vicar Apostolic even when it created a lot of anguish and anxiety in him. He had to be mindful of the good of the holy Catholic Church as well as the good of the Marthoma Christians in which his identity was primarily based. He was answerable to his own rite people as well as to the universal Church. This necessitated great discernment on his part. He tried to stand in the middle, which enabled him to see and experience truth from both sides. He discerned the meaning of the term "virtue is in the middle." This middle stand invited accusation later that he was a latinizer of the Syrian rite people. Both Christianity and psychology advocate living in the middle.<sup>1</sup> This is not being in the middle of relativism or mediocrity but in the middle of faith, drawing the full meaning of incarnation.

The healthy world of middle accepts limitations; it can neither control individual lives nor the society or the universe at large. It seeks remedy for anxiety not in human power, but in faith, hope and love. Chavara in his holistic awareness did not condemn or judge his superiors or his subjects. He knew in the Kingdom of God, judgment and

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<sup>1</sup>O'Meara, *Fundamentalism: A Catholic Perspective*, 60.

condemnations are not prominent that they are least significant. In truth, there is no mandate for anyone to condemn another. Jesus said: "Judge not, that you be not judged" (Mt 7:1). The bond between the human and divine is not based on law, justice or achievement but merciful love. The incarnation of Jesus said 'yes' to God, 'yes' to man, and 'yes' to cultural complexities standing in between. The spirit of the Lord worked in the incarnation and resurrection in an unprecedented manner; in ways larger than we can comprehend. The spirit acts in real and subtle, though invisible ways. The spirit in individuals and social movements continues the work of Jesus when they don't move to the extreme but choose to stand in the middle to be compressed by good and evil from both sides.

When one stands in the middle, the Christian hope is inevitable. "The absence of hope fuels anger."<sup>1</sup> Hope includes more than optimism and activity. There must be hope not only in our energies and beliefs but also in others. Sometimes we hope in change; at other times, we hope in the change of institutions. Above all we hope in the Lord whose spirit works out things according to his designs and plans. Christian hope is a hope in the silent power of God. It seems that Chavara had imbibed this hope in the silent power of God as he was caught up in between different worlds that pulled him in different directions. As a true religious who had surrendered everything to God in faith, he realized that the world, on its own, may not submit to His will as an orchestra that follows its conductor.

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<sup>1</sup>O'Meara, *Fundamentalism: A Catholic Perspective*, 60, 63.

### **3.13. Paternal Heart and Feelings**

Saint Chavara as he is known today was *Chavara Achan* for millions. In fact, he was a father – *achan* – to all: not only for the Christian society or the religious orders he founded, but also to many others. He was loved and respected by all. He was a reformer in the Church and society in nineteenth century. At a time when the media and modern communications were not much in vogue, generally leaders were not known beyond their respective societies. Chavara being a humble priest, who lived and worked in the conservative confinements of the Church, could not bring attention on him or his progressive actions he undertook at that time. He was a reformer in the Catholic Church in Kerala at that time. He looked beyond his time and he saw his society's immediate needs. A holistic development of the humans irrespective of religion, caste and cultural distinctions was the unique characteristic of this great personality. P. Govinda Pillai, a Marxist ideologist who authored *Kerala Navoathanam: Oru Marxist Veekshanam*, observed how the early writings on Kerala reformation left out this reformist who contributed much to the uplift of the Kerala society. He, with his visionary intellect, could see how the societies that don't change or willing to change discerning the needs of the time perish eventually. As a saintly man with a heart full of love for humanity and able to feel with them like his Master Jesus, whose discipleship he formally accepted by being a religious priest, could not simply content with the dim light of the society and the Church he belonged.

He had strong paternal feelings towards those whom he considered and loved as his spiritual sons and daughters. In his letters, repeatedly, he addressed religious men and women of the congregations he founded as "my dear

children." In his testament to the members of his congregation prior to his death, Chavara addressed them: "Dear children, by the grace of God we are called to be members of the congregation... We have not yet become genuine religious."<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere he wrote: "I have a special obligation to do some good to you in justice... So, I entrust this letter to you, my children of the parish of Kainakari, to be preserved as a treasure." It is this letter that, later, came to be called *The Testament of a Loving Father*.<sup>2</sup>

Chavara was a father to all with his natural love, concern and empathy. Love is caring, sharing, affirming, delighting, sacrificing, reconciling and forgiving. We humans need it in our primary home, i.e., in our families. These needs do not stop when we leave our home and join religious houses or seminaries. Our communities shall become real home. Home is not just a place we simply live, but a place where our needs are met, we are understood, affirmed and having a role and mission to accomplish. Emotional disturbances become a real problem when these love-needs are not met. Healthy emotional life for individuals and communities is characterized by openness and intimate sharing in fraternal charity. Religious communities shall become real homes.

Chavara was a nurturing person; he was a spiritual father and leader to all religious communities he founded and fostered. In the role of Vicar General and teacher in the seminary, more than an administrator he was a nurturing parent and a model of inspiration. In his dealings, he could radiate the loving fatherly figure of God. All Christians are called to manifest the fatherly and motherly dimension of God in their day-to-day life. Though theology has

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<sup>1</sup>KKC, IV: *Letters*, 70, 99.

<sup>2</sup>CWC, IV: *Letters*, 102-116.

sometimes overemphasised the paternal dimension of the disciplining father figure, equally, the Bible manifests the tender motherly side of God too. The failure in imbibing both this character of God is a disservice we render to God. Pastors, superiors, and spiritual directors of institutions should reflecting in themselves the tender care of a father and a mother, as and when needed, so that their subjects can perceive from their style of life and relationship the heavenly father's all encompassing love. A good number of parents and superiors fall short of mirroring this ideal of love reflected in the Father and embodied in Jesus Christ, his Son. Chavara was a father to all and they could relate to him easily. People could easily stand up to the challenges in life, if they come to know that they have a good father in heaven as well as on earth, a father who loves them and believes in them.

Like the blessed mother, who could quickly perceive the need of a distressed family at the wedding of Cana and could help in the distress of the family, Chavara could feel the need of the society, Church, religious community, etc., and could respond accordingly. His success in diverse fields was due to his intense prayer life and charity towards all. He was a manifestation of God's love and concern. His prayer life and especially his devotion to the Eucharist maintained him without any deflection from the right path.

### **3.14. Synthesis of Knowledge and Experience**

Chavara developed his character assiduously assimilating and synthesizing various aspects of knowledge that he had gathered. When we refer to 'character' our reference is to those dimensions of the self that are subject to alteration as a result of deliberate human actions. Put it differently, character is constituted by a set of enduring dispositions of

mind, will, and affect as shaped by our morally good and bad choices. Although many things in life are beyond one's control, reflexive character is not one of them. One's character is one's own doing; one builds it up or tears it down, by one's own choices. C. S. Lewis writes hauntingly about this self shaping quality of our choices in *Mere Christianity*.<sup>1</sup>

Due to his holistic outlook, Chavara could embrace a larger pastoral horizon and, thus, he always belonged to a larger world. He could go beyond his immediate family, Church and society. He realized that people needed not only Churches but also schools, not only liturgical music and chants but poetry and drama too. While living and working in this world he did not want to be circumspect, because he could see another real world besides this world. To be a citizen of two worlds and to synthesize them is a momentous task of human beings in this world. Chavara realized this task successfully. He synthesized knowledge and life experience to create wisdom and passionately disseminated it among the people.

He endeavoured to fill up the literary vacuum he encountered in the Christian society. His literary compositions are revered for their content and style. He was bold enough to create new experiments synthesizing Christian themes and values into the structure of the literary genres. Referring to his work *Atmanuthapam*, Perumpadavam Sreetharan, an acknowledged novelist from Kerala, said that there is a divine touch in his literary works.<sup>2</sup> A mind that savoured the divine beauty and richness only can pen poems like *Compunction of the Soul*

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<sup>1</sup>Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 86.

<sup>2</sup>Sreedharan, "The Sages Requiem," 141.

(*Atmanuthapam*) and *Martyrdom of Anastasia*. The mystical engagement with the divine is evident in Chavara's spiritual and literary writings.

*Atmanuthapam* unlocked his soul's innermost chambers. It is a key to understand the very person of Chavara, his thought, feeling and most especially his relationship with God.<sup>1</sup> As a literary critic, Sukumar Azhikode remarked that one could easily witness an East, West and Indian spirit in Chavara's writings. Because of his holistic outlook he belonged to the universal Church and to a larger world, at the same time, embracing the entire humanity.

### **3.15. Ecclesial Personality**

It is his love for the Church that urged Chavara to establish monasteries and seminaries. He sensed the urgency of more informed priests and religious whose virtues can embellish the Church. He, in fact, was carrying a grief in his heart seeing the plight of an Apostolic Church without any proper seminaries and religious institutions. He wrote: "In this land of Malabar, where the faith was preached from the very beginning, there were no monasteries or convents and the virtues of religious life were only spoken about. The men can at least opt to become priests and live chastely. The women folk can only get married and live in the world. Even if any of them wishes to remain a virgin and chaste there is no means for it."<sup>2</sup> It is in this context that he began to think of religious life for women. During the time of schism he wanted to bring peace and order. He sought the support and prayers of the congregation and sent letters accordingly. It is his concern for the progress of his Church

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<sup>1</sup>Shibu, "Chavara: The Mystical Flower of Mannanam," 92.

<sup>2</sup>CWC, I: *Chronicles*, 1; CSK, I: *Nalagamngal*, 1.

in an all round manner that led him to initiate new ventures in parish renewal, education, publishing, etc.

Maintaining bonds of charity and love was a prime concern for this great soul. In his last letter that he wrote to the members of his congregation and to the faithful of the Church, he wrote:

I, your servant, Brother Kuriakose Elias address my dear brothers, priests, my dear children... Let the Vicars of each one of our monasteries foster real charity among themselves and maintain a true bond. However numerous monasteries are, all must be members of the same family, children born to, nursed and brought up by the same mother. Never let this love weaken, but grow it stronger from day to day.<sup>1</sup>

To him family was more than blood-related lineage. He felt that there is a greater sense of unity and bond among people who together make a spiritual journey. Thomas Kadankavil observes that some of the discourses of Chavara to his subjects remind him of the farewell discourses of the great biblical personalities like Moses, David, Saint Paul and even Jesus, all of which manifested the depth of love to their children or followers.<sup>2</sup>

In spite of the conservative forces that worked sometimes against him, Chavara could achieve a lot in promoting more authentic faith life that manifested itself in social actions. He was not seeing anything in life as isolated and separate. In his view, everything is related and connected to everything else. Spirituality and religious life shall not be isolated islands in which one crafts one's life according to one's own needs. In Chavara's personality nothing remains stranded.

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, IV: *Letters*, 71.

<sup>2</sup>Kadankavil, *Chavara: A Multidimensional Saint*, 24.



His psycho-spiritual experiences were fully harmonized and synergized all through. Like a sunflower oriented to the sun always, while drawing nourishment from the earth, an integrated person balances himself with values of heaven and earth. He radiates the love and joy to others and becomes a blessing.

Saint Chavara in his six decade long life achieved more than many mortals could do, though he had only little ready resources at his disposal. He nurtured and brought up his own resources, psychological and spiritual; he could make a proper synthesis of all his aptitudes and skills for his own self-actualization as well as for promoting the optimal development of the society and the Church he was part of. He first transformed his own consciousness and, then, acted as a catalyst to transform the ecclesial community and the religious fraternity he had founded and nurtured.

## **Chapter 4**

# **CRISIS TO STRENGTH**

## **Broken and Blessed**

Do saints suffer more? Sometimes, we tend to ask such questions. In fact, saints and sinners suffer and go through agonizing experiences. Perhaps, statistics may not give any superiority to the saints. Many spiritual persons have undergone ignominy, humiliation and incessant pain in their lives. The fact that one has found God or had a spiritual experience may not change one's everyday world. We meet with the same hard-nosed people, may find ourselves still in humble and sometimes humiliating life situations. But there is a radical difference: you now have new lenses to view every event that occurs. For example, after the resurrection of Jesus, the disciples realized that Jesus is the Lord, but that did not make life any easier for them. Things in Jerusalem had not changed at all, but the disciples were ready to face their future with courage and hope. In this chapter, we shall delve into how grace and evolved consciousnesses sustained and nurtured mystics and saints like Saint Chavara.

### **4.1. Mystery and Raised Consciousness**

Normally, God doesn't spare someone from the natural order and its governing laws. The way they conducted themselves in such context is different from those of the ordinary 'sinners'. Often saints and holy people accepted trials and tribulations of life as part of the natural order. Christian saints who have a different world vision accept them as part of a divine design to help them grow and to

attain greater spiritual maturity and self-realization. It is crisis, challenges and experience of creaturely helplessness that finally help someone to burn off any remaining vestiges of ego consciousness, thus preparing to surge ahead in holiness.

Long terminal illness was the fate of many great saints. As it is clearly delineated in the Gospel of Saint John (9:1-3), suffering is not because of any one's fault. In the same line, we have to conclude that a pleasant life experience does not mean that it is on account of any special virtues of a particular person. What Jesus implies in the blind man's cause of illness is that we cannot fully grasp the ways of God. We shall not attribute shallow or superficial meaning to human plight. It is obvious that one can attain spiritual heights and still be subject to physical, psychological, or even spiritual suffering. In the natural order any living thing can be affected by viral or bacterial infections and may get sick, struggle and die. Humans partake in the same order and are subject to what happens to other physical beings. The brutes have only one way of dealing with it: they simply endure it. Humans, being endowed with higher consciousness, can raise one's endurance power and can deal with it meaningfully. The mystery surrounding human pains and struggles challenges humans to raise their consciousness. Humans can find meaning and purpose in their trials. Saint Chavara who underwent conflicting issues, often created by humans around, did not 'react' violently but learned lessons of kindness, forgiveness, and empathy, and thereby transformed his own consciousness.

Saints are graced with this ability to make good out of bad. We cannot simply explain away everything. As a religious person Chavara stood in the midst of mystery. Mystery means that it is not going to be swept away by

further information or answers that will be awarded someday. Part of the mystery is unknowable always and remains beyond human understanding. Partial glimpses may be received but not sufficient for a full grasp. If someone is in communion with the greatest mystery God, he/she will naturally have an experience of the unknowable mystery. It is in such contexts that Saint Chavara uttered “Thy will always and everywhere.” Saint Chavara showed much equanimity, acceptance and tranquillity in the wake of serious stress-producing moments. This is possible only through a set of actions directed inward, aligning with some higher purpose and meaning. It is an action that lets one stand in the midst of mystery, transcending the ambiguity.

To Saint Chavara like many saints of catholic tradition, spirituality or prayer was not a commodity one exchanges for convenient life. When life has a purpose and meaning deriving from faith vision, suffering will not have its scalding effect. As Suzan Ertz puts it, “Millions long for immortality who do not know what to do with themselves on a rainy Sunday afternoon.”<sup>1</sup> Saints are awakened people who have real understanding or awakening regarding the nature of all given phenomena, including their own immediate crises and struggles. It is an understanding that all of us are created in the image and likeness of God; we are all ‘untouchables’ and are utterly beyond the ravages of any accidents.<sup>2</sup> There are meanings and messages in every adversities and tragedies. Sometimes only by accepting those meanings and messages will it go away. Chavara, though holy and sought the will of God in every instance, could not pray away everything. In such situations he maintained an

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<sup>1</sup>Ertz, *Sun Beams*, cited in Dossy, *Healing Words*, 35.

<sup>2</sup>Dossy, *Healing Words*, 36.

attitude of surrender to the mysterious designs of God. Ramana Maharshi, the great revered sage of India, contracted terminal cancer. Many felt that such an enlightened master should not suffer from such incurable disease and pain. Many thought he is having yogic skills and managing it. But sometimes, they saw him screaming in pain. Once somebody who bumped on him asked: "Do you have much suffering?" He said in reply: "I do have pain but I don't suffer." Chavara with his spiritual experiences and theological understanding could stand firm in pain, illness and dilemmas, while not avoiding or eradicating it.

God has two kinds of medicines, bitter and sweet. God refused to remove the stuttering from the speech of Moses, but gave him assistance. Job in the Old Testament realized this truth when he asked, "If God gave good things why can't he also give us trials." Saint Paul had his own kind of suffering; in addition to the personal suffering he had, which he asked the Lord to relieve, he suffered from his concern for the Churches where everything was not in order. Fulton J. Sheen observed that, in the pain and suffering of many saints, there is a phenomenon of transferability.<sup>1</sup> As we transfer blood from one body to another to save it in time of emergency, we can transfer sufferings and pain so that the other may gain it in the spiritual realm. Thus, God said to Abraham that ten just men could save Sodom and Gomorah. Saint Paul applies transferability to marriage: "The believing wife sanctifies the unbelieving husband; the believing husband sanctifies the unbelieving wife" (1 Cor 7:14). Like Saint Paul, Saint Chavara was completing the suffering of Christ in his body for the sake of the mystical body of Christ. It is as if

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<sup>1</sup>Sheen, *Treasures in the Clay*, 345.

everyone belongs to Christ having a quota to complete for building up the body of Christ or to repair its damages. Thus, we see the marks of Calvary in the body and psyche of many godly men.

All spiritual geniuses have invariably taken the position that God is not just the God of good things alone. In our human realm and experiences, I doubt whether any truth can exist without its corresponding opposites. So, if there is ecstasy and joy, there could be sadness and misery. But the opposites are waiting to be raised to a higher plateau by virtue of one's higher consciousness by which he or she can transcend the immediate opposites and become an integrated person with peace and harmony within as the lasting attributes. Human experience is made possible through contrast. Alan Watts expressed the point trenchantly: because human consciousness must involve pleasure and pain, to strive for pleasure to the exclusion of pain is, in effect, to strive for the loss of consciousness.

#### **4.2. Through Crisis and Brokenness**

Every crisis is a challenge to make a turn or detour for the saints. Chavara's life exemplifies the maxim: every failure brings along with it an equivalent success, if our eyes are fixed on the Lord. It is impossible to put into words the quiet strength and the incredible courage Saint Kuriakose Chavara showed in his life. We watch a spate of issues one after another in his ministry.

A growing body of empirical literature reveals that many people find meaningful life lessons, a renewed appreciation for life and increased feelings of personal strength after every crisis.<sup>1</sup> Crisis and traumatic events have been part of

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<sup>1</sup>Baumgardner, *Positive Psychology*, 67.

human experience since the dawn of human history. Each individual and community had its own share of crisis all the time. What is critical is how they are dealt with or faced. Some people grow and some others get shattered. The increasing volume of depression today is an indication that many are not able to cope with crisis situations and that they are easily shattered and become dysfunctional, whereas some others grow to greater strength. We may wonder what is that thing which helps someone to bounce back and never get weary in life.

Saint Chavara faced his first crisis when both parents died unexpectedly due to the outbreak of an epidemic. He also lost his only brother in this tragedy, who was survived by a girl child. All his relatives were concerned about the continuity of the family lineage. Young Kuriakose experienced a lot of pressure from his relatives to get back home and to embrace family life. But he held on to the motto he had adopted very early in his life: "The Lord is my portion" (Ps 16:5). He discussed the matter with some understanding relatives and made arrangements for taking care of the sister-in-law and niece. He was willing to give up his family property to this effect. We are told by Malpan Porukara that Chavara bore the pain of this tragedy in a spirit of submission to God's will and lived with deeper faith in God.<sup>1</sup> God was preparing this soul to court hardships and obstacles in the way to build up his Kingdom. Malpan Thomas Palackal, seeing the calibre of this young seminarian, wanted to have him through the Latin course offered in the Latin rite seminary; however, having been denied permission, Chavara had to terminate his stay and had to return back to Pallippuram. Kuriakose later recalled

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<sup>1</sup>Porukara, *Sthapaka Pitakkanmar (Founding Fathers)*, 25.

that it was one of the worst humiliating and sickening experiences. He, however, did not entertain any ill feeling and was ever so graceful even in disgrace.<sup>1</sup> Further, because his joining in the seminary was quick, contingent upon the visit of Malpan Thomas Palackal in Saint Chavara's native parish, he could not procure a 'Desakury'.<sup>2</sup> Years later, when young Kuriakose returned to the parish after receiving minor orders for the traditional reception and banquet, the vicar, as planned by the parish council, closed the Church and left the place. To anyone this was a humiliating experience. Saint Chavara, without any qualm, chose to spend the day in another Church.<sup>3</sup>

Problems cropped up during his ordination time too. The ordination was scheduled around the feast of the Holy Cross on 14 September 1829. Saint Chavara and other deacons arrived with their Malpans in Varapuzha. Bishop Maurlius Stabilini took offence in the fight between 'anjootikkar' and 'ezhunooticar' and cancelled all his programs and decided to return to Rome; though nothing of his fault, practically, the ordination didn't take place. At a later date, it was held at Arthunkal, to which place Bishop had shifted his residence. We can imagine the distress of the candidate as well as the embarrassment and anger of the family and relatives. He didn't react but tried to pacify all concerned. The continued faction fights again made problems while the construction of the first monastery was on. Malpan Palackal and Malpan Porukara, who were in the

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<sup>1</sup>Kochumuttom, "K. E. Chavara: A Man of God," 48.

<sup>2</sup>A permission certified by the Parish Council which has exercised some powers of discernment as to who should be sent or welcomed to the parish.

<sup>3</sup>Kadankavil, *Chavara: A Multidimensional Saint*, 14.



forefront of the movement to establish an indigenous religious community and were blessed and permitted by the then bishop to gather financial support for it, were accused of collecting funds without permission and without transparency. They were questioned and were asked to produce consent letters for undertaking the construction. They readily produced it; however, it is reported that Bishop Stabilini, after having gone through the papers, did not take any step to neutralize the accusation.<sup>1</sup>

Again, all the three pioneers of religious movement were much aggrieved when Saint Chavara was transferred to Pallipuram against their wish. Thus, he was effectively blocked from carrying out the necessary work for the monastery construction.<sup>2</sup> When he approached the Bishop with their genuine concerns, Bishop sternly rebuked Chavara for not having learned to obey orders from his ecclesiastical superiors. During the same period, Fr. Porukara was also transferred to a remote place. Chavara and his companions had a lot of struggles in realizing their dream of religious life. Chavara was again rebuked for delegating pastoral care of his parish to a young priest when he had to oversee the construction work. Perhaps also due to the roadblocks created by the not so helpful hierarchy of the time, the two pioneers in the movement left for their eternal reward without having realized their most cherished dream. All these created a lot of anguish and distress in Saint Chavara. K. C. Chacko indicates what was the attitude of Saint Chavara as a religious person: while everywhere else men anxiously tried to assert their selves, flatter their egos, and exact obedience from others, here was a capable

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, I: *Chronicles*, 23-24; CSK, I: *Nalagamangal*, 28

<sup>2</sup>CWC, I: *Chronicles*, 24; CSK, I: *Nalagamangal*, 28-29.

organizer of men and things who promised obedience at all times to the hierarchy and bounded him with unquestionable obedience to the discipline of the community.<sup>1</sup> Saint Chavara's utter humility, love for the Church, and trust in the Lord which he inherited in his early years of life helped him to push on singularly against all odds.

Things got slacked at a period: there was not much enthusiasm from the hierarchy to see a monastery soon in Mannanam. In 1850, Archbishop Ludovic Martini, the Vicar Apostolic, visited Mannanam and then promised to give ecclesiastical approval for the religious life and Saint Chavara was asked to file formal petition to this effect. With great zeal they were drafted and given over; however, nothing was heard about it thereafter. Saint Chavara and his involved companions had to wait till 1855 to get canonical approval for the religious community they had initiated!

Problems were not over yet. When the new congregation was highhandedly declared as part of the Third Order of the Discalced Carmelites (TOCD), it broke his heart. That too was done without any consultation and dialogue. The new community resented and showed displeasure conveying their agony to him without sparing words. He had only spiritual tools to console them. Though the First Order of Carmelite (OCD) was altered a little to suit some of the traditions and practices, it did not go enough to give a boost to keep the spirit and charism of the new congregation. The new rules promulgated did not please all the candidates who have been aspiring to enter religious life. Some of them found it too harsh and restrictive and refused to join. Fr. Panthaplackal comments: "He devoured a lot of fire. In that

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<sup>1</sup>Chacko, *Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 38.

fire was the fire of the Spirit too. This Spirit of fire awakened and encouraged him in all crises.”

Chavara shared the painful feelings with the Vicar Apostolic. It was a great blow and wound in his heart for not being able to take in all who wanted to be in this new life. For many years they have been ardently preparing for this. The Vicar Apostolic consoled him and told him to take care of the remaining ‘little flock’ in the light of faith. The words of the Bishop, I doubt, were powerful enough to console a man who was deeply wounded and bleeding. But as a man of faith and obedience, he knew how to conduct himself.

Hope helps humans to look ahead and face crises gracefully. Once on his mission for raising funds for the first convent, he had a severe rheumatic fever and fell unconscious for two days. He was walking with his swelled legs often. In spite of his poor health, adverse physical conditions, and circumstances far from being pleasant or congenial, he achieved phenomenal things by sheer determination and trust in the Lord.<sup>1</sup>

### **4.3. Waiting on God through Darkness**

On 16 January 1841 Malpan Thomas Palackal and on 8 January 1846 Malpan Thomas Porukara died, leaving the whole responsibility of nurturing and promoting the newly laid out religious community on the shoulders of Saint Chavara, the youngest among the founding trinity. This was indeed a crisis period for Chavara. He took care that he may not lose the spirit and mission of the senior colleagues who wanted to see a religious congregation in the indigenous

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<sup>1</sup>Chacko, *Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 50.

soil. He took up this crisis as an opportunity and source of grace.

Social and historical factors too had put restraints on him, observes Kadankavil.<sup>1</sup> Kerala society, during the time of Saint Chavara, was riddled with numerous divisions of castes and communities and was beset with problems resulting from interreligious and inter-caste tensions. In a caste-based and communally fortified society, to be accepted beyond one's community and its boundaries was not conceivable. Chavara had openness towards all communities and segments of society; the elite ruling class, however, was not ready to accept and recognize his leadership efforts. Permission was denied from local authorities when an apt location was found for the new religious order. We read in the *Chronicles* that the founding fathers had to appeal to the higher authorities to get permissions.<sup>2</sup>

Saint Chavara dreamed of doing a lot of good to people, society and the Church. But often he encountered unexpected hurdles in the process. The bishop was caught up between the groups fighting among the Latin Catholic community. One group feared that Saint Chavara and his new religious community would exert undue influence on the bishop against them. So, they levelled some allegations against Chavara and his colleagues. May be because of this and some other factors, the bishop slowed the enthusiasm in setting up the new religious community and gave transfers one after the other. As the result, no one could get fully involved either in the collection of funds or the work at the construction site. All feared that the hitherto work went in

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<sup>1</sup>Kadankavil, *Chavara: A Multidimensional Saint*, 22.

<sup>2</sup>CWC, I: *Cronicles*, 13.

vain that *Besrouma* will become woods once again. God, however, did not abandon them in wilderness for long. In the third chapter of *Chronicles*, Chavara describes the difficult times he had to face during the few years after the foundation stone was laid. After the period of darkness, dawn arrived as Chavara and his companions could wait on God. Finally, the new prelate relented and allowed Chavara to continue with the mission of everseeing the construction of the new monastery.<sup>1</sup>

We watch so many ordeals in the life of Saint Chavara. Some of them brought excruciating pain and conflicts into his life. Sometimes, he looked lost in darkness, especially the time after the foundation stone of the monastery was laid. Nothing much was happening for the progress of the project on account of many uncontrollable factors. This virtuous and confident soul prayerfully waited patiently for God's intervention. Great many people in facing problems act emotionally, without giving time for their emotions to settle. When emotions flare up, reason will be gone and will be left without even the scope for the Spirit to involve.

Waiting patiently for God's help and reflectively praying over the problem, with a willingness to do the will of God, is a sure means to receive God's help. Many of us follow our own course of action or rely on our wisdom without waiting for the light from above. When we are impatient, intolerant, and bitter, we cannot wait for God. Scripture says: "Be still and know that I am God" (Ps 46:10). Chavara didn't act impulsively or inappropriately: all because of his faith in the One who started it all; he knew that the one who has begun it will complete everything in His own time. Finally, when everything was put in place for the construction of the new

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<sup>1</sup>Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 93.

monastery and the work was gaining a momentum, the shock came: both Malpans, his associates, who took initiative to begin the religious community, passed away. Now, Saint Chavara had to shoulder the responsibilities by himself with all the ambiguities and the uncertainties. He had to see that nothing started by his colleagues is minimized or stopped. There was growing demand on his time and energy. He never faltered; surely he got help from those two saintly priests from heaven. The Word of God was light to his path: "For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope" (Jer 29:11).

Having not seen or having no such model around, the new congregation they envisioned was very much in the Indian and Eastern style. They felt lost, when a Western style religious life was imposed on them by the bishop. What they imagined was in indigenous congregation with its merits and demerits and wanted it to evolve. Till this moment, it was moving along the conceived lines. What they looked for was a *Darsanaveedu*, a house of vision and action, in order to be a source of inspiration for all around. Now, its very nature and existence were called into question by relegating it to the status of tertiary of the Order of Carmelites. The congregation seemed to lose its identity and autonomy.<sup>1</sup> When there were waves and tides in the sea, the disciples feared and cried out "save us, Lord, we are perishing!" Jesus was only sleeping to be awakened in order to quell the sea. Apparently lost and dispirited, the disciples feared that their life is lost (Mk 4:38-40). Jesus is dynamically present in the Church even in the apparently lost turmoil and tumultuousness of the socio-political upheavals. He

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<sup>1</sup>Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Chavara*, 198.

quells human fears and guides his Church through the Divine Spirit.

Believing people always see things beyond the immediate. Being a prudent man he did not want to displease the missionaries who had sovereignty over the Malabar Church. Even the little he could do would not have been possible by any kind of reaction and criticism from his part. As he looked for the best always, he could reconcile with his own ego satisfaction and maintained a let go attitude. He believed in God who could write on crooked lines and make things happen in his own time. The charism of the congregation was dynamically evolving in the loving providence of God with a blend of Carmelite, Indian and Eastern characteristics.

Saint Chavara desired to found a congregation for women. He felt that women need opportunities for devoted life of commitment to God and the Church. Though he began planning and looking for an ideal place, the changing ecclesial and social scenarios did not help in the process. Finally, he identified a place in Pallippuram and did basic things but all came to a halt with Roccas schism and his need to involve with the problem resolution. After the schismatic divisions, when all things got settled, he thought again to give life to his idea of religious life for women; but by then, the bishop thought that the immediate necessity was a seminary at Pallipuram to form good priests to confront disunity in the Church. Saint Chavara was asked to convert the initial project into a seminary. Thus, he experienced another roadblock in realizing his plans for an indigenous convent. It took 38 years for him to realize the original plan of women religious congregation, which he believed would do a lot of good to women in the society in

empowering them socially, economically and spiritually.<sup>1</sup> He wanted the new congregation to be an effective agent in social transformation along with a commitment to religious life. Finally, when the admissions came, Fr. Leopold, by some reason, did not let in all candidates who were ready to enter. He blocked the entry of Elishwa (Clara) who was equally interested and prepared for religious life. Fr. Leopold insisted that he should see her a second time as if Saint Chavara did not have the calibre to make right judgement about the candidate in question. By this time the candidate had already arrived with the family to enter the religious life. Saint Chavara had to console the family and the judgement was delayed and kept the matter in suspension. Fr. Leopold, though a good missionary, sometimes showed the 'missionary superiority' to Chavara, though a proven and veteran senior administrator. This was again a humbling experience. It seems that though he was the one who spearheaded the idea and started working at it, Saint Chavara's endeavours were later relegated by missionaries. They took up the idea and leadership from him in this regard.

Archbishop Baccinelli who delayed Pallipuram convent realisation had not given up the idea. He wrote to the General of the Discalced Carmelites for assistance. Despite all these, he actively cooperated. He did not turn his face away from any good things irrespective of the places and persons involved in it. The hierarchy and Fr. Leopold took more active interest in the last phase of the convent establishment and the historical records, which Chavara himself had scribbled, don't should much active role for Saint Chavara. No doubt, however, that he was the inspirer

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, I: *Chronicles*, 195.



and the architect who championed the movement. Chavara was ready to render any help and cooperation if it would promote common good without any regard for fame. It took decades to understand this great soul whose work is seen behind all the good things that happened in the nineteenth century Kerala Church. He could gracefully accept all situations and could start working from nothing, resigning himself completely to God's plan.

#### **4.4. God's Empowering Love**

Chavara never had a doubt and knew deep within that all things are possible because of the One who strengthens him, as Saint Paul had remarked. His self confidence was from the sure knowledge and experience that God is with him. He believed like Teresa of Avila that God alone suffices. To him there was only one thing to do when things were going tough: waiting for God and letting Him act. When he had lack of funds, as the chronicles testify, miraculous things happened at least in a few instances.<sup>1</sup> When the winds are high, it is he who comes to us walking on the turbulent water as it happened to the Apostles. Chavara was convinced that God's plan will be done, if one doesn't insert one's own agenda into God's one.

God loves us so much that he cannot passively remain without being involved in our lives. Our broken experiences are often the truth of His involvement in our lives. As such, they are blessings in disguise. God's love chastises and disciplines us sometimes. It is not often to break our will but to strengthen and refine us. Someone very aptly said: "The Lord is like a dentist. If you go to the dentist with a toothache, he will fiddle around with other teeth and find

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, I: *Chronicles*, 45.

some other problem and propose new remedies; then you will be going to visit him again. He will cure it in the end making you all right. He will give you a full treatment."

God wants us to be healthy adults who have a full life. Most people do not endure the discomfort and pain of growing into the spiritually adult person. They are satisfied with the bare minimum, because they do not have the slightest idea of the wonderful things God is preparing for them. Suffering seems to be the crucible in which God burns out all that is mean and lowly in a human personality. Then, he moulds us into something that resembles the divine. Spiritual authors liken this transformation to that process of changing coal into a glittering diamond. It seems that Saint Chavara had a proper understanding of the divine pedagogy and designs. Good people aren't spared from troubles of life. Saint Chavara experienced God's love as an empowering love. It is faith and love that empower one when one's world shatters. At every crisis Saint Chavara sprang up with more strength and endurance.

God never sends hardships into His loved one's lives without his accompanying offer of help to empower them. Saint Paul's attitude to his trials and hardships was emulative and inspiring. "We are afflicted in every way but not crushed; perplexed but not driven to despair; persecuted but not forsaken; struck down but not destroyed" (2 Cor 4:8). Saint Paul had learned the art of resting in God via faith. When we find ourselves weak, powerless, and helpless, God is closer to us than we think. By virtue of the blessing we receive after brokenness, we tend to assume a new purpose and outlook towards life. However, everyone may not experience this kind of blessing even if broken. The blessings will pass by those who rebel and resent. It is here Saint Chavara made a difference. A gentle surrender to the

wisdom and will of God, accepting the fact that I don't control my life but God is still in control, will help to settle in life. Gradually, then they will see and experience in greater degrees the guiding hands of God extended over them. They will have the experience of Francis Thompson who said, "Lord, I did not know the dark clouds shadowed over my head were the shadow of your hands stretched out to bless me." The sad thing is that none of us can allow ourselves to be broken in order to experience the blessing. We are more inclined to run away from all hurting contexts. Scripture says: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9). God is never short of supplies; His grace never runs out. All God's faithful one's experienced this truth over the centuries from Old Testament to New Testament period. Chavara, who lived in the nineteenth century in the South West of Indian subcontinent, vouchsafes this universal truth.

If we look into the lives of holy men and women, we may not see God intervening always on behalf of the good souls. God did not save his own Son from troubles. The Holy Family had to flee to Egypt to save the Child Jesus from the hands of the wicked King Herod. Often, God lets us pass through the natural course of events. It seems to be the plan of God that we must go through the trials and hardships of human existence and grow out of it by the strengthening power of God. Mysterious as it is, true faith and suffering go hand-in-hand. When David Livingstone returned to his native land after many years of missionary work in Africa, he was found emaciated and handicapped. A lion had mangled his one arm. He was speaking to the students at the University of Glasgow and said: "Shall I tell you what sustained me during the hardship and loneliness of my exile. It was Christ's promise of 'I am with you always even

unto the end of time' (Mt 28:20)."<sup>1</sup> Everyone in the spiritual pursuit is aware of this promise of empowerment from God.

#### **4.5. From Crisis to Turning Points**

Bible contains many accounts of crisis in the personal life of its leaders as well as crisis in the collective life of the people of God. Scripture has employed different words to explain the plight of humans, like trial, tribulation, test, affliction, hardships, suffering, etc. Adam and Eve experienced a crisis when they were thrown out of the garden where they were in plenitude. They experienced shame, fear and isolation, as they were left to make their own life without the company of God. Jacob was forced to flee from his enraged brother. He faced rather unusual crisis having spent the night not with the woman he had married but with her sister (Ex 2:11-14). Moses experienced a crisis and turning point when God called him to return to Egypt. The Israelites underwent a number of extreme difficulties as they escaped from Egypt. It took a long time for them to be truly shaped up. Adversities and crisis times finally turned out to be shaping forces in their life. Hostile environments made them strong and bound them together as Yahweh's people. Many of David's Psalms were recorded in the midst of personal and communal crisis and are wonderful examples of seeking the strength of God in crisis. In the midst of many trials, Jeremiah continued to proclaim God's message to his people.

Following Jesus ascension Peter and Paul experienced crisis when they were arrested and forbidden to preach Jesus (Acts 9:4). The situation became even worse with the persecution of believers. Paul recounted the many critical

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<sup>1</sup>Graham, *Hope for the Troubled Heart*, 46.

crisis times in his life in the second Letter to the Corinthians (1:8-9). Leaders of the Church, in all centuries had the same experiences. Sometimes the crisis was from within than from without. Young Kuriakose experienced crisis from within and without. At no point, Kuriakose's life was smooth being exposed to all unfavourable situations. He had deep subconscious knowledge what God can do for his people according to his plans and designs. What ultimately mattered was not human plans and initiatives but God's.

Life is all about God and God's purposes which bring one to existence. Rick Warren in his popular Christian best seller emphatically opens the first page: "Life: It is not about you... You were born by his purpose and for his purpose."<sup>1</sup> We tend to ask the self-centered question: what should I do, what are my goals, what is my future? These and similar questions cannot stand by themselves. Life is about God doing things with you for his purposes according to his plans and time. This is a faith-outlook that prompts one to make a total self-surrender to the great architect who has perfect projects. To Kuriakose personal goals and success did not matter. Having God and God's purpose in mind, he could drop personal ambitions and fulfilment for the sake of achieving greater things for God. He had an abiding belief in him that nothing matters more than knowing God's purpose and nothing can compensate for not knowing his purpose and will.

Crisis events can be challenging, disorienting and sometimes devastating. Equally, it can be a turning point for those who move in the line of God. We need to look at crisis from a holistic perspective rather than looking merely at

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<sup>1</sup>Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, 17.

what is happening now or what is happening to me personally. A few observations in this regard are:

- Being a holy person doesn't exempt you from hardships and crisis.
- In some cases God may protect you and other occasions simply strengthen you to face the ordeals.
- Some of the trials are necessary to conform an individual into the image of Christ.
- A Crisis is not a crisis as such, for God is in control.

God comforts us through different means. Encourages us through His words like "Fear not, I am with you" (Is 41:10). Many biblical figures have received God's assurance when they were in crisis. The mastery and mindfulness of God's word and keeping one's consciousness positively make one experience success in life. It is said that success comes to those who become success-conscious and failure comes to those who carelessly allow themselves to be failure-conscious. No crisis lasts forever. Even difficult circumstances will pass by. Finally, God will prevail. Anticipation of the positive things in the end helps one not to lose heart.

#### **4.6. Hardships as Stepping Stones**

Who prevails over adversity? Simple answer is: it is people with ample resilience. Some people become overwhelmed by life's challenges and tragedies. They suffer significant symptoms of emotional and physical distress and need help and support in the recovery. Adverse life events affect people and make them bitter, angry, resentful and anxious. On the other hand, some people seem remarkably able to maintain their bearings in the face of adversities and transform them into stepping stones.

The energy and vitality we witness in Saint Chavara's life are not simply a psychological phenomenon; rather it is something psycho-theological in nature. Sorrows and tribulations are simple indication of a great truth of life that we are only pilgrims here. "Here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is yet to come" (Heb 13:14). With this vision Chavara could convert every hardship into a stepping stone. He accepted his sorrows in the last phase of his life with joy knowing that he is a passing pilgrim. Even in the midst of his tribulations he was concerned about others. He never made any complaint about his illness or the services given to him. He had a special talent to make every one of his visitors happy.<sup>1</sup> Here is a recollection from the chronicles:

He suffered for almost three months all the above mentioned diseases with great patience and resignation. But the one thing that surprised people was this. When people lost their eyesight normally they became irritated and very sorrowful about it. But this was not seen in Chavara. He was always pleasant with a smile on his face.<sup>2</sup>

Anyone who looks into the life history of Chavara will have only little to suspect that he maintained an egoistic self. Even the little shade of ego he surrendered to the Higher Self. It is in powerlessness that humans often feel anger and frustration. Humans tend to resent disruptions of their life plans, as those disruptions explicitly challenge the illusion that they are in control. Chavara knew who was at the helm. So, he could rest peacefully even when the tides were rising.

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<sup>1</sup>See *Posito*, 546.

<sup>2</sup>CKC, vol. 1:205.

He could see his life and mission from a wider divine angle. In other words, he viewed everything and assessed everything from God's perspective. Knowing that he is safe in the hands of his loving God, who called him to existence with a design about which he was sure of, he could explore, experiment and even could commit errors. The knowledge and experience of the unconditional love extended to him made him more resilient. Like a rubber band stretched but never broken, Chavara was able to regain his composure and confidence amidst any type of adversity.





## Chapter 5

### A HOLISTIC PROPHET OF THE EAST

In popular imagination, the image of prophet is associated with those who are able to predict the future, foresee the coming events, or guess the outcome of some significant process. However, real prophet has nothing to do with any of these pictures. Rightly put, it is the ability to see the world as it is, as God sees it, and the ability to respond to it accordingly.

#### 5.1. Prophetic Call of a Religious

Many evangelical qualities that need in religious and priestly life today require religious to be prophets with a prophetic voice. The words such as 'prophet' and 'prophetic voice' have become a byword to signify religious life and its mission. Looking to Old Testament times, we see most of those prophets were hesitant to accept their call to be prophets. They were nervous about their safety, security and the outcome of their action. Therefore, they received comfort and reassurance on the way.<sup>1</sup> God accompanied them in their mission. He did not give them detour; instead he was empowering them from within themselves to accomplish their mission. In the complex socio-ecclesial backdrop of Kerala in the nineteenth century, God's hand was uplifting Chavara with renewed energy in the wake of adverse circumstances. He was given the power of sacraments, the word of God and the powerful Eucharistic presence. Calling people to faith, conversion and renewed life were very much part of the prophetic voice of Saint

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<sup>1</sup>Horan, "The Prophetic Voice," 41.

Chavara. He was a much wanted preacher and teacher of parish life renewal. His strong prophetic voice against the schism of the time led almost to his arrest and at another time he had to flee the town.<sup>1</sup> His prophetic ministry led to witnessing to the power of the gospel to the poor and the marginalized. Chavara's prophetic voice was indeed a witness to the world that God does indeed "hear the cry of the poor" (Ps 34), and he called the Church and the society to heed to their cry and do the best possible in response.

## **5.2. Text in the Context**

Every prophet is a text-message of God in the context of a particular socio-religious cultural milieu. We see prophets arise in the Old Testament times, especially when people of God were at their low spirits and were in desolation. Prophets became the voice of God who was concerned over the plight of his people. God who acted in the history of the Old Testament people is still active in the Church through the Spirit and sends prophets and seers for our times too. Thus, we have Saint Chavara in the nineteenth century in Kerala and Mother Teresa in the twentieth century in Calcutta, India. Being sent to a country where great religions arose and spiritual traditions emerged, Saint Chavara had to be a prophet of a different kind to be a witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In the context of the plurality of religions and multiplicity of religious traditions and in the not very laudable socio-economic conditions, his role as a prophet was not at all smooth. This made him a prophet with a difference.

Saint Chavara, with his holistic vision and understanding, played a significant role in the nineteenth century context of the Church and society in Kerala by his preaching, teaching,

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, I: *Chronicles*, 85, 94.

evangelical thrust, lifestyle and proactive actions of social uplift. He could see all dimensions of life with its rich colours and variety; at the same time he could envision the underlying unity in everything. To him everything had a purpose in God's plan. Time to time God sent prophets and visionaries to God's people to lead them out of darkness of that particular period and to illumine the hearts of the people. Prophets helped the people of God enter into a whole new realm of life aided by the grace.

### **5.3. Forms and Shapes of Prophetic Ministry**

The figure of prophet with various modifications is a phenomenon in the history. Humanity has come of age. Prophetic ministry takes different forms and shapes today. What was accomplished through force and threat is no more acceptable in any field of human activities. As Jesus was a prophet, priest, and king, so too shall all his ministers in the New Testament times. In any ministry in the Church, one is called to manifest the gentle and compassionate face of the Father. In the Old Testament, God sometimes appears in anger serving threats and punishments instantly. Perhaps, it was divine pedagogy to deal with a more primitive people. In the New Testament times, we see the power of love, forgiveness, and mercy as the characteristics of the divine. Saint Chavara in his prophetic role understood this new phase that the New Testament had initiated. Prophets knew their history and history of God's people and what shaped them and their destinies; they could relate much more holistically to the past, present and future. They had hope about God who loves and guides his people to their future destinies. This hope is derived from meaningfully relating to the past where they could see indelible footprints of God who guided them through the vicissitudes of the past. So,

they were fully present in the now and looked forward to the future. Prophets do not become mere onlookers and wait for someone to act. They become collaborators with God in doing what they could and leaving the rest to God.<sup>1</sup>

In the course of time, the priestly office and its powers overshadowed the prophetic role in the Church. When liturgy, sacraments, prayers and divine worship got ascendancy with the emergence of clerical-hierarchical structures, the prophetic role was relegated to insignificance. Sacraments in general and the Liturgy in particular, with a set rules, could be easily handed down to the new officials in an institutionalized way; on the contrary, the prophet and his role have always been new and assumed different forms based on the socio-economic and spiritual climate of the times. The prophet by his authentic life and message has to validate himself with no prior credentials to present. His task cannot be strictly speaking institutionalized.<sup>2</sup> In spite of certain fluidity in the role the prophet, it is always different from that of the priest. Jesus was primarily known to be a prophet than a priest. To be in the footsteps of Jesus one cannot overlook the prophetic role. Most prophets in the Old Testament times were concerned about the socio-economic plight of their people and warned the oppressors against the dire consequences that might befall on them.

This image of the prophet is mainly found in the popular writings amidst the ordinary people. Prophets of the Old Testament are seen as the defenders of Hebrew religion. They were not simply defending the official religion controlled by kings and priests. They pointed out a direction

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<sup>1</sup>Pathrapankal, "Prophetic Personality of Blessed Chavara," 15.

<sup>2</sup>Rahner, "Prophetism," 1986: 1287.

to which they could march forward rather than getting stuck up with the status quo. Some prophets were active confronters, while some others did not confront the rulers aggressively. Prophets fulfilled their role by holding up a positive destination and envisioning the steps to reach there. We don't need to see prophets in a stereotypical model. To be on God's side and to bring people to God's side by encouraging, inspiring, showing the Promised Land with all its rich prospects are part of any prophetic ministry.

#### **5.4. Prophetic Vision**

Jesus had a sense of mission. He put it up succinctly at the outset of his public ministry: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me. He has anointed to preach the good news to the poor to proclaim liberty to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed and to announce the year when the Lord will save his people" (Lk 4:18-19). The first part of this mission involves merciful philanthropic action thereby God's people become disposed to listen to the announcement of the saving acts of God. The prophetic dimension of priesthood takes new ways of expression in the life of Chavara.

Challenges and needs of the society in the changing socio-economic scenario demanded a different kind of spiritual leadership and action. Jesus was a champion of the poor and marginalized. One of the accusations levelled against Jesus was that he ate with sinners and walked in their company (Lk 15:12). His prophetic mission was always in tune with shepherding. This way he was not letting anyone out of the net. Saint Chavara, following the example of Christ the Good Shepherd, exercised his prophetic priesthood embracing everyone of the society. Only a holistic personality can take all people on board with him.

All the distinctions and barriers humankind makes finally dissolve when one has a holistic understanding that we have only one God and all are God's children with inviolable human dignity. Religious aristocracy of the time didn't like his option for the poor. Saint Chavara's charismatic prophecy helped him to make the Gospel message all the more relevant and actual in the complex socio-cultural milieu of Kerala. Chavara's *Testament of a Loving Father*, addressed to his own parishioners, was well received by the people of Kerala as it offered insights and directions on the vicissitudes of their daily life. Through this he was able to imbue a greater sense of justice and decorum in the society. It was a clarion call from a holy prophet who wanted to see things right in a society that was plagued by social inequalities. His prophetic vision and action were definitively oriented to the setting up of a just society, than to the addition of number of converts to the community.<sup>1</sup>

He wanted everyone to live more fully as a child of God enjoying an 'abba relationship' and fullness of life. He consistently looked for the possibilities of growth for God's children. This led him to adopt a dictum, namely, "*Kannil Kattapetta Nanmayellam cheyuka*," meaning to do all the good that is being shown, which, in fact, became the maxim of his life. His whole life is indeed a manifestation of this truth. In the words of Archbishop Kavukatt, "All his activities were the outcome of the holy aspirations of a heart that was ever pure and full of divine love and it is no wonder, therefore, that they were blessed by God and were crowned with success."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Chackalackal, *Igniting Minds to Transform the Society*, 30.

<sup>2</sup>Cited in Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 426.

It is easy to be fired up with narrow understanding and perception. We just need to look into the radical movements and all kinds of fundamentalism that are baffling humanity today. They are all fired up with a narrow perception of reality. A very static and narrow understanding of reality stirs up the terrorist to all kinds of destructive actions. Thus, they become false prophets in the society. In Saint Chavara, we witness the life and actions of a soul, a holistic visionary prophet, who could touch and transform every dimension of human life.

A cursory look into the life and works of Chavara reveals how he was concerned to maintain the unity in faith and fellowship. Like Elijah, he showed his zeal for the Church during the time of Roccas schism when majority of parishes fell in line with the schismatic bishop. Saint Chavara faced threats to his life during that period of time. Like Jeremiah, who was called "to build and plant" (Jer 1:10), with burning zeal for God and God's people he strove to create a better Christian community, clergy, and families. In short, his prophetic personality was an all-encompassing one giving all spheres of human life a divine touch.

In a Church characterized by many conflicts during the complex socio-cultural and political climate, Saint Chavara walked on a fine line without falling into any traps that would have endangered his basic mission of being an embodiment of the good news of Jesus. Unlike traditional prophets of the Old Testament, he was more a proactive prophet who could bring many gifts of the people together. He was not a prophet of judgment, but a prophet of merciful love, although he was aware of the role of judgment in the divine love. He was concerned about the sad plight of Malabar Church and farsightedly reflected and proactively



acted over it. In *Alacona*, for example, we find him painfully reflecting upon such a situation:

When we see the Greeks and Latins have excellent theological books and good treatises and when we ask ourselves why the Syrians have not produced so far good books or treatises and how this situation can be improved, the answer we find is that all nations and people and not only the monasteries, have their own bishops and missionaries who are well-versed in sacred studies and that they have produced in the course of years good literary works and theological treatises.<sup>1</sup>

It is from this kind of farsighted reflection and historical sense that he initiated several innovations in the social, ecclesial and liturgical realms. There is a significant amount of literature to his credit, which was developed to energize and empower the Church and the society. Hence, his contributions to the renaissance of the nineteenth century Kerala are being slowly recognized.

### **5.5. Prophet of Positive Actions**

Saint Chavara adopted a different prophetic role of uplifting the downtrodden and marginalized by his visionary plans and actions. He started charity homes and education for the poor. He collected money, so that the poor students may not starve in the school. He could put a system in place to feed the poor students with lunch, to provide them with dress and books. His actions made far reaching impact on the society that it was taken up in the course of time by different agencies and charitable associations.

This farsighted saintly person easily sensed that the plight of people in the lowest strata of the society - dalit

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, IV: *Letters*, 57.

people – in India would not be liberated with cosmetic actions of doling out charity bits. He felt that they needed literacy and enabled them to participate in the common patrimony of the positive cultural heritage. He, therefore, developed projects so that they may feel their human dignity and the power of their choices to bring them up in the higher ladder of society. He started educational programmes to empower them.<sup>1</sup> At a time when untouchability and caste system were reigning in, without disregarding the mainstream population, he dared to make his preferences in favour of the untouchables. This attracted the untouchables to the Church where they felt that they could experience some level of liberation. Saint Chavara could make only some pioneering attempts, because such inhuman systems that were fortified by the caste system could not be pulled down by any singular effort. It takes time and concerted effort of many to make it a widely prevalent movement. He permitted the poor and the *dalits* to enter into the ashram and supported them with needed material things. The *dalits* around him, therefore, felt that someone is there with love and tenderness to walk with them.<sup>2</sup>

### **5.6. Holistic Empowerment**

As a man of holistic vision, he saw the need for empowering families and women. Glancing at the female figures and personalities appearing in his works and ministry, one can easily sense his lofty vision on women. At a time when no community in Kerala gave any attention to the emancipation of women, he made singularly commendable

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<sup>1</sup>Joseph, *Vishutha Chavara*, 72.

<sup>2</sup>Joseph, *Vishutha Chavara*, 73.

efforts to raise the status of women. He tried to raise the dignity of women by giving them greater religious role. When he founded the convent he wanted to have an integrated life for women. He blended manual labour and spiritual life with other creative arts to achieve integral development of the whole person. This integral vision eventually led to put up boarding houses and schools along with convents. The girls who were in the boarding received naturally training to become good Christians and house wives. Though his resources and exposure were very limited, we could see some paradigms for the holistic development of women and families evolving through his mission. When he envisioned the founding of Congregation of Mother of Carmel (CMC) in 1866, along with Leopold Beccaro, a Carmelite missionary from Italy, he aimed the emancipation of women and the wholesome development of the society. He wanted to ensure the presence of women visibly in the spiritual domain and saw it as a springboard to move to other apostolates. Being a conservative society, the level of religiosity permitted to women was nominal, not to say of any socially involved projects. Chavara saw that the best way to bring them to mainstream society is to bring them first to religious life with its own visibility.

### **5.7. Missionary Prophet**

What is most important for a people with a God-perspective is to accomplish the mission God entrusts them with. God who works in history, has created human beings with creative power so that they join Him in fulfilling His designs on earth. The creativity we are called to manifest in life is based on the mission we have found in life. The word 'mission' comes from the Latin word for 'sending'. To be a Christian means to be sent as the Father has sent Jesus.

Priests and religious are doubly sent by virtue of their special call and consecration. At the age of twelve Jesus said: "I must be in my Father's business" (Lk 249). At age of thirty-three he said: "It is finished" (Jn 19:30).<sup>1</sup> Jesus continues his mission in the Church which is his mystical body. Being parts of this body, all Christians continue the mission and are sent to be the messenger of God's love.

To be a messenger of God's love one has to experience it first. For this reason, Jesus first called the disciples around him. They were to have a personal encounter with him and thereby had to imbibe the power of his love and its depth. Everyone who belongs to God in Jesus Christ feels this mission deeply in his or her heart. If we believe in possessing the greatest good news ever occurred in the history, naturally there arises a passion to announce it by all means and sharing it will be deemed as a great act of kindness.<sup>2</sup> Accepting God's vision and plans for the human-kind is accepting the mission to be sent. Thus, Chavara found the mission in the nineteenth century Malabar Church in the social and cultural milieu of Kerala. To carry forward God's vision and mission one has to abandon personal agenda and personal ambitions. Finally, they will be able to say with perfect abandonment and surrender as Jesus said it: "It is not my will but your will" (Mt 26:42).

As a priest, Saint Chavara adhered to doctrinal propositions and rules of worship, as a prophet he went beyond the institutional Church and plunged himself into actions that empowered the weak of his time. Anyone who upholds the message of Jesus and makes it relevant to one's own time is a prophet after the model of the supreme

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<sup>1</sup>Warren, *The Purpose Driven Book*, 282.

<sup>2</sup>Warren, *The Purpose Driven Book*, 284.

prophet of all times. Saint Chavara had realized that Church itself is prophetic in its call and that a priest, who represents Church, therefore, cannot but be a prophet. For many, priesthood is basically a cultic reality and it is confined to the celebration of Eucharist and administration of sacraments which often stands in isolation with the rest of life.<sup>1</sup> A priest is essentially the preacher of the word and not merely an administrative officer in a religious society. His cultic function is not offering a new independent sacrifice each time but the representing of the one sacrifice of Christ through his efficacious presence and words. By being a prophet embodying the person of Jesus in his life and functions, he represents Christ and his sacrifice in a more meaningful way. Hence, the priesthood should be understood rather in the light of the prophetic than in the cultic dimension. Saint Chavara rightly blended the cultic priesthood as well as the prophetic role in a balanced way promoting the cause of the Church as well as the welfare of the people he ministered.

### **5.8. Bright Star of the East**

Christianity reached Kerala shores early in the apostolic period. Saint Thomas is said to have landed in Kodungallure in AD 72. Christian communities and Churches were here at least from the fourth Century onwards, as it is clearly documented. Although Christian presence was supposed to have worked as a leaven to transform the society, the stranglehold of caste mentality remained like a virus affecting even the Church body for centuries. The divinely commissioned man of the nineteenth

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<sup>1</sup>Pathrapankal, "Christian Priesthood in the Footsteps of the Faithful and Merciful High Priest," 4.

century found it as his mission to give a new lease of life to the Church. He realized that the message of the Gospel can get through only by a renewal that is holistic in nature. By his multifaceted enterprises, he made Christ's message attractive and vibrant. He accomplished this by driving his roots more deeply into the soil he was born. He could make his faith incarnated in the social context. He translated devotional books to mother tongue, did not fear to adopt and transform some Hindu observances and ritual as long as they did not have any negative faith implications. He encouraged chanting twilight prayers and use of *nilavilakku* with oil. He tried to give an indigenous touch to many things. The terminologies he used such as *Jnanapiyoosham*, *Darsanaveedu* (house of vision), *Thapsubhavanam* (house of discipline), etc., refer to his desire to become a true Indian devotee of Christ. In his fasting and abstinences he was following the lead of his own indigenous culture and environment. He integrated his faith, cultural heritage, and vision for the Church and society in a meaningful manner that resulted in concrete and innovative actions in the socio-cultural and spiritual realms of Kerala.

When the socio-economic and ecclesial factors were not conducive, he did not blame anyone or any system. In him we don't see a blamer or fault-finder; instead, he invested his energies in the best possible manner for his own positive growth as well as that of his society. He could have easily attributed all problems to missionaries or the very conservative socio-economic conditions of Kerala in the nineteenth century. Instead, he chose a different path with a positive outlook. He tutored himself, learned many languages like Latin, Syriac, English, Spanish, Sanskrit, Tamil, etc. As there were no universities in Kerala at that time, through his language expertise he could tap wisdom

and theological understandings from other quarters of culture and faith practice. He empowered himself with needed wisdom, sanctity and a holistic outlook. It seems that something deep within him was prompting him to be a holistic person who could reach out to anything that is human and divine. He cooperated fully to this inner prompting and, thus, could present many holistic paradigms in his life. Though he was not a theologian by any academic standards, we could see rich expressions of an integrated theological vision, which he practised in his humble circumstances.

Saint Chavara was a bright star who rose on the East in the nineteenth century and brightened the horizon of an Eastern Church of apostolic origin which was in need of a new awakening because of the rivalries and conflicts within and without. He was a silent revolutionary with the armor of faith and zeal for the good of all. Though Church and society were fragmented, by his prophetic vision and faith, he could become an embodiment of an integrated and wholesome life. He integrated the material, spiritual and intellectual spheres into a holistic paradigm for his own generation and subsequent ones. He knew the pulse of the times and the fabric of the society; accordingly, he visualized the changes.

Chavara felt the need for the indigenization of his community's faith so that he could play a critical role in the social life as well. He could foresee the needed changes and, hence, made steady and calculated moves in which his main succor was his own faith in the providence of God, who he believed was accompanying him. Jesus was accompanying the distressed Emmaus disciples, after the violent death inflicted on him by the Romans and Jewish authorities, though only in the end that they came to know exactly that

he was accompanying them all through their journey. He listened to their sad stories and conversed with them. Saint Chavara was accompanying the Church he loved with utmost sensitivity and with a prophetic understanding.

### **5.9. The Fearless Prophet**

'Do not be afraid' was often uttered by prophets to give consolation, reassurance, and strength. It was God's reassurance to his people whenever they had been in trouble. Thus, Isaiah spoke: "Yahweh, your God I grasp you by right hand, I tell you, Do not be afraid, I shall help you" (Isa 41:13). Jesus greeted his disciples many a time saying: 'Be not afraid' (Mt 28). John Paul II began his pontificate telling the faithful 'Be not afraid.' The one who witnessed the fall of communism had to fill the vacuum created in Europe. In turbulent times, he held on to the Lord who made the promise: "I will be with you until the end of the world" (Mt 28:20). History repeats itself with different persons, places and times. Because humanity is the same and human struggles and fundamental questions of life have been the same throughout centuries, we may find the same paradigms repeating again. Saint Kuriakose Chavara, who lived a prophetic life during his lifetime in the Kerala Church, kept his courage and hope in all the trying situations. He had tremendous faith in the promises of the Lord.

### **5.10. The Antidote to Fear**

Fear is one of the primary human emotions. Humans are vulnerable to fear from the very early time of the infancy. In the prenatal period, while in the mother's womb, a child can experience fear. Fear affects the whole system and can even make humans dysfunctional, especially if it is maintained



without coping skills. Most psychological problems are caused by fear stimuli and the disproportionate response to it. All phobias and panic disorders are derivatives of fear and stress. When they are continued body begins to wear out, immune systems are compromised, and, as the result, medical problems slowly begin to rise. More than fifty percent of human diseases are psychosomatic, arising from the mind towards the body. In the wake of fear, one is likely to feel helpless and experience that outer forces are too strong that one cannot manage. With this cognition, which is negative in nature, the body and its whole system go reeling. A positive cognition of being confident of one's resources help one to gain better control. The faith in a benevolent God and that God's closeness can make a lot of difference in the human system itself. Those who face life hurdles and traumas with God and relying in His power are seen always making extra miles without breakdowns.

Saints have had more than their due share of sufferings, but most of them dealt with those adversities declaring their faith in God, affirming it more emphatically and, thus, gracefully transcending them without becoming dysfunctional. A simple look into the life of Saint Chavara amply validates this truth. He contracted small pox which was a fatal disease for which no cure was known at that time. He saw some signs in his body indicating the presence of such a dreadful disease. But he was not sure about the nature of it. But the experts came and vouchsafed the presence of the dreaded disease. Naturally, he could be anxious and could be easily panicked, thinking of an abrupt end of his life and all the projects he had embarked upon. He completely surrendered to the divine will and faced it submissively and courageously. He knew that the great Shepherd who guided him so far will complete all things in the best way.

Miraculously, his symptoms began to disappear within few days with some natural medicines being administered by the local people.<sup>1</sup>

All human diseases get a boost from our fear and anxiety. Those who affirm God's power keep the fear and anxiety at its lowest and may, in turn, boost the immune system. They are likely to be restored quickly. People sometimes create courage and faith in themselves by psychological methods and tools. Psychological devices have their own limitations; they may not carry us too far. The assurance of an unfailing God can set off the resources of the whole human nature in the best way.

We know what happened to Peter when he took his focus off the Lord and looked on the rising waves (Mt 14:29). He began to drown and he feared for his life. Fear may grip leaders of all kinds when they move away from the Lord and focus on their own competencies. So, to deal with fear, the first antidote is to take one's focus away from oneself to God. Saint Chavara's eyes were always stuck on the Lord; therefore, fear didn't strike him down at any time. We noticed earlier how he was not admitted to his own parish after the tonsure; he was calm and composed and kept his serenity without bitterness. The trust in the Lord, the absolute trust, gave him the assurance needed that he needs not be anxious for there is one who controls. Trust and fear cannot go hand-in-hand. They are of opposite attributes and cannot coexist. The more you trust, the more you are free of fear. Trust in God means trusting in the power of God who has created everything and keep the order of creation, and bringing everything to fruition according to his plans and projects. Gospel assures us: Nothing happens without the

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, I: *Chronicles*, 47; CSK, I: *Nalagamangal*, 44.

knowledge of your Father in heaven (Mt 6:26). This kind of trust and faith in the one who loves and guides makes one naturally at peace more and more with oneself as well as with the world and everything in it. When the mighty one is close to me or at my arms length, I need only to make a call to get assistance.

Fear is a natural instinctive response in human person against possible threats. Every living being is endowed with the gifts to maintain its life. So, in the face of threat, every organism sets off its emergency powers to fight or to fly. When these emergency powers are constantly made use of, it leads to the exhaustion of powers and its systems make one psychologically and physically weak or sick. After doing one's best in the given context of fear evoking stimuli, one has to take recourse to one's faith. John Paul II, in a similar context, speaks of widely opening the gate for Christ to dispel fear. It is a holy courage to invite Christ into one's life. Buoyed by the love and zeal of his Saviour, Saint John Paul II was not afraid to speak up. He pointed out that Jesus Christ "alone has words of life, yes, of eternal life" and, thus, "a message of hope, salvation and total liberation" for all (Jn 8:31-32; 11:25-27; 14:6).<sup>1</sup> Apostle John wrote: God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him. There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear (1 Jn 4:18). God, as a father, cares for us even when He takes recourse to medicinal punishment. When Adam and Eve sinned they were ousted from the paradise; but they were promised good things in the future. Our God is a God

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<sup>1</sup>John Paul II, "Homily of His Holiness John Paul II at Saint Peter's Square, 22 October 1978. Less than a week after his election as Pope, Saint John Paul II proclaimed perhaps the most famous and lasting words of his lengthy pontificate: "Be not afraid!" [online].

of promises; he realizes plans in his time, 'in the fullness of time.'

God is the love that drives out all fear. The more we open up our hearts to Him in childlike faith and remain in that love, the more He would enter into the darkness of our fears and anxieties and would instil in us holy courage along with confidence and peace. This confidence is not derived from simply knowing about Jesus Christ, but from knowing him personally. In Saint Chavara's life, we witness a personal loving relationship which he cultivated by remaining in adoration for long hours in front of the Eucharist. At one time he made a rhetorical question: "How great a madness it would be to forsake the Lord through one's negligence or indolence. By promoting the forty hours adoration and preparing rubrics for it, he was stressing the need to develop personal relationship with the Eucharistic Lord and, thus, was advocating solid Christian life among the faithful and their families at large. Though 40 hour adoration was not much in tune with the then Oriental tradition, which Malabar Church followed, he found the power of these practices and personally experienced it in his life; hence, in order to enrich the life of the faithful, he wanted to adopt this practice for the whole Malabar Church. The monasteries he founded became centres of the meaningful practice he adopted from the Latin tradition.

Unless we become like little children we cannot have the kingdom of God (Mt 19:14) and the love which drives out fear. Therefore, the foundational key for not being afraid is to let oneself be enraptured in love. Pope Francis, in one of his homilies, said: "Let the risen Lord enter your life. Welcome Him as a friend with trust: He is life."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Pope Francis, "Easter Vigil Homily," 30 March 2013 [online].

Positive thinking is not enough to drive out fear; of course, it can create a proper attitude for God's children to feel the disposition of holy courage. With this holy courage one can rejoice in the Lord with the awareness of God's nearness that finally renders peace that surpasses every human effort. Therefore, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice! Your kindness should be known to all. The Lord is near. Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. The peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil 4:4-7). Positive thinking enables us to open our hearts to God in prayer and enable us to avoid the pitfalls of bitterness by embracing the will of the Father. In the life of Saint Chavara, the determination to do the will of God was absolute through the kind of positive thinking he practised. "In all circumstances give thanks; for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thes 5:8). Former Satanist Deborah Lipsky wrote recently explaining how negative thinking is like a beacon that draws evil spirits toward us, like rotting meat draws flies. If we are attracting darkness that drives out the light of *holy courage*, replacing it with bitterness and gloom, we need to be watchful and vigilant.

Saint Chavara's life was an exemplification of the Psalmist words: "You shall not fear the terror of the night nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that roams in darkness, nor the plague that ravages at noon. Though a thousand fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, near you it shall not come. You need simply watch; the punishment of the wicked you will see. Because you have the Lord for your refuge and have made the Most High your stronghold" (Ps 91:5-9). He had adopted the maxim from the Psalm "The Lord is my portion" (Ps 119:57) at the time of his

ordination and kept it in his life faithfully so that nothing could make him panic or anxious.

### **5.11. Prophet on Hilltop and Valleys**

The founding fathers originally thought of seclusion from the world to lead a holy life. As they initiated the founding, slowly, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit – through the bishop – they felt the need of engaging in this world to become its leaven. What then happened was a process of affirmation, negation and transcendence. We all are constantly challenged not to conform to the values of this passing world, but rather to allow God to transform us through a renewal of our minds (Rom 12:10).

In the beginning what was envisaged by the holy seers was a centre of incessant prayer and austere spiritual practices away from the world to save one's soul. Slowly the idea expanded and the contemplative desire realized in a much more inclusive way integrating more ecclesial and social dimensions. The opening of seminary along with the monastery made their community an integrated centre of learning, study and work. Things developed in such a manner that gradually the ashram became a hub of multi-dimensional pastoral activities. The ecclesial community was benefitted from the prayers as well as the ministries derived from the power of their ascetic life and prayer. The more they grew in spiritual life the more they felt the need to be with the people of God and to serve them.

Just as Apostle Peter and the small band of disciples got a vision of the divinity of Jesus on the Mount Tabor, this small band of people on *besrauma* – hilltop – being awakened and enlightened by the new experience that came down to the valleys from the top to be with people of God in their genuine needs. The Apostles initially wanted to be on that

special place of *theophany*, and Peter even uttered the desire to remain forever in the security and pleasantness of the divine experience. But they had to be part of everyday life and to experience the challenges of life far from the initial safety and security they experienced at Mount Tabor. As soon as Mary received the word she went to the house of Elizabeth to be with her and to serve her (Lk 1:39-40). It is the task and privilege of all those who are touched by the Divine and to enter the routines of life, to serve others in a whole different way in accordance with the sublime beauty and love they had experienced. In Chavara's life every blessing he received became a stimulus for him to act with a greater sense of mission and thrust for Gods kingdom.

### **5.12. Prophet with a Sense of Mission**

God's will is related to one's sense of mission which inclines one to experience as David says: "My zeal for God and his work burns hot within me" (Ps 69:9) or, again, as Jeremiah puts it, "Your message burns in my heart and bones and I cannot keep silent" (Jer 20:9). God filled Chavara with a passion to do as much good and, thus, to radiate the goodness of God in his life. So, looking for no rest, he engaged to further the Kingdom of God by his life and deeds which were in perfectly in tune and harmony with his mission. Thus, he became an effective witness of the good news of the Kingdom. If Kerala society has made progress in healthcare, social welfare, social development and social justice and has become a model for other state, it is also because of the pioneering works of Saint Chavara. It is the easily available and accessible school education that transformed Kerala into a secular democratic force. It is from these schools where everyone, irrespective of caste and

creed, sat together and learned the primary lessons of human dignity and equality.

In 1846, he started a Sanskrit school. Till then Sanskrit study was reserved for high caste Hindus. Only Brahmins were allowed to have learning and the sublime knowledge contained in the scriptures. Chavara dared to open a Sanskrit school and to admit children from untouchable segments of the society. As long as people live in their confinements of seclusion, observing what was handed down to them and avoid interacting with the wider world and larger human communities, life might get sterile and will move on in the beaten track. It was in the context of seeing all kinds of social barriers, especially the rigid caste hierarchy, that Vivekananda called Kerala a 'lunatic asylum'. When Kerala society was in such a deplorable state without openness and practised untouchability and inapproachability, bashing others based on their caste superiority, Chavara felt the best antidote to overcome these social malaises is classroom where everyone be made equal under one roof, learning the same lessons.

In his attempt to found a Sanskrit school, he had a purpose of bridging the gap between different social strata. In every civilization there had been a language of upper classes. These upper classes only had the privilege to use divine languages like Aramaic, Latin, Hebrew, Arabic, and Sanskrit. Mostly it remained as priestly language even when they were not in use among ordinary people. Ordinary language of the people was looked down by many religious hierarchies. It is at this time Saint Chavara thought of founding Sanskrit school. Probably, he wanted to establish English language as a means of strengthening his community; but having no support from the Catholic hierarchy in Kerala at that time for English education, he



turned his attention to achieve a different purpose by opening Sanskrit school. He planned to strengthen even the marginalized by helping them in touch with Sanskrit, the language of the nobles and aristocrats of the society.

Chavara's concept of universal schooling took time to be accepted by the whole society; nevertheless, he championed a movement in the direction. Slowly universal education turned the marginalized classes of society into participants of various projects with access to authority and wealth and, thus, the society was transformed.<sup>1</sup> One timely small action taken by Chavara at an appropriate time created ripples along the way. Education created a strong middle class in Kerala which, in turn, strengthened the society through decentralization of wealth; this also fortified the democratic institutions. The missionary congregations he started continue to radiate the positive energy and are carrying on his legacy venturing new models to uplift society.

Chavara had a profound sense of history which enabled him to plan things in the best way for the advancement of the Church. He knew the revered apostolic traditions and the richness of the liturgy of the Malabar Church. Having had interaction with the Latin Church and being under Latin ecclesiastical jurisdiction, he could adapt and assimilate some of these traditions for the genuine spiritual growth of his Church. Chavara had realized that making a copy of the past would be suicidal for a Church that has immense potentials. Further, historical circumstances had blurred some good practices and some other elements of traditional spiritual practices which were in need of updating. He wanted to revitalize spiritual practices and liturgy. He succeeded in bringing some order and discipline

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<sup>1</sup>Radhakrishnan, "Founder of Modern Civil Society in Kerala," 50.

in worship and spiritual practices. It is unfortunate that these reforms were later interpreted by some vested interests as 'latinisation' of an Apostolic Church.

Most prophets in the Old Testament were blessed with the potential of foreseeing the future prospects of the community they belonged to. Chavara, with his prophetic and intuitive mind, could figure out what his people were in need of. His testament, the *Chavarul*, testifies to his ability and visionary nature in reaching out to families and future generations. Chavara states:

So I give you this in my own hand writing. Even after my death this paper will not perish. So I entrust this to you my sons and daughters of the parish of my children of the Kainakary chapel, to be preserved and observed as a treasure from me.<sup>1</sup>

He read and interpreted the signs of the times. He cared for the weak and the needy.

Pathrapankal remarked about the greatness of this sage. "With a wide and far reaching vision, Chavara took giant steps and acted far ahead of times faithfully mobilizing souls from different strata of society and made them part of God's vineyard."<sup>2</sup> Chavara was a prophet by his positive presence and action. Being a person of positive presence he did not have to make much noise. The literary luminary, Sukumar Azhikode once in his Chavara discourse said that Chavara was a model of one who worked more and spoke less. By means of powerful consciousness, determination and a spirit of sacrifice he questioned the oppressive structures, sometimes silently, and at other times compassionately and commandingly.

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, IV: *Letters*, 152.

<sup>2</sup>Pathrapankal "An Iconoclast in His Own Right," 234.



## Chapter 6

# SAINT CHAVARA'S HOLISTIC VISION IN FORMATION

Saint Chavara, with his prophetic and holistic vision, could touch and transform the society, Church and community in a significant manner. Though he parted us in 1871, the vibrations of his thoughts and actions and the rich legacy he bequeathed to us hang in the social life, human formation as well as spiritual formation. He is remembered and esteemed for many pioneering services he rendered, leaving an indelible mark unparalleled in history. Though, we don't have much material or information regarding the formation style and functioning of the seminary, we understand that he felt the need for radical changes in the old system which was *malpanate*, which followed a native mode of tutoring, like the *gurukula* system where the candidates stayed the *guru* for the purpose of schooling. He wanted definitive changes sensing the need of time. He looked for learned and whole priests for the Church. For an understanding of Chavara's vision on formation and religious life, we mainly draw from his circulars and his testament.<sup>1</sup>

### 6.1. Self and Wholesome Formation

The word 'self' is being used today with all its varying meanings and implications. The self I refer here is the unique identity of a person as a subject with a natural unity

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<sup>1</sup> See CWC, IV: *The Letters* (The letters he wrote on various occasions to the Holy See, to the superiors and members of the congregation as well as to the parishioners and the faithful reveal the person, personality, and formative interest.)

of body and soul. This unity itself is an integration of physical, chemical, biological, psychic, intellectual, and volitional properties. It is endowed with freedom, intelligence, moral power and the power of transcendence. Since it is endowed with all these attributes and more, it indicates the need for continuous integration to maintain the essential unity of the self. The self is capable of growing and developing in many varied ways. Christian or religious formation makes use of this inherent power of the self to grow and change. All through the changes and growth, an identity – an unchangeable ground – is kept which we term as self. The self is rooted in the sinfulness of humanity and is open to many deformations.<sup>1</sup> One's choices, beliefs, actions, thoughts, habits and ignorance all can distort and deform the self in destructive ways and, hence, the need for formation. Though Chavara was not a psychologist and psychology was not a developed science in his time, he still had that insight into the nature of human beings. This insight regarding the fundamental nature of human person and the life of grace that nurtures the divine life in human person was very much part of his life and faith. It is this vision that led Chavara to be an effective formator by pioneering new movements in seminary formation.

## **6.2. Reservoir of Formative Energy**

Every organism needs energy to move, act and accomplish. This energy for various actions is inbuilt in human organism. All humans have a definitive amount of energy in the system. To where it is directed and employed all depends on the personality and the worldview of the individuals concerned. Because our system can hold only a

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<sup>1</sup>Tyrell, *Christo Therapy*, 163.

limited amount of energy, everyone is called to make use of this energy in the best possible manner for self-realization. The given energy is channelized in different ways based on the life purpose, sense of mission and values. Thus, people focused on physical/ material aspect may manifest their life energy to achieve and acquire worldly comforts and pleasures. Psychological needs, wants and fulfilment arouse psychic energy in that direction. Psychoanalysis speaks of libidinal energy which is sexual in nature as the source of human actions and motivations. A spiritual perception of life, sense of mission and purpose direct the energy through a different but holistic channel. People who are connected to their spiritual self can transcend their limited reservoir of energy, as spiritual world and its potentials are unlimited, but being an embodied spirit, it experiences limitations. Our human energy is directed towards desired goals based on our perceived values, physical, psychological or spiritual, hence, we are in need of spiritual goals and desires. Chavara cherished a reservoir of spiritual energy during his formative years and he was imparting the same to his candidates in formation.

Chavara always cherished personal and intimate feelings towards God, which he expressed in an intense filial manner by *appa* or *ente appa*. His vision on formation is based on the *Abba* consciousness and the subsequent filial experience. Similar endearing words appear more than thirty times in his works.<sup>1</sup> In *Dyanasallapngal* (Meditation Colloquies), his religious mind is best expressed. His childlike innocence and natural bonding with God are reflected there. He addresses Jesus and God as *ente appa*. It is the natural, simple and endearing way of addressing someone who is

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<sup>1</sup>See CSK, III: *Atyalmika Krithikal*.

personally very close. Oftentimes liturgical and spiritual languages keep God in heaven by employing theological expressions and jargons. Chavara preferred to use everyday language of his mother tongue to refer to and express his intense and intimate relationship to God. By using the word *ente appa* he referred to the same *Abba* consciousness Jesus referred while addressing his heavenly father. Whenever he used it, he felt that he is loved, accepted, chosen; for, he felt that he belonged to the family of God. This has been the reference point of his Christian as well as religious formation. In fact, this *Abba* consciousness was the reservoir of his energy. His devotion to the Holy Family is a concrete expression of his belongingness to the Divine Family. Embracing God's love is not done with our heads but with our hearts.<sup>1</sup> It is not simply about understanding, but about simply receiving. Perhaps one may spend a lot of time trying to figure out how God can love us and what that means. But, all we really need to know is that He does love. The ability to trust in this profound truth unleashes a reservoir of energy and enthusiasm to proceed farther in the process of becoming whole.

### **6.3. Identity and Wholeness in Formation**

By definition, wholes are complete. In an ideal whole, there are not only components, but they are in an arrangement of harmonious integration and balance. What we witness in the life of Chavara is this harmonious integration and balance. It is this legacy that he has handed over to the formees, formators and to his new seminary, monastery and convent. The first man was a whole person. He was in perfect harmony with nature and was at ease with himself

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<sup>1</sup>Gerth, *You Are already Amazing*, 12.

and in right fellowship with God. To be whole, one must be fully in relationship with the transcendent and must be alive in mind, too. The divine order for wholeness is spirit over mind and mind over body. Hence, spiritual practices enjoyed a special place in Saint Chavara's life and the formation he rendered.

Nothing exists more urgent and more important than for everyone in the world to find wholeness, because life is far more than just a battle for survival. Saint Chavara earned this sense from the early period of his life that life shall not be a simple survival. His holistic understanding of life has its roots in his sense of identity: Who am I? It is a question humans tend to ask throughout life, sometimes consciously and other times unconsciously. The desire to know who we are really has been placed within us being created in the image and likeness of God. Jesus knew His identity at the age of twelve. When He was lost and found in the temple, He responded to the confronting question of Mary and Joseph in a succinct manner expressing His identity: "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I should be in my Father's house?" (Lk 2:49). Jesus referred to His divine Sonship and His need to be with his heavenly father. Every formation should start with this sense of identity, which should be deepened by an intense life of prayer. Saint Chavara, having found his true self at an early stage, joined the seminary to nurture this identity. As a result of such a consciousness, he could rightly feel his place later in the Trinitarian family. His newly dawned sense of spiritual identity is well revealed in the motto he adopted, "The Lord is my portion" (Ps 16:5), as he was formally initiated into the seminary.



#### **6.4. Formation: A Human and Divine Process**

Religious are called to be the living image of Christ in their relations and associations; they shall reflect the human qualities in the absence of which one will be doing a disservice to Christ and the Church. Lacking in genuine human qualities of compassion, empathy, reconciliation, positive disposition, forgiveness, etc., many of God's people have been driven out of the Church's fold. *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (1992), therefore, stresses the need for human formation of candidates for priesthood. The ministry of the priest is certainly to proclaim the Word, to celebrate the sacraments, to guide the Christian community in charity; but all these things he does by dealing with individual human beings. As religious exist for the Church and their ministry essentially involves the people and the Church, formation should be given not only for the growth of the spiritual person but to develop the whole person so that one's social and psychological self also may grow. Religious and priests shall be formed that they should be able to bring people to Jesus and not block them on the way.

Formation houses shall be a place where the formees feel emotional security. It shall be a continuation of the family in the sense that they should be able to enjoy minimum security, comfort and belongingness. In simple terms, they shall feel at home and not feel like fish out of water. The seminary atmosphere shall neither be authoritative nor permissive.<sup>1</sup> Saint Chavara, in his seminary formation, always saw that a family environment is maintained. In his formative style, he integrated his paternal authority and tender love of a mother. Formators are in the place of parents and candidates shall be able to feel the nurturing parental love in

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<sup>1</sup>Karimpanackal, "Formation for Celibacy in Seminaries," 68.

the formation environment. Lack of affective environment in formation houses may lead to affective immaturity and imbalances in the emotional realm. Formators and major superiors lament over the poor internalization of the formees. The capacity for internalization depends on the inner freedom from the affective unconscious pulls. Lack of internalization means greater compliance or identification. Compliance occurs when one is influenced by the mere desire to gain reward or avoid punishment. These people are looking to authority for their approval or disapproval and modify themselves accordingly. Some move to identification level in order to be part of the group or mainstream without any commitment. Acceptance and relationship satisfaction only count at this level. They flow with the group or group leaders who command respect. Internalization occurs when a person realizes that this is the right thing to do and modifies one's attitudes, actions and decisions according to a set of values and beliefs that are personally cherished.

Poor internalizing capacity is mostly because of the unmet needs of the psychological self and lack of motivation. Saint Paul speaks about the habitual conflict in man that prevents him from becoming a whole person: "I do not understand what I do; for I don't do what I like to do, but instead I do what I hate to do" (Rom 7:15-18). All recent documents on formation stress the need for integration of the human and spiritual in formation, because the spiritual dimension is the natural blossoming of the human dimension.

Though in every person God has deposited the capacity to transcend theo-centrally, the divine call encounters limitations of various kinds inherent in the human person because of the flawed psychological structures.

Religious and priestly formation is a spiritually motivated human process. Individuals involved in formation are human beings with human structures employed to respond to the supernatural call. Though the subjective sanctification doesn't intrinsically depend upon psychological dispositions, growth in the psychological and spiritual dimensions is interdependent. Because of this interdependence, both dimensions shall be taken into consideration in formation. Chavara had sensed that religious life and formation involve extraordinary demanding synergy of human and spiritual dynamics. The divine grace is offered and mediated through the structures and dynamisms of the human psyche of which God the creator is author.<sup>1</sup>

### **6.5. Systematic Training**

The first indigenous congregation for men is coupled with the foundation of the first formally organized seminary in the Syro-Malabar Church.<sup>2</sup> Unlike the *malpanates*, which were conducted exclusively by one priest, the new seminary in Mannanam came up with a formal training program with more priests and this was found more effective. Christian formation and religious formation help one to consolidate beliefs, values and moral certitudes and anchor properly so that they may be established in a standard of judgment and choices in any situation. Without formation one may tend to improvise. Serious study is called for in the area where one wants to develop convictions and values. Chavara, who had a special affinity with Teresa of Avila, did stick to her counsel: "This is not for believing every one, believe in only

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<sup>1</sup>Pope Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, §55.

<sup>2</sup>Chackalackal, *Igniting Minds to Transform the Society*, 36.

those whom you see modelling their lives on the life of Christ... Believe in the teaching of the Holy mother Church. You may then be quite sure that you are on a very good road."<sup>1</sup> Lacking in standards of judgment, one has no way to determine the right thing to do in a situation of choice. As the purpose of one's life is to serve God and others, the fundamental criterion of life shall not be anything else but love of God and neighbour. All behaviour shall take direction from this source. Chavara knew that circumstances were to be considered in making choices. To him more significant was why something must be done differently. A religious does something not because somebody does so, but by an internal prompting. Forming an interior locus of control guided by the intellect and desired by the choice of the will are essential part of human formation. Chavara who understood these laboured to render information to the intellect and proper desires to the heart. For this purpose he felt an urgent need of proper seminaries.

Though the *malpanate* seminary system was not great in contrast to the modern seminary system, Chavara, under the direction of holy and erudite Thomas Palackal, made the best out of it in his formative years. Chavara as a young seminarian realized that an uneducated priest is not only inefficient to do any pastoral work but may be even detrimental to the salvation of souls even.<sup>2</sup> With his farsightedness he could see the need of holy, educated and well-disciplined priests in the Church. In opening the seminary he himself designed the formation programme. The new seminary system had its own facilities and a team of priests to teach and train them. Seeing the many good

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<sup>1</sup>Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection*, 21.

<sup>2</sup>Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 6.

such training renders, the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly instructed Chavara and his confreres to start more of seminaries attached to the newly found monasteries.<sup>1</sup> Contextualization and inculturation stressed in the Post Vatican period found its earlier streaks in Chavara's education and formative endeavours. By promoting Sanskrit languages study among Christians and priests he opened a portal for cultural as well as religious exchanges wherever it was possible. In his innovations, he wanted to have the best of Indian culture and values to be imparted to the seminarians. This humble start up mission fully blossomed when the seminary was shifted to Bangalore where it began growing, spreading its shoots and branches to become a centre of Indian spirituality and dialogue. Regarding formation of clergy, a notable authority on Saint Chavara, Thomas Kochumuttom remarked:

The Fathers were concerned not only about the training of priestly candidates but also the ongoing formation and discipline of priests. The use of cassocks introduced long before by Malpan Palackal had created in the clergy a sense of priestly identity and dignity, and that in turn made them more respectable before people. The same Malpan instilled in the priests taste for reading good books which made them more spiritual and learned pastors of people. To help the priests sustain spiritual fervour and pastoral zeal Chavara took pains to conduct for them annual retreats at Mannanam, usually by the end of May.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Kaniampampil, "Blessed Chavara and His Unique Contributions to the Church in India," 4.

<sup>2</sup>Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint K. E. Chavara*, 31.

### 6.6. Wholeness by Life and Example

Chavara was a real *guru* who trained candidates by preaching, teaching, and by life example. As a genuine *guru*, he felt the need of casting away the darkness of ignorance from his subjects as is perceived in Indian spiritual traditions. One of his priorities in developing publishing houses was to bring out more popular as well as classical spiritual books to spiritually nourish the religious candidates and the lay faithful. He employed different holistic paths to help seminarians in spiritual realization. He was not imparting bookish knowledge but experiential knowledge. As a *karma yogi*, he was imparting the path of disinterested action, doing one's duty without a desire for fruits. His own life was a book to the religious candidates. Above all, in his formative vision, the path of love and devotion – *bhakti marga* enjoyed a prominent place. Belief in a personal God and total surrender to this loving God as well as manifesting that love in surrender expressed in continuous devotional practices constitute *bhakti marga*. This kind of *bhakti marga* he stressed in the seminary and religious life. In the religious house at Mannanam and in the seminary attached, he saw to it that candidates practice all virtues like simplicity of life, obedience, accountability and transparency and genuine concern for the poor. He also promoted devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, Blessed Virgin Mary, Saint Joseph, Holy Family, etc.

According to Fr. Leopold, as it is recorded in his short biography on Chavara, Fr. Chavara fulfilled his priestly and religious duties more by good conduct and virtuous practices than by words. All were impressed by his deep sense of humility, unparalleled charity, and spirit of submission to authority. Therefore, they not only respected

and loved him but also unquestioningly trusted his words.<sup>1</sup> In his testament to his fellow religious, he instructed them to render as much help as possible to the family of Mathan Manjooran Kalapuracka who illegally misappropriated the monastery's property and who also filed criminal case against Chavara. All these affirm that Chavara did more by motivating and molding seminarians and young priests by his life and example, whether or not they were seminarians or priests.

He was an authentic shepherd after the model of Jesus, committed to the care of sheep, even at the cost of his life, daring even to go out and anoint people with smallpox. Without fear, he joyfully administered sacraments to such people. Love dispels all fear! In his spiritual writings, he highlighted the possible pitfalls in priestly and religious life. It testifies to his brotherly concern for the wellbeing of all members in the community as well as the future members.

As a man of holistic outlook, he was giving out tirelessly, involving in the betterment of all equally. There were times when he was exhausted and discouraged. He drew strength from the Eucharistic Presence as well as from reaching out to his spiritual director and associates. His emotional bank account, therefore, was never depleted fully. He was cared and loved for by his spiritual children. Not only giving, but also receiving is a grace. In order to receive materially, emotionally and spiritually, what we need is an open heart, hands, and life.

Everything about nature is a question of give and take, offering and receiving, grasping and releasing. This is an essential outlook to become whole. Of course, one may feel more in control when one gives. But this control has to give

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<sup>1</sup>Becarro, *A Short Biography of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 12.

way to receiving also. In the receiving end, one may feel certain difficulties whether it is from God or from people. As you give, you determine the how, when and what. You can calculate and plan. When you are in receiving mode, things are messy and more unpredictable; but that also shows us the way to grow towards wholeness.

The Creator has blessed everyone to attain the final objective of life, *moksha* or liberation from pain and misery and the attainment of bliss by means of *bhakti*, *karma*, and *jnana*. The genius of Fr. Chavara was that he could synthesize all these three in his life, like many Indian *rishis*. Thus, he became a model for wholeness during this earthly life itself. It is this model that he wished to have in formation.

We believe that we are created in the image of God and as such there is a divine glow in all of us. It is deeply buried in us. This original goodness we need to uncover. A mask may hide the face completely; but, with conscious effort, it can be removed. Sometimes by the environment and other times by upbringing and by adverse circumstances so much dirt, dust and moss could be formed around the glow and the face may become almost invisible. The original good is there waiting to be unearthed. In the murky depths of the pond of our personality a lotus is waiting to be blossomed. If given proper environment and nurturing, a quiet time of solitude, reflection and space to be warmed up in divine and human love, then the divine spark will flare up. The lotus in the Indian tradition is a beautiful symbol of the core of goodness in every human being. Each of us has a latent capacity to reach and grow up with strength and beauty. The whole point is that there is a potential for transformation in every one, going beyond the genes and environment which we inherit.



### **6.7. Human Formation for Wholeness**

The letters he wrote to the new found religious community of sisters touched on all aspects of their life – physical, mental and spiritual. The letters are vivid portrayal of his vision of life in the new congregation. He emphasized knowledge, devotion and fruitful engagement.<sup>1</sup> He sent them some best available books. To expand their knowledge level, asked them to learn Tamil well and stressed the need for knowledge and devotion. As a *karmayogi*, he acquired the habit of *niskamakarma*, selfless service. He encouraged his subjects to integrate harmoniously prayer and work without losing one for the other. To be whole, one has to embrace the present moment and should be present here fully. We can experience God, because He is the “I Am Who Am.” We find Him neither in the future nor in the past. Formation has meaning only in this context that He is with us, besides us, and inside us. We hold eternity now in our being, though suspended from history. We cannot grow in spiritual life yesterday, and cannot do it tomorrow. The only place where we can offer ourselves, where God can use us is the moment we are in right now. If we let Him take hold of us and we take hold of Him, He can use all our strengths, weaknesses, imperfections and challenges as stepping-stones towards wholeness and holiness. All saints declare this truth unequivocally.

Formation consists in taking definitive steps towards the One who has called us. One may recall the story of Peter walking on the water towards Jesus according to the wish he expressed. Jesus positively responded to his request. Then what happened? Peter started off well; he made a few steps and began to sink. Jesus asked him: “Why did you

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<sup>1</sup>Kochumuttom, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 349.

doubt?" The pertinent question was whether Peter doubted Jesus or himself? It doesn't make a difference! It is the same thing. Everything is possible for God; but in everyday life, one needs a stable psychological self to make definitive steps towards Jesus. Forming effective instruments in the hands of God is the purpose of formation. God, Church and society need whole persons, not weak and vulnerable ones. We cannot expect God to work miracles all the time; rather we see a God who works in history and in the natural unfolding of events. This fact underscores the need of more whole and integrated persons who can withstand the pressures and crushes of the environment.

Chavara gratefully acknowledges that the Congregation was established, nurtured and made to grow by God's gracious acts. The congregation shall bear fruit, therefore, through the personal virtues of its members. "The strength of the monasteries does not consist in the thickness of their walls but in the religious zeal and the virtues of their members."<sup>1</sup> He emphasized that the strength of their virtues really matters, neither the size of the structures nor the number of members. He envisions here authentic virtuous people who can attain wholeness. To Saint Chavara, everything is related to one's holiness. He did not look at holiness apart from everyday life.

In a letter he wrote to the Vicar of Mannanam monastery, Father Kuriakose Porukara, he reminded that the superior of a community is called to be a partner with God in tending his sheep. He continued that the community does not exist for the sake of superior, but he exists for the sake of the community. He must love them as his own children. He must be concerned about meeting their spiritual and bodily

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, IV: *Letters*, 65, 94, 95.

needs. Let not any religious be sad not even for a moment. God is not pleased with the service rendered in sadness.<sup>1</sup> These and similar words appearing in different letters show the concern of Saint Chavara in imparting proper formation to seminarians as well as to those religious who are already full-fledged members of the congregation.

Religious formation as envisioned by Saint Chavara was intended to transform the person holistically. It was not simply a matter of training to fulfil certain apostolic functions, but called for an inner transformation of attitudes, values and patterns of behaviour, tendencies and dispositions. Lack of integration and wholeness leads to disturbances and blocks the zeal and vitality that are needed in the chosen life. The most critical area in formation is the area of personality integration. Personality integration is the blending of our human faculties and gifts into a harmonious whole. It is a harmonization of our physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual gifts. These gifts have to be nurtured to attain their full potential. Psychologist Philomena Agudo says that the capacity to cooperate with grace is dependent upon the individual's personality integration. Integration takes place when both behaviour and attitudes are purely motivated by the love for God and service for His people.

### **6.8. Wholeness and Maturity**

For an authentic and holistic life, *being, having, and doing* are to be fully integrated in right proportion. It is like a triangle where each side supports the others.<sup>2</sup> *Being* is the experience

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<sup>1</sup>Plathottam, *Malankara Sabha Matavintee Oru Veera Santhanam*, 373-374.

<sup>2</sup>Groeschel, *Stumbling Blocks and Stepping-Stones*, 7.

of being totally present to oneself and being at rest within oneself. *Having* is the ability to allow and accept things and people in our lives and developing good relationships. *Doing* is a movement or an activity that lets the creative energy flow from you to others and from others to you. Values, desires, ideals, dreams, temptations, etc., shall be integrated to produce a harmonious personality. Life is a gift from God and what we make out of this life, our wholeness by the expansion consciousness and proper integration, becomes our gift to God. To make oneself into a whole and, thus, make a supreme gift to God we are given certain faculties, namely, intellect, freedom, and will that are unique to humans.

The freedom and will of human beings are finite, not that of the creator. It is not without limitations. Psychology and other social sciences have a role in formation that they can heal and restore these faculties. They can help them to trace out problems buried often in the unconscious and help to deal with them without defences.

Formation period stresses on these faculties and their optimum use in earlier days. These faculties cannot be overlooked in favour of the self-fulfilment theories. By fully exercising these faculties, human beings make their life meaningful and whole. The ability to transcend one's own self and to strive for a higher goal or a phenomenon larger than oneself is a necessity for human beings to attain self realization and wholeness.<sup>1</sup> This self-transcendence is achieved by the faculties of intellect, freedom and will. The power of transcendence is translated in everyday life in the form of detachment. It is this kind of detachment, we encounter in Saint Chavara's life. It was not a simple negation of

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<sup>1</sup>Maniampra, *Spiritual Vision to Wholeness*, 26.

everything that is positive in life. Because of this power of transcendence, saints are able to rise above the tragedies of life and find life again meaningful and whole. A person has both actuality and potentiality. He can be more than what he is at present and, hence, the significance of formation.

### **6.9. Maturity and Time Factor**

We cannot expect the attainment of spiritual maturity and wholeness within weeks or months. Spiritual maturity is manifested in one's ability, "To let go and let God." It also involves the ability to let go of hurtful feelings and wanting to forgive and move on.

Everything on earth has its own time and its own season (Eccles 3:10). There are no shortcuts to growth, integration and maturity. It takes years for us to grow into adulthood. It takes a full season for a fruit to mature and ripen. The same is true for the fruits of the Spirit. The development of Christ-like character cannot be rushed. When we try to ripen a fruit quickly, it loses its natural flavour. God is not worried about how fast we grow as we are. Today, we are obsessed with speed; we want quick fixes, shortcuts and on-the-spot solutions. Superiors and formators want a seminar, a workshop, a retreat to resolve all the problems and release us from all growing pains. Real maturity and integration do not result from a single experience, no matter how powerful or moving. It seems that God prefers to work in incremental steps. Why does it take so long to grow and change? Human beings are slow learners. The history of Israel vividly illustrates this point. How quickly they forgot the lessons instructed to them! We have a lot to unlearn as behaviour psychologists testify to it. Most of our problems and bad habits were not developed overnight. It is unrealistic to expect them to go away immediately even with good

intentions. There is no pill, prayer or counselling that do away with the damage of many years. It requires the hard work of removal and replacement.

Our habits are developed over time. Character and personality are the sum total of our habits and dispositions to think, feel, and act in a particular way. When we practise something over time, we become good at it – repetition of good actions is the mother of character and skill. The character building habits are often called spiritual discipline. Spiritual growth is a tedious task; it needs only one small step at a time, but calls for an ongoing persistent attempt on the part of the one who aims at it. One of life's frustrations is that God's timetable is rarely ours. We are always in a hurry when God isn't. Bible is filled with examples as to how God made a long process to develop character in His people and especially among the leaders. It is said that when God wants to make a mushroom, He does it overnight; when He wants to make a giant oak, He takes a hundred years.

### **6.10. Saint Chavara and Accompaniment**

In any form of life formation is necessary. Each individual engages in a process of formation knowingly or unknowingly on a moment to moment basis. A person achieves goals of life gradually and progressively. To become good priests and religious, for example, one needs to develop a lifestyle and a set of values in a time-bound and goal-oriented manner. In the process of this becoming, accompaniment and guidance are necessary. Formation calls for deeper understanding of the adolescent characteristics, both constructive and destructive. An adept formator would be able to accompany the young formee through this sphere of life without endangering his identity as a called one with all the humanness within him. Saint Chavara founded

modern seminary system for this kind of proper accompaniment. Every accompaniment has to be interactive as well as reciprocal. Reciprocal interaction aims at giving space for the formee in the whole process of formative accompaniment. It is by entering into a reciprocal interaction with the formee that a formator would travel to the inner self of the formee. It alone can give the desired result of formation. Maturity is a day-by-day conquest, and the following of Christ is also gradual and progressive.<sup>1</sup> In this gradual and progressive process, accompaniment plays an essential role. Chavara, being a good accompanier, encouraged a gradual and progressive development of candidates towards wholeness in his seminarians.

Chavara as a rector-malpan was a constant accompanier. Accompaniment of formees by a competent guide is an absolute requirement to facilitate self-transformation. In the Gospels, we see how Jesus accompanied his disciples by tutoring, correcting, and affirming them as and when it was required. Jesus followed them closely in their inward journey and spent time exclusively with them manifesting his interest and concern for them. Chavara could imbibe a deep sense of belongingness as the seminary was more like a familial home. To grow responsibly mature humans need a sense of belongingness and a sense of security. It is more the paternal mind than the legalistic mind that helps people in transformation; Chavara had realized this simple psychology by his experience and wisdom. Saint Chavara saw that there shall be a conducive environment for spiritual growth. Having had no self-fulfilment theories and personality developmental theories in vogue at the time, he paid attention to cultivate virtues like love, compassion,

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<sup>1</sup>Ezhaparambil, *Formation to Discipleship*, 28.

sacrifice, service, simplicity, forgiveness, generosity, etc. He knew that cultivation of such virtues will naturally lead to a holistic development of virtues and moral character that have the power to transcend the lesser values.

### **6.11. Training for Meaningful Priesthood**

Saint Chavara, a man of God, out of love for his Church and society, pioneered new movements with courage and insights and, thus, could effect far-reaching changes in his time. The positive and affirmative action he took is still yielding results touching generations after him. He was a major force in liberating the narrow-bound cultic priesthood and its training to a more inclusive one by founding seminaries and monasteries for a new priesthood in the changing society. He wanted to elevate Christianity from its cultural and institutional constraints so that it may embrace a universal outlook.<sup>1</sup> As an ordained priest of the Catholic Church, he was carrying the eternity in his soul and was concerned about the spiritual wellbeing of the faithful concerned. As a man of holistic vision, he could not bind himself in the narrow confines of the inherited understanding of human persons. Being also concerned with the 'here and now' of the people entrusted to his care, he felt the need of a new generation of priests for which he committed himself by opening new seminaries. He wanted to impart a holistic formation without losing the spiritual essence. Thus, the style and the content of the seminaries he conducted naturally reflected his holistic vision. He offered a new sense of direction to Church and society by founding modern seminaries of priestly formation.

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<sup>1</sup>Chattergie, "Foreword" to *The Life and Legacy of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, iii.



Finally, he turned his attention to the restoration and updating of the liturgical calendar and rubrics. Chavara prepared it and got it printed in 1868 with the Syriac title *Thukasa*, which means the Order of the Mass.<sup>1</sup> Thus, he was instrumental in preserving and perpetuating the beautiful liturgical seasons of the Chaldean tradition. Needless to say, that these reforms added beauty to the liturgy as well as a sense of grandeur and order to the priestly office and celebrations.

Priesthood was mainly cultic and sacramental in the past centuries. In formation the prophetic and pastoral dimensions were overlooked. Chavara felt the need for a revamping the formation programme for scholastics. He stressed the need for systematic formation in the backdrop of a community. Priests shall be men of wisdom, sanctity and social grace. The seminary he founded at Mannanam became a landmark in the field of formation. He saw that it is not enough to fulfil certain apostolic functions; rather it should involve inner transformation and its exterior expressions in attitudes, values, behaviours and dispositions. Transformation in the inner shall be experienced and manifested in one's whole being.

Formation shares in the work of the Father who, through the Spirit, fashions the inner attitude of the Son in the hearts of young men and women (VC 66). The location, the environment and the lifestyle of the candidates shall reflect the reality of the people around. In Mannanam seminary, he saw that they follow a simple life reflecting the reality of the lives of the people around. The formative spirituality he envisioned was centred on the Gospel way of life reflecting the mind and heart of Christ. Greater emphasis was placed

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<sup>1</sup>Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 268.

on silence, solitude and contemplation in order to promote greater interiorisation. It seems that he was keen about the process of self-transformation through the holistic integration of spiritual, human, pastoral, and intellectual dimensions of priestly and religious life.

As society becomes increasingly complex, also with the arrival of the global market and global village, formation needs a new direction and paradigm shift. What Chavara did we cannot copy nor can't we be simple imitators, for imitation makes us fools. What we need is creative minds, flexibility and courage for new shifts and focus, in the absence of which seminaries and formation houses may become inadequate and outdated to produce good priests and religious who would be faithful as well as effective in the contemporary world.



## Chapter 7

# SPIRITUAL QUEST AND PRAYER CULTURE

Psycho-spirituality and psycho-theology embrace all that are religious and spiritual, such as religious symbols, prayer, metaphors, wisdom, sacraments and other appropriate tools that are sensitive to one's spiritual journey. Holistic religious disciplines invite the faithful to approach lives with a sense of appreciation and mystery for their own humanity.

Jesus said: "I have come so that you may have life and have it to the full" (Jn 10:10). The reason Christ came into this earth is that they be filled with life. Religious call is an invitation to celebrate life. It is a call to the fullness of life in Christ; it is becoming like Christ. To help us in this process, we have to put on the mind, heart and attitude of Christ. For a Christian, life is a venture in disciplined living towards transcendence. Life is a quest for happiness in union with God. In doing so, life becomes a witness to God's gracious presence and fulfilment in Jesus Christ. For the mystic, the goal is to be a spiritually transformed human being, a vessel of holiness. The method for acquiring abundant life includes giving of oneself through spiritual readiness, self-discipline, and concern for others.

### **7.1. Spiritual Dimension of Human Nature**

How many parts a person has is a wrong question to ask. We can feel the awkwardness of such a question by the very way it sounds. There are apparent polarities and paradoxes in human personality. These polarities and paradoxes

become the source of creative tension to continue our struggle for a larger self and greater wholeness. Humans are spirit incarnated in body with the ability for transcendence and meaning beyond here and now. The struggle to integrate the human and the divine is characteristic of human existence that makes it what it is. George Ladd opines that such terms as body, mind and spirit are not different separable faculties of humans but different ways of seeing them.<sup>1</sup> Psycho-spirituality refers to the fact that though apparently dual phenomena, mind and spirit are indivisible.

The basic assumptions of a holistic spirituality are: (1) our essential nature is divine or spiritual; (2) we have valid urges for spiritual seeking; (3) consequently, spiritual seeking is healthy and essential for human fulfilment.

The essential nature of human personality is spiritual. This is very well brought out by Saint Augustine's prayer: "Our souls are restless until it finds rest in thee, O, Lord. For, thou hast made us for thyself." We are unfinished and incomplete until we establish an enduring communion with the Supreme Self for which our inner selves are longing. We are having spiritual thirsts and quests. When we are thirsty we can take any drinks ranging from soft drinks to alcoholic drinks. Temporarily, it may satisfy us, because they are liquids, but it is pure water that would serve the needs of the body and would make us healthy. Our fundamental spiritual yearnings can be quenched temporarily by developing false selves and needs. Holistic spirituality is the route to trace the genesis of our false selves and identities in order to leave it for larger self and new identity in Christ. Human personality needs love, affection, approval, and nurture. Without drawing these basic sustaining elements,

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<sup>1</sup>Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 457.

the self will starve and the emotional effects will be devastating for the total person. Holistic spirituality addresses the basic problems of a needy, rejected and idealized self. Addressing the basic psychological issues can facilitate self-acceptance, identity, positive self-image and self-esteem that help one to find one's true identity in Jesus. Chavara was fortunate to have a loving and caring family and parents grounded in faith. He spoke eloquently in *Atmanuthapam* on the superb qualities of his mother:

A Mother to feed me while a feeble babe  
To feed me from pain and sorrow and tend me soft  
To pour that tender love you filled her with  
That nectar to my tiny blissful heart.

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.<sup>1</sup>

It is through the earliest experiences with their mothers or any other person significant in their lives that the infants learn about the trustworthiness of others and the safety of the world. Given the good enough bases of trustworthy love and nurture, young Kuriakose moved toward an understanding that, despite inevitable frustrations and hurt, the world is not hostile. As we see, his initial attachment reinforced a sense of security essential for his holistic growth; therefore, subsequent attachments in his later life were also robust.

The spiritual is not any more one part of the person or an independent part of the personality. Spiritual is perceived to be the essence of the human person and, as such, it is related

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, II: *Atmanuthapam*, 1:44-51.

to the psychological self and psychological wellbeing. As spirituality is understood more and more in terms of wholeness, self-realization, vibrant living, and maturity, it seems that psychology and such social sciences could be a handmaid of spirituality and spiritual formation.

The purpose of all theology is to understand human being in relation to God. Theology is not for theology's sake or God's sake. Theology is for humans to complete themselves and to help them in their self-realization according to God's plan. It is the fulfilment of the human personality which is whole by its essential nature. Our true human nature is revealed to us in Jesus Christ. How He realized his divine and human self is the model for all disciples. Chavara adopted this Jesus who realized the divine/human selves as his model of self-realization and wholeness.

## **7.2. Vocational Discernment and Growth**

Saint Chavara had discerned his vocation and its preciousness in the early years of his life. We have glimpses of his rich theological and spiritual understanding regarding the preciousness of life and the gift of faith. He is full of praise and gratitude for the God almighty which he expresses at the outset of *Atmanuthapam*:

Perfect one, it was your holy will  
 Impeccable, that let me born on earth  
 A human being me. Impoverished you raised  
 To the highest skies Your Abode.<sup>1</sup>

He entered the seminary quite early, when he was thirteen. He had received invitation to join even before that from Malpan Palackal who saw in young Kuriakose bright

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, II: *Atmanuthapam*, 1:13-16.

prospects of becoming a good priest and made preparatory arrangements for an orientation by permitting him to stay in young Chavara's own parish rectory. He joyfully and gratefully recalls his vocational discernment and sings:

When I passed ten years of age  
Oh God in your great mercy, you called me  
Of this I am fully convinced  
Had you not called me  
By no means would I have treaded this path.<sup>1</sup>

Chavara could listen to the footsteps of the Lord who accompany him in his soul. He, therefore, began to see his projects as God's projects. Gratefully and with a sense of unworthiness he recalls how he was wonderfully cared, taught and trained in a good path by the special love of God that accompanied him always.<sup>2</sup> The setbacks he experienced did not make him anxious. He continually experienced God as a loving friend accompanying him. Thus, he reminisces this experience with gratitude:

How have you arrived so far?  
Who made you leave the family?  
How come you were ordained a priest?  
How did you join the monastery?  
Where did the religious congregation come from?  
Who appointed you as prior?  
How have you reached here?  
Are you worthy of anything of these?  
"Not at all, to be sure."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, II: *Atmanuthapam*, 1:113-116.

<sup>2</sup>CWC, II: *Atmanuthapam*, 1:130-140.

<sup>3</sup>CWC, III: *Colloquies*, 1.



Chavara deemed his vocation as gift with an invitation to self-transcendence. There is a limit to what we can do to bring about changes but there is no limit to what God can do. A divine touch can transform the person. Prayer touches and transforms the depth of a human person. At a higher state it brings about a profound silence and simple awareness which resides in the depth of one's heart. Prayer takes us to the deepest layers of our being. Human life begins with the breath of God. The inner content of this breath is consciousness. Prayer is the expansion of this consciousness. Human beings are called to participate in the divine consciousness, and to the level they participate they rise above themselves in their orientation to the Divine.<sup>1</sup> This is transcendence. Today's grace builds upon yesterday's, and tomorrow's grace will build upon today's.

God confers extraordinary graces to accomplish in moments the growth of a whole lifetime. The sudden transformations of Saint Mary Magdalene, Saint Paul, Saint Augustine, Saint Francis of Assisi and Saint Ignatius of Loyola and the like are clear examples of God conferring abundant grace that transforms humans. He gives abundant grace to each one, but for most of us it is by a long and gradual process through which we grow in the goodness. The practice of piety in religious houses needs to be conducive to give them a deeper experience of God. The divine touch will, then, transform them and help them to grow in transcendence.

Abraham Maslow posited a hierarchy of human needs through which, according to him, every human being goes through as they grow towards perfection. In Maslow's famous hierarchy of needs, the top of the need triangle was

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<sup>1</sup>Vineeth, *Prayer and Power*, 92.

occupied by self-actualization. But as he himself acknowledged later on, self-transformation, which goes beyond the personal, is the next step in human evolution. The shift, then, is from actualizing all of one's skills, abilities and capacities toward exploring and dissecting the self that is doing the actualizing. The stages of this hierarchy from the bottom to the top are physiological needs, safety needs, social needs, esteem needs, self-actualization needs, and self-transcendence. This is a ladder which leads to growth. The needs in the lower rungs are to be met before going ahead. It is only when the lower needs are satisfied one is motivated by needs that rank higher in the hierarchy. Maslow called the lower needs "deficit or deficiency needs" and the higher needs "growth or being needs."<sup>1</sup>

Frankl speaks of experiential, creative, and attitudinal values which are merely surface manifestations of something much more fundamental. With his religious bend he calls it the supra-meaning or transcendence. Supra-meaning is the idea that there is, in fact, ultimate meaning in life, which is not dependent on others, on our projects, or even on our dignity. This is a reference to God, and the spiritual meaning of life derives from it. At its deepest level, human self is self-transcendent. Our preoccupation with psychological needs and physical needs prevents us from self-transcendence. It is out of fear arising from the ignorance of my true nature that I tend to think that I will be lost completely without it and I cannot stand upto it if I miss them. Oftentimes, unresolved developmental issues and emotional blocks prevent people from achieving the awareness of a spiritual realm and its beatitudes. Awareness is not an activity of the intellect alone; it is equally an

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<sup>1</sup>Schultz and Schultz, *Theories of Personality*, 371.

activity of the heart too. As we become more and more mindful of the contradictions, struggles, inner tensions, and paradoxes of life, we slowly tend to admit that the two realities can coexist and can be equally true. This kind of awareness slowly leads discovering the deepest nature of human condition.<sup>1</sup> Most psychologies and counselling interventions stop with self-fulfilment, whereas holistic spirituality is concerned with self-transcendence through love, compassion, interrelatedness and full awareness. Chavara stands before us as a shining example of this kind of transpersonal self and transcendence.

### **7.3. Banking on Divine Providence**

Providence derives from the basic faith and conviction that God is always at work, eventually, bringing out the best. Chavara's life and ministries are a vivid portrayal of this fundamental truth of spiritual life. The only capital at his disposal was very often his total trust in the divine providence. If we believe that God has a definite plan for each one of us and is working it out, we can easily unite our will to that of God and accept his plan. "For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope" (Jer 29:11). If God has such a definite plan about you, how dare you ask to shelve those plans in favour of your little plans! Most of us still have to arrive at this point to see that God has a plan and purpose for us. Humans are inclined to think that God is there to grant every wish, dream, and desire. In that case He would not be an intelligent God. Scripture reminds us: "Before I formed you in your mother's

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<sup>1</sup>Drago, *Holistic Guidance*, 30.

womb, I knew you" (Jer 1:5). God's plan for each one is the result of his thorough knowledge and love for each one.

In Chavara's life we come across many occasions when he had no money to give wages to workers. He had neither financial resources nor technical skills to start a publishing house; he had no cash in his hand to put up a decent convent. Often times, miracles happened in the last minute after his total surrender to the providence that has been sustaining him. Faith in the bountiful providence of God gave him the courage to move along with empty hands. In fact, God needs an empty hand to be filled up. God is constantly prodding us to cooperate with his intelligent plan for us. He tells us: "Give up your plan. I have better plans; trust me and believe in me." What the Lord is accomplishing in our lives is best illustrated in the image of the potter and the clay pot (Jer 18:4). God asked the prophet Jeremiah to go down to the potter's house and watch the pot making. If you have had an occasion to watch a potter making a clay pot, you will understand what God does. Sometimes, because of a flaw in the design or having a crack or an unsmooth spot, the potter smashes down the clay on the wheel to make it better. The potter's purpose is not to destroy the pot; instead his purpose is to make the best functional and beautiful pot. Unlike Chavara, the problem with human is that our ego does not want to be the clay in the process of God's plans. When the newly found congregation was high-handedly affiliated to the Carmelite order and named it as the Third Order of Discalced Carmelites, sadness fell on the lives of all the members and the one who championed the Order. Though it was against the wish of Chavara and members of the congregation, who preferred a more pastorally involved active life, the rules of the pure contemplative order put them into great

difficulties. Nevertheless, he accepted it in faith, negotiated for changes in certain rules and, then, trusting in the providence of God, exhorted the members to accept everything in faith. He reminded his confreres that all these occurred in God's great providence so that the congregation may have a special protection of the Blessed Mother. He believed that God's providence will finally take them to the safer harbour, where they will be properly anchored. History proved that his faith in the providence was not in vain.

Divine providence is the natural follow up of God's merciful love. God, who loves humans, makes and designs this in such a way that those who love God will be able to experience God's providential involvement in different phases of life. God is always active and sustains everything he created in love according to the fulfilment of His designs. Therefore, even in the apparent failures, when one looks deeper, one is able to see God's hands. This we often refer as providence. It is a form of conviction of a devotee that, God being a loving father, all things will work out for good. Chavara had this deep conviction. Chavara reflected on the providence of God that brought him into existence and gave him a noble birth and saved him from many possible dangers like epidemic.<sup>1</sup> In the beginning of his *Dhyana-sallapangsal* he clearly mentions God's designs and acts which are not based on his merits or virtues. It seems that, in his theology, the best way to experience God's omnipotence coupled with benevolent love for His children is to experience one's powerlessness as a created being. This understanding helped him to have a strong faith in the providence of God.

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, II: *Atmanuthapam*, 36ff.

When I trust in Gods providence “I can do all things in him who strengthen me” (Phil 4: 3). It is a certainty that God never abandons me. It encourages reliance on the strength of God. Trusting in the providence of God does not spare humans or any saints from the struggles of life or hard times; but they know that the “Lord’s hand is not shortened” (Is 59:1). The faith that the love of God does not end, that it awaits us in heaven gives true energy and enthusiasm at every turn of life. Chavara who was seeing and experiencing God as *Ente appan* was eagerly waiting to be embraced in heaven with this love.

#### **7.4. Obedience and Humility**

“He must grow and I must decrease” (Jn 3:30). Like Saint John the Baptist, Chavara liked to occupy the backseat. He did not look for or ask for any status or honours, though he deserved much more than what was bestowed on him. His name was proposed for consecration to become the bishop of Syro-Malabar Church, which was disposed off later; he took it without being disturbed. He kept his tranquillity all the times. As the ego deflates divinity deflects. To decrease oneself means less and less being occupied with one’s own self. When Christ is more in us, the less ‘I’ count. The mark of a true religious is total surrender of one’s will and being obedient, and in doing so will attain perfection continually, he wrote.<sup>1</sup>

Obedience and humility constitute the key to blessing; Saint Chavara learned it just like Peter. Peter and the band of other fishermen with him toiled all night but were of no avail. Of course, they tried right and left and no spot was spared in their desperate attempt to have a good catch.

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, IV: *Letters: Testaments*, 70.

Then, they receive a command to cast again in all those tried out spots again. The dictate had no reason apparently; Peter did not dissect the reasons. By setting aside one's own reasoning, obedience brought about unexpected results. This spiritual wisdom was dawned on Chavara from the early years of his life; hence, we see the kind of obedience he manifested in life, even when the Vicar Apostolic moved contrary to his cherished desires. In the nineteenth century Church life, blind obedience of the authority was the rule of life. The Second Vatican Council asked the religious orders to have more participation and decentralization in exercising authority, at the same time reminded that the final word belongs to the superior (VC §43). Smart goals, strategic planning, and other proactive measures may give rise to greater voluntary participation and effective management in religious administration.<sup>1</sup> Chavara was not totally unaware of this kind of corporate wisdom. As a man who worked in the midst of people, empowering them, he exercised such wisdom while being obedient to his authorities.

In the lives of most saints, we come across a great sense of unworthiness. This is coming from realizing the loftiness and dignity of one's calling and the potential corruptness of the nature and the society. Thus, Cardinal Newman wrote: I could not bear the scrutiny of an angel; how then can I see Thee and Live? I should be seared as grass, should I be exposed to the glow of Thy countenance." Chavara was cautious to exercise authority vested with him as the Prior and Vicar General. He never carried the trappings and pomp of his office. He never wanted to fall in the traps

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<sup>1</sup>Mampra, *Chavara Retreat*, 55.

related to authority. Perhaps, he knew the meaning of what Shakespeare wrote:

Man, proud man  
Dressed in a little brief authority,  
Most ignorant of what he's most assured  
His glossy essence, like an angry ape,  
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven  
As make the angels weep.

Chavara knew that the Church is always judged by her priests and bishops more than anything else. His love for the Church did not permit him to taint it by any manner, especially by his craving for worldly things and power. Humility is always the condition of finding divinity. When Christ was born wisemen had to stoop into the cave to see the Baby whose fingertip fashioned the world and planets. In Chavara's time, perhaps, no one could beat him in humility.

Humility is the basis of all virtues. Humility resides in accepting the truth about oneself. God being the sovereign truth, to be humble is to walk in truth.<sup>1</sup> The highest truth about man is discovered above all in the divine light; whatever good we have is coming from God. Chavara as a humble person experienced intimately the truth of the words of Saint Paul: "What have you that you do not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift (1 Cor 4:7). Humility leads one to centre life on others and not oneself. The humble person does not think that he deserves anything special for doing well: he likes to hear the words of the Lord: "When you have done all what is commanded you, say, we are unworthy servants, we have only done what was our duty" (Lk 17:10). Humility

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<sup>1</sup>Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle*, 10.



grows when one has true knowledge of oneself, accepts opportunities to surrender one's own judgment in order to obey and follow what is prescribed. Humility does not take oneself too seriously and is convinced that without God no one can take a single step.<sup>1</sup> Saint Teresa reminds nothing but humility is of any use. We see the depth of Chavara's humility in the obedience he displayed at every phase of his life. There were times he had to bear with punishing actions. He graciously accepted all such situations as paternal corrections. Surrendering one's will to conform to God's will made known through the superiors was very much part of the consecrated and priestly life. He warned the congregation, in his circular, that the consecrated community shall not be reduced to the level of self-willed stewards or mere business administrators.

It is by deep personal encounter with the Lord that we are able to heal our wounds and restore us in Christ again. One's theological knowledge, spiritual understandings or social actions alone cannot make one true disciple of Christ. True love and devotion, integral and holistic in nature, do not deform any natural gifts or deprive one of any good from our nature; it just renews and completes it. When Moses saw the burning bush in the desert, it did not feed on any fuel; the flame, however, continued to exist without destroying the wood. Likewise, grace completes the nature without destroying it.

### **7.5. Apostle of Blessed Sacrament**

Devotion to the Eucharistic Lord manifests the respect one has for God and the mystery that God is. It is said about Moses that God knew him face to face and spoke to him

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<sup>1</sup>Lorda, *Virtues of Holiness*, 37.

directly. Moses was able to speak to God like a friend (Ex 33:11). As children of God, all children need to develop a filial relationship to the heavenly father and this is achieved through prayer. Chavara knew that relationship does not happen automatically; it needs to be nurtured with care. No intimacy can be developed without spending time with the loved ones and listening to them actively. In psychology, they say of active listening as a prerequisite for developing rapport with the client to effect healing. It is through prayer that Christian life comes to maturity. It is in prayer that we discern God's voice and desires. Prayer is the foundation of spiritual edifice.<sup>1</sup> According to Saint Teresa, anyone who does not pray does not need devil to tempt him. Without this foundation every building will fall.<sup>2</sup> Chavara never failed to devote quality time with the Lord. Though he had many things to attend to, prayer was his first priority. Chavara stressed the need of silence and solitude in religious houses; for, he knew the significance of having a proper environment to engage conversation with an intimate person. As all spiritual masters make it clear, it is not the external silence that matters but the interior silence; the first one disposes the devotee for the second which is more critical. The hustle and bustle of our life and the constant interior monologue that occurs in our mind needs to be halted to advance in prayer.

The dictum of 1960s, "my work is my prayer," sounds great and has a ray of truth in it; but a priest or religious cannot content exclusively with such a position. Many who subscribed to such notions are no longer in their priestly or consecrated life. We see Saint Chavara's involvement in

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<sup>1</sup>Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection*, 83.

<sup>2</sup>Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection*, 4, 5.

everything genuinely human and divine. His social involvement was not mere social work, as it was a ministry founded on prayer life. Chavara was a man of God whose life and ministry breathed forth the Gospel. Chavara had the experience of being loved, affirmed, and forgiven in a real way; without this inner experience achieved through prayer, he would have had very little to offer for his Church and society. "Prayer is an act of faith; it is a simple statement that God is in charge and not us."<sup>1</sup> Chavara having had a prayer culture cultivated in the early part of his life and fed on the Word of God could bring sufficient depth to his ministry and had borne plenty of fruits.

John the Baptist announced to the public: "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29). Its full meaning was not clear to any hearers. The meaning became clearer only at the end of Jesus' public life when he celebrated the paschal meal with his disciples. The Eucharist is the *mysterium fidei* par excellence, the mystery of faith. The tremendous mystery and grandeur of God surround this mystery with strong symbolism.<sup>2</sup> Christian saints could grasp the mystery of God and His unfathomable love in the Eucharistic adoration. Chavara exhibited a special sensitivity to Eucharist and the Lord present in the tabernacle. As he understood this mystery more and more, his life began to revolve around this great mystery and his encounter with it. Perhaps, he sensed a prelude of eternal life in the Eucharist. In the heavenly Jerusalem, there won't be any need for the sun, because the lamb will be at its centre and will illumine everything (Rev 22:5).

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<sup>1</sup>Rosseti, *The Joy of Priesthood*, 46.

<sup>2</sup>Lorda, *The Vitruves of Holiness*, 93.

Spreading devotion to the Blessed Sacrament was one of his apostolates.<sup>1</sup> Chavara's priesthood was devoted to the body of Christ, inseparably tied to the Eucharist. He was reconciling and loving the many parts of the body, the many faces that make up the Church and was shepherding them to make a single whole, which is Christ. He maintained an invaluable devotion to the Blessed Sacrament which he began in his early days and nurtured it later by introducing many reforms such as Order of the Holy Mass, forty hour adoration, Liturgy of the Holy Saturday, etc. Chavara's biographer Valerian qualifies him as the Apostle of the Holy Eucharist.<sup>2</sup> Holy Eucharist was the centre of his spirituality and he drew his spiritual strength from the Eucharist. In fact, as he said, he preferred to remain locked up in the tabernacle with Jesus. Though he had always handful of things to do, never his spiritual life and exercises were disturbed. Leopold Beccaro tells us: "Besides the usual visit to the Blessed Sacrament enjoined by the rule, he used to spend long hours on his knees, immersed in prayer before the Tabernacle."<sup>3</sup> He was often found missing but found later in the presence of Blessed Sacrament. Such instances have not been rare in his life, his biographers observed. Chavara showed great devotion and reverence to the Blessed Sacrament. It made him strong in struggles and tough times. Chavara took to his heart the words of Fr. Faber, another Apostle of the Blessed Sacrament: "The world would be walking along the path of goodness if it had known the power of the Blessed Sacrament."

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<sup>1</sup>Moozhoor, *The Star of the East*, 85.

<sup>2</sup>Plathottam, *Biography of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 263.

<sup>3</sup>Beccaro, *A Biography of a Venerable Person*, 15.

Eucharist was really a great source of nourishment for him. It was his life and breath:

Thou art my love and my fortune

How can I live except in and by you?

You are my breath, my food and drink

Where else is my consolation, if not in you?<sup>1</sup>

We may wonder how he could achieve so much in a short lifetime. In fact, he had a power house, namely, devotion to the Eucharistic Lord; it is from the Eucharist that he drew his strength and withstood the tough times.

### **7.6. Trinitarian Family and Holy Family**

Chavara's faith outlook gave him a sense of power and protection along with needed resilience in every situation; for, he knew that he was always welcome to his *Abba*, his own father, who has an infinite supply of love and concern. In every situation, therefore, he could push on.

He registered himself spiritually in the triune family of God and, consequently, he could feel greater family experience in the Holy Family. He always maintained a devotion to the Holy Family and nurtured it consciously. The need to belong to a family is part of human nature, for we are all born in families, in the loving company of people. Only in the loving fellowship of families humans can grow and mature. Chavara could feel and experience his belongingness to the Trinitarian Family of God. The love, mutual belongingness and presence to each other, even when being away from home, are the characteristics of any good family. As the persons in the Trinity are present to each other always and in perfect unity of thought and will, so shall be humans on earth. This perfect unity and oneness

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, II: *Atmanuthapam*, 2:143.

of will as in the Triune God is not easily happening in humans; hence, we need an earthly model. This model is given through the Holy Family. Perhaps this Holy Family model helped him to integrate the *jnana-bhakti-karma marga* in life and helped to be a whole person.

After the Holy Trinity and Holy Family models, he wanted every one of his children to belong to a true family once they have grown out in their natural family. Wherever humans are, this need to belong to a family is not outgrown. Trinity and Holy Family are archetypes and prototypes of families on earth.<sup>1</sup> In his desire to belong to a spiritual family and the earnest desire to grow in the divine family, he attached to his name 'Holy Family'. Thus, he addressed himself as *Kuriakose demin thehoma kandisha*, meaning Kuriakose of Holy Family. In his last words, he recalled that by being in the Holy Family, he could live a holy life and could keep the grace for a holy life. It is the love, faith and fellowship and the desire to do the will of God that is reflected in the members of the Holy Family, which Chavara sensed as imperative everywhere especially in religious life. He always emphasized mutual love, concern and reciprocity in the letters he wrote whether addressed to the religious or lay persons.<sup>2</sup>

Aristotle addressed God as the unmoved mover, the immutable; Shankara called the One *Nirguna Brahmn* in his Advaita Vedanta. In the Bible, however, we have a different figure, the One who is moved by the sufferings and plight of his people. He walks with them and talks with them sharing their lot. It is as if he speaks their language and experiences their emotions. God is 'Yahweh' and its proper translation,

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<sup>1</sup>Kalluveetil, *Chavara Dhyana Samgraham*, 22.

<sup>2</sup>CWC, IV: *Letters*, 71, 100.

as scripture scholar Paul Kalluveettil puts it, means, “I am one who becomes.” He is one who becomes like humans. In the incarnation, this claim of Yahweh was more fully realized. He became our Emmanuel God (Mt 1:23), being with us, being born in a family.

Jesus was obedient to his parents and lived long years in the family until the discernment for public life occurred; but all the while he maintained a consciousness that he is the beloved son of the Father. Saint Joseph was a man lived for his family, caring and protecting them, accepting God’s designs and forgoing his personal desires. Saint Chavara maintained a special devotion to this holy soul. Mary with great gratitude was always glorifying God as in her *Magnificat*, contemplating the great mysteries unfolding before her. Saint Chavara being inculcated himself in this Holy Family, and in constant communion with them, could see his congregation and Church as his family.

### **7.7. Prayer Culture**

Kochumuttom observes that Chavara was a proud heir of prayer culture, in which prayer is considered a supreme value. His mother sowed the seed of prayer in his mind at an early age.<sup>1</sup> The role of the mother in developing his prayer culture finds beautiful expression in his work *Atmanuthapam* at its very outset. We read:

You gave me a mother to bring me up without any mishap in life as she taught me up suckling me with the love you gave her; she guided me to say my little prayers as well. And as I grew up she taught me more and more assuredly and made me learn all my prayers. Sitting at her feet I slowly began to know God. Even when she

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<sup>1</sup>Kochumuttom, “Mystic and Mystical Theology,” 215.

woke up to pray at midnight and prayed on her knees I too was beside her on my knees and learned from her lips the name of Jesus and prayers to the mother of God.<sup>1</sup> The seeds implanted by mother were nurtured later by very devoted and dedicated Malpan Palackal and Malpan Porukara who were his mentors and later became his colleagues in the founding of the congregation. Thomas Porukara and Thomas Palackal were ascetic people with great spiritual discipline and fervent love for the Church. It is amazing to see how they inspired and enriched each other. Chavara could easily imbibe the spiritual culture of these two holy men by constantly associating with them.

Regarding prayer numerous volumes have been written in every decade, in every religious tradition. Prayer is simple, yet a complex phenomenon. This is why prayer has numerous definitions. We don't enter here the niceties of those different forms of prayer and the merits here. In simple terms, prayer is the human way of relating to the creator. It tells us who we are. Prayer may be a conscious activity, but it also may flow from the depth of one's unconscious. Because prayer has its roots in the unconscious, we can never fully grasp its nature.<sup>2</sup> Probably, this is why there have been so many forms of prayer and definitions. Prayer is offered in words, sighs, gestures, or in silence. In the highest level of prayer – mystical – it bypasses our waking awareness.

Our prayers are shaped, formed and expressed by our worldview. As it is an inner activity that has its roots in the very being level, irrespective of its expressions and forms, the experience is radically the same. Thus, in the Western

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, II: *Atmanuthapam*, 2-3; CSK, II: 2-3.

<sup>2</sup>Dossy, *Healing Words*, 27.



tradition, we send prayers up to God whereas in the East we focus inwardly to the deepest part of one's being.

As we all know, prayer takes many forms. It depends on the tradition in which one has been brought up and the cultural and religious milieu in which one is groomed. Chavara being brought up both in the Eastern Catholic tradition as well as in the Western Carmelite spiritual tradition and spiritual practices, we witness these traits being made integral in him. Prayer tends to follow the instructions laid down by the great religious traditions. People may pray to a personal God or intermediaries and resort to various devotional practices. Often the prayer experience is depending on the intention, intensity and its consistency. The quest to be with the Transcendent and the efforts in this direction with discipline matter more than what kind of practices one follows. People from simple and naive cultural milieu may practise whatever is culturally handed down to them. The simple devotional practices in the Catholic Church of the nineteenth century were determining elements in Chavara's spiritual life and prayer. It reveals an indisputable fact that one does not need any complex prayer rituals or prayer practices to grow in spiritual life.

Theresa of Lisieux's prayer life was very simple. What mattered to her was the intention to love wholeheartedly in whatever one does. Chavara knew this simple technique and practised it throughout his life. Often people tend to ask questions like this: How should I pray? Is there a best method to pray? Many prayer experiments conducted in the recent decades vouch that prayer is effective and

transformative irrespective of particular methods.<sup>1</sup> People adopt and adapt particular prayer methods depending on their personality traits. Teresa of Avila deems essential the following three virtues in developing a life of prayer: love of neighbour, detachment of heart from worldly things, and humility. As we have noticed it, Chavara had acquired these attributes very naturally that he did not have many hurdles in his prayer life. He maintained simplicity in life which added much more force to his spiritual life. In his room he had kept only minimum things and in food habits he was content with just essential things that ordinary poor people had. When the Archbishop came to his room in Koonammavu, there was only one chair. Honouring that simplicity, Archbishop made Chavara sit on it and himself was seated on a box.

“My soul thirsts for the Lord as deer longs for water” (Ps 42:1). In everything Chavara sought for God and above all he sought God. His meditations and prayers were filled with the cries of a soul that longed for God and wanted to walk with the Lord or in his company. Higerere was his love for the Lord, greater was his ability to suffer for the cause of his beloved Lord. Because of experiencing this kind of intimate love while suffering, he showed extraordinary patience and faith.

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<sup>1</sup>For a summary of religious words and phrases used in various western traditions which Herbert Benson found effective, refer *Beyond the Relaxation Response*, New York: Time Books, 1984; see also Aldus Huxley, *Ritual, Symbol, Sacrament and Spiritual Exercises: The Perennial Philosophy*, New York: Harper & Row 1944.

### **7.8. Best Prayer**

Some studies show that a “Thy will be done approach” in prayer is the best approach. Numerous studies show that prayer is effective when people pray for specific outcomes as well as non-specific outcome. “Thy will be done approach” was seen quantitatively more powerful than being oriented to specific results.<sup>1</sup> In the life of Saint Chavara, he had adopted this best form of prayer, that is, accepting God’s design by declaring “Thy will be done in all and in everything.” In anxious and conflicting situations he employed this prayer. It is noted that this kind of prayer can bring a feeling of empathy, care and compassion for oneself or others, and can reduce unnecessary anxiety and related problems. In the midst of so many pressing issues Chavara could maintain his serenity, probably on account of this kind of prayerfulness.

In the midst of his struggles and afflictions of bearing so many responsibilities, he maintained his Christ-centeredness and drew strength and vitality by maintaining a living relationship with Jesus. Saint Chavara’s spirituality and theology can be summarized in the words of the Psalmist, “The Lord is my portion” (Ps 119:57). When he was ordained in 1829, he chose these words of the psalmist as his motto. Like the alchemist, he was bent on changing the very life and environment he was found with. He let himself a pliable instrument in the hands of God. In fact, God did use this instrument to the utmost. He was like a pen in God’s hand; God could write his dreams with it. With love and noble intention to serve God and people one can change even the base metals into gold.

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<sup>1</sup>Dossy, *Healing Words*, 112.

### **7.9. Trust, Foundation of Prayer Culture**

Most people in their spiritual life remain in petitionary prayers and some may move on to meditative prayers. Only a few move further and reach the stage of contemplative life as the Carmelite mystics like Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Edith Stein, and Kuriakose Elias Chavara. In contemplative prayer, one becomes like a child peacefully nursing at its mother's breast. We can be still and do nothing but rest in God with the awareness that His closeness is all that suffices. Contemplatives have a natural awareness that nothing is based on their merit but on God's infinite goodness. Contemplatives find God and God's goodness out there as well as in their own depth. Loved and trusted experiences of early years make one easily disposed to a contemplative stance. Suspicion and mistrust in oneself and others may create roadblocks towards moving to the contemplative prayer. Spiritual traditions that emphasize God's lovability and one's own lovability help in our prayer life. The early Christians sensed the connection between faith and trust by using the same Greek word *Pistuo* for 'faith' in God as for 'trust' in a parent.<sup>1</sup>

Saint Chavara's trust began in the family and it grew up as he was growing into adulthood. With its power he touched the heaven and with its power he transformed the society spiritually and culturally. "Blessed are those who trust in the Lord. They are like trees planted along a riverbank, with roots that reach deep into the water. Such trees are not bothered by heat or worried by long months of drought. Their leaves stay green, and they go right on producing delicious fruits" (Jer 17:7-8). Actualizing the prophet's words, Chavara still stands tall in his

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<sup>1</sup>Linn, *et al.*, *Healing the Eight Stages of Life*, 45.

contemplative stature like an evergreen tree with abundant and delicious fruits.

### **7.10. *Abba* Theology of Experience**

Despite his heavy schedule Chavara could find time to spend hours in the presence of the Lord. Many in his time have attested to his undivided and total dedication to the spiritual exercises. He had enjoyed long colloquies with the Lord as is evident from his works. For him, meditation is a conversation between friends: "Two friends, even if they do not know each other's language, can communicate between than two individuals who are not friends though they may speak and understand each other's language. Even sitting in silence very close to your friends is a matter of satisfaction."<sup>1</sup>

Jesus revealed God as *Abba*, Father. Chavara's theology and spiritual practices emanated from his *Abba* experience. In fact, he addressed God in a colloquial way in his native tongue as *appa*, meaning father. We know that God is God of all. But when we relate to God, we relate in a more personal way and tend to address him as *my God*. Chavara's theological understanding got his God down from the heaven, and he could walk and converse with that him as *Abba*, Father, in a personal and meaningful way. As Jesus is the ultimate revealer of God the Father, by striking close intimacy with him and relating to Jesus in a filial way, Chavara could relate to the Father's love in an intimate manner. It is through his personal relationship with Jesus that he entered into the heart of God. The Jesus consciousness he acquired by long years of ascetic prayer and spiritual practices enabled him to be in the presence of God continually.

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<sup>1</sup>CSK, III: *Dhyana Sallapangal*, 15.

The word *Abba* (*appa*) is used frequently in *Dhyanasallapangal*. It is highly evocative in style, intense enough to transport one to mystical realms. It is a poetry that is even more resplendent than the works of many poets from the Bhakti tradition, says C. Radhakrishnan, a writer, scientist and media person. *Dhyanasallapangal* depicts the mind and heart of one who is identified with God in Jesus. Jesus and God are addressed as *ente appa*, my beloved father, an endearing expression in Malayalam.

Jesus associated the trust towards a loving parent with that of faith in a loving God. Jesus encouraged calling God, *Abba*, an endearing term indicating closeness and tender personal love. It was not meant to reveal God only as a male person as opposed to a female person. It was in contrast to the distant patriarchal image of God in those days. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus employed many feminine imageries to describe God. We have three parables of the merciful love and forgiveness of God. In the second one, God is portrayed as a woman householder who searches for a lost coin (Lk 15:8-10). Isaiah speaks of God as a loving mother in labour and the author of the Book of Numbers speaks of God as one who gives birth, breastfeeds and carries the child in her bosom (Is 49:15; Num 11:12). Loving mothers and fathers, male and female, reflect for us the image of God (Gen 1:27). It is true that no human images or metaphors can fully exhaust the nature of God; hence, when we employ images and metaphors they should be used in a more inclusive sense. God is more than any best human father or mother we can imagine.

### **7.11. Anthropomorphism and Spiritual Quest**

As we embark upon the spiritual quest found in the life and works of Saint Chavara, we need to understand the place of

symbols and images in spiritual life. Faith starts with our anthropomorphic images of God. A child may imagine God as his father or mother, although God is unknowable, infinite, omnipotent and omnipresent. The gap to bridge God's transcendence and human finitude is made possible over the religious history of humankind by means of anthropomorphism. In theological terms, anthropomorphism makes God in some way into the form of human being. Mostly, it is a process of assigning human characteristics to God.<sup>1</sup>

Worship involves having an intimate relation and interaction with the Transcendent. In the initial stages, one needs forms and meanings that make sense. We start our spiritual journey with the help of our senses and in a very personal manner. This God conceptualization occurs within the socio-cultural and religious milieu. In several places in the Bible God is described as having physical attributes of man; he is also shown to have human emotions. The use of human terminology to talk about God is necessary when we, in our limitations, wish to express truth about the Deity who by his very nature cannot be described or known. From biblical times to the present, people have felt compelled to explain what God is like, and no expressions other than human terms are able to convey any semblance of meaning to the indescribable. Thus, in the Genesis we see that, just like a human being, God creates, moves, speaks, walks, shuts, descends, hears, scatters, tests, and judges.

Anthropomorphism is a figure of speech that transmits theological truths about God to humankind. Though the absolute is radically beyond any grasp of human categories, we have only human words and images to express the

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<sup>1</sup>Packer, "What Is Anthropomorphism?" [online]

ineffable. Only when taken literally they are misconstrued; taken as metaphorical expressions, they provide by analogy a conceptual framework by which the God who is beyond our comprehension becomes a person whom we can know and love. In the New Testament, the analogy becomes a reality in the mystery of incarnation (Jn 1:1-18). No matter how we try to express God, it is limited. All images of the devotee are essentially limited. Hence, there is a paradox that mystics and devotees face. To say that the Holy One has no form is equal to limiting the Limitless Being.

It is the anthropomorphic image of God that stands out in the whole Bible. Dozens of verses refer as if God has eyes, face, feet and hands. All these are just starting point in one's early quest for God. God is spirit not flesh and blood, but because we are not spirits but being in the world of senses anthropomorphism helps us to understand God's nature and actions. Anthropomorphism can enable us to comprehend the incomprehensible at least partially, knowing the unknowable and fathoming the unfathomable. Chavara, being a poet and mystic theologian, was prolific in employing anthropomorphic language and metaphors whenever he touched upon the divine milieu.

All great spiritual masters may say that all names of God are misleading. All major esoteric wisdom traditions tell us that the absolute cannot be spoken or thought. We simply have no reliable pictures of the Almighty. The great thirteenth century German mystic Meister Eckhart observed that some people perceive something in God and attach thereby some name to him that is not God. God, however, remains ineffable.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Raymond, *Meister Eckhart*, 243.



Mystics begin with images of God on the purification level and as they move further in their spiritual journey by being slowly enabled in the spirit to grasp God with their own very being. But it is only the human words and images that we have in the beginning. One has to be fully engaged with the Divine in order to grasp the unknowable without images. Love starts with the images, words, and actions of the person we love. One may need phone calls, Facebook, Twitter, SMS, and all such gifts to develop a relationship. Once they become spouses, their intimate presence to each other is sufficient; there is no need of all those previous tools, which, later, will have only minimal use. Anthropomorphism helps us to picture a loving God, until we develop spiritual faculties. Since all are not capable of developing spiritual faculties in a time bound manner, we need images of God and the tools that help us in making those images of God meaningful.

The God of Revelation is not described as a superhuman hero, but with radiant, dazzling colour, and brilliant light accompanied by the sounds of might and majesty. In the Revelation, God is imageless. This is consistent with the biblical prescription against depicting God in images. Taken to the extreme, with an imageless God, we will be left without any gospel to proclaim.<sup>1</sup> The God with whom Chavara related and conversed with is a God who presented himself through incarnation in such a way that human beings can experience Him as real through anthropomorphic images.

According to Christian understanding, this God who cannot be contained in any human form, language, or images is contained in the incarnated human flesh, the Son

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<sup>1</sup>"Imageless God" [online].

of God who became Cosmic Christ beyond all images. It is interesting to observe and witness the transcendent journey of the incarnate word of form to the formless cosmic Christ of transcendence.<sup>1</sup> According to Evelyn Underhill, mysticism is “the science or art of the *spiritual life*.” It is the expression of the innate tendency of the human spirit towards complete harmony with the transcendental order.

### **7.12. Spiritual Quest in *Atmanuthapam***

*Atmanuthapam* reveals that the basic disposition a spiritual seeker needs is his desire to purge his soul with the spirit of Jesus. The compunction of his heart spread throughout this work was not contrition for his sins; instead, it was a holy compunction generated out of his deepest longing to possess God totally. Since no one fully possesses God once and for all, while living on this earth, his constant longing for more and more of the divine vision and union prompted him to purge himself continually, so that he would have the blessedness of the pure heart and beatific vision as is expressed in the beatitudes. *Atmanuthapam* portrays his travail to the mystical union. He starts with the creature-creator relationship that puts everything else in the right perspective.<sup>2</sup>

Chavara looks on to his own life from his very birth to death as a gratuitous gift of God which he feels that he has not valued enough and understood properly. He feels his level of gratitude for God’s goodness is inadequate. Only a person with deep gratitude can experience the deepest holy compunction. His compunction is different from the ordinary guilt. Guilt not properly handled may lead one

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<sup>1</sup>“The Imageless Image of God” [online].

<sup>2</sup>CWC, II: *Atmanuthapam*, 1:1-20.

away from God and will even push a person to some level of paralysis. But holy compunction leads one closer to God acknowledging His greatness. The more one acknowledges one's humble state and need of grace, the more one is able to abide in God's love. Holy compunction and gratitude were the two wings with which he soared to spiritual heights. He is full of gratitude for his mother, Mother Mary, and the *Malpans* who taught him spiritual lessons. He deems himself as a prodigal son who needs to return to the father. Though we know that he never lost the grace received in baptism, as he had affirmatively stated at his deathbed, it seems that he has assumed vicariously the guilt of the sinful world along with Jesus and his saints. He blames himself even for the rejection of Mary and Joseph as they searched for a house in Bethlehem:

Even the simple virtue none ever showed her  
 All because of my unworthiness  
 My grave sins or this cities curse...  
 What be your holy will my Lord!  
 Blames on me, I accept it as my lot.<sup>1</sup>

He sees himself as a sinner-child of the world who needs to be present with child Jesus the saviour; thus, he stresses the pre- and post-nativity scenes in his vivid imageries.<sup>2</sup>

His poems reveal the beauty of his own soul. His *Atmanuthapam*, without sensationalism, touches the hearts and ears. His surrendering love and desire to delve deep into the mystery of the divine-human encounter is beautifully portrayed in his poems. No one can express holiness, unless holiness is experienced within the person. Seeing life with the eyes of God, perceiving the great love

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, II: *Atmanuthapam*, 4:25, 26, 35.

<sup>2</sup>Shibu, "Chavara: The Mystical Flower of Mannanam," 96.

that gave existence, and experiencing divine glory, one cannot desist from moist eyes. If one were to look at it with a secular perspective, one may miss the dignity and grandeur awaiting us and, thereby, may miss both the message and the messenger.

Chavara's soul being illumined could find meaning in the cry of Saint Augustine who said: "You were with me but I was not with you; you were within but I was outside." When the soul is illumined by divine light, what Blaise Pascal said comes true: There are only two kinds of men: the righteous who believe themselves sinners, and the rest of sinners who believe themselves righteous. Illumined souls see God, world, people and one's own self totally different and, hence, our everyday language becomes absurd.

God himself did not hide in heaven. He descended from heaven to be involved with His people. In the same fashion, though Chavara wished to be a contemplative in seclusion, his spiritual maturity and discernment finally led him to be amidst the world to impart greater gifts through his active and contemplative life. The apostles who got the experience of transfiguration at Mount Tabor, though initially wanted to remain there, had to come back and share the experience, so that the same and similar experiences shall be the lot of all disciples. Divine experience cannot be contained in the cellar; naturally, it is longing to be shared and disseminated.

Being a sensitive person who treasured the soul and its dignity, he was concerned about any nuances of sin even unawaresly crept in. Thus, he wrote: "Woe to me, I beheld but filth around." He laid open the contents of his inner life through poetry; therefore, now we can have a glimpse of his spirit that permeated, accompanied and guided him in his

entire life.<sup>1</sup> In doing so he became a great communicator of the divine truths and its actions in his life. Chavara entered deeply into his own experiences of faith, watched carefully his own anxieties and inadequacies as he stood before God. It reveals the depth of one's spiritual nakedness as one is encountering the luminous, the *mysterium tremendum*. The greater the light of the divine, the deeper one feels the spiritual dirt in oneself, however insignificant it is. *Atmanuthapam* is a challenge to enter into one's own self, holding the divine light glaringly so that one may be able to purify oneself from all impurities in a sublime manner. Chavara was speaking to the community and the Church from his realized soul rather than from his every day personality. Being the communication of a soul, it would make sense only to those who are attuned to the soul's language. Instead of becoming an external pressure, the *Atmanuthapam* gently prods and challenges one to take the soul life seriously.

A bird sings because it has a song to sing in its very being; it is natural for a bird to sing. Chavara had a message to communicate. One needs to form the message properly in the given cultural milieu. Christians in those times, especially genres of clergy hardly tried poetry as a means of communication. Chavara's writings were born out of his faith and the mission he was entrusted with. The fire in his soul offered a spiritual glow to his message. His personal monologues and meditative notes are indicative of his communication with his own deeper self. As a man who practised contemplative communication in his own deeper self, he was able to communicate it in the best manner to the outside world. He maintained transparency in communi-

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<sup>1</sup>Shibu, "Chavara: The Mystical Flower of Mannanam," 98.

cation. He himself was an open book that everybody could read. All his text had a context; therefore, texts were meaningful and were able to touch the human hearts. He ventured to enter into poetry to express deeper truths of faith life. The quest of a spiritual seeker is aptly expressed in the following anonymous verses:

Nothing is more practical than finding God  
 That is than falling in love, in a quiet, absolute final way.  
 What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination  
 will affect everything;  
 It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning,  
 What will you do with your evenings, how you will  
 spend your weekend.  
 What you read, what you know that will break your heart,  
 And what amazes you with joy and gratitude,  
 Fall in love, stay in love and it will decide everything.

By his poetic works *Atmanuthapam* and *Anastasyayude Raktasakshitoam*, Chavara was not trying to carve a niche in Malayalam literature for himself. Nonetheless, through his poetry, the higher truths that cannot be expressed in the everyday language found beautiful expression.

### 7.13. Spiritual Truths in *The Martyrdom of Anastasia*

The ease and effectiveness of one's language depends on how passionate one is to the truths conveyed. Therefore, *Martyrdom of Anastasia* is a beautiful minor epic exquisite in form and content. In this story, Anastasia, a nun, who wanted to uphold her faith against the wishes of the emperor, suffered martyrdom. This story was replanted imaginatively and creatively to convey his message in the form of an epic poem. In the Christian religious literature stories on martyrdom abound. Stories of martyrs evoked compassion as well as courage to stand up for noble causes.

In writing this poem *Martyrdom of Anastasia*, Chavara must have foreseen the meaning of the words of T. S. Eliot, the philosopher poet of the twentieth century: "Martyrdom is always a design of God, for his love of man, to warn them and lead them to bring them back to his ways. It is never the design of man; for the true martyrs are the instruments of God, who have lost the will in the will of God, and who no longer desire anything for themselves, not even the glory of becoming a martyr." By renouncing his own will in everything and desiring for nothing except the glory of his creator who loves and thus brought him to existence, Chavara was willing to forgo anything and everything; he was holding a mirror onto his own life in the poem. But Chavara did not want to set up him as any kind of model; he picked up a right character from history to encourage, and energize people in faith. He was telling, through the parallels of the situations of the *Martyrdom of Anastasia* and that of his own time's schismatic divide, to be firm in faith and faith practices that they inherited and treasured so far. The message was that it is worth undergoing trials and persecutions if warranted for the sake of one's faith. The reward that awaits those who suffer for Christ sake or for the sake of righteousness is beautifully brought out by Chavara in these verses:

Christ the king her lovely groom,  
 Welcomed her into bliss with him,  
 Jewels of marvel, pearls of price,  
 All heaped on her by Lord divine.  
 He held her in his close embrace;  
 She loved him deep with the warmth sublime.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, II: *Anasthasia's Martyrdom*, 172; 226-230.

The brave declaration of her faith is the most eloquent part of the poem. The martyr Anastasia still speaks to all spiritually-minded people about the dignity of one's faith that one can endure anything of this world for saving one's soul. It is the actualization of the scriptural words the martyr exemplified in her life: "What man gains losing the soul and gaining the whole world" (Mt 16:26). The poem emboldened people to face the dark times of schism and exhorted them in a noble way to keep their faith intact in the face of oppositions. It is the intimacy with God that helped the martyr Anastasia to withstand the trials. It is love for God, the Church, one's own family and children that embolden one to make sacrifices. No love and intimacy means no sacrifice and an unwillingness to endure any hardships. Jesus' love for humanity and his father enabled him for the greatest sacrifice. At a time when women were looked down as weak and, therefore, kept them away from any involvement in religious and secular realms, the heroism of Anastasia and her eloquence before the emperor posed a challenge before the womenfolk who were marginalized. It was a challenge to be heroic and to be in the forefront of faith and, thus, to have the right status in the socio-religious spheres. It also revealed to the womenfolk of Kerala that life dedicated to God and spent in the service of God is worth and valuable. The poem hints that the women of nineteenth century were capable of being the captains of their lives and could charter a new course of action, reigning in their own destiny.

#### **7.14. Dignified Serenity of the Final Stage**

In his *Colloquies*, death is a frequent theme. He lived continually keeping in mind his own death and this was particularly so, in the final stages of his life. He had been



preparing himself for a happy death and the awaiting glory. In the last phase of his life he had lost his sight almost completely. Though all kinds of available treatments were given, nothing could improve the situation. Anyone who was given to extensive reading, writing, and instruction couldn't do much in such a situation. One of his pains was not being able to say canonical prayers; then he listened to the prayers of the community and asked to read spiritual books as he could not read; while his external eyes got weakened, his interior eyes opened up more. It was an invitation to him to be more and more detached and, in turn, to be proportionately attached to the divine sphere.

While training candidates all masters stress the need to close external eyes, so that they are less disturbed. Also, it is taken to be a sign of the awakening of the inner faculties. When external faculties are not exercised, internal faculties rise up with more powers. External world, through its myriad sights, drains our spiritual energy and the focus we need to harness in order to experience the divine. When his loved community and its authorities thought of taking him to Mannanam from Koonammavu in the last days for better treatment and better climatic conditions, he did not express any special interest though he was extremely sick. He said to the authorities: "I don't have any special will; you know whether it is here or there. Whatever is told by authorities I will abide?" He had skin eruptions and inflammations already and was almost impossible to walk in the last phase of life. Added to this was the pain in the eyes. As his external eyesight waned, his interior eyes opened up to see things from a totally different perspective. Some of the traditional methods employed to cure the eyes were so primitive and crude like letting the leech to drain the bad blood near the troubling spot: in this instance near the eye.

Nothing helped; problems only compounded. Some of the Ayurvedic treatments scalded the surrounding skin.<sup>1</sup> By this time he had come to a perfect detachment and serenity in his whole being and did not desire anything more in this earthly life. He began to express his greater longing to leave for the eternal abode and wanted to be in the communion of saints.

In the final stage of his life, there were only minimum attachments to the external world. He attuned himself to the heavenly things and showed little interest in mundane things. He was yearning for that union with God. In mysticism, we transcend reason and lower levels of consciousness and attain direct experience of God. In that illuminating experience, one realizes that the soul is the abode of God.

Spiritual master and colleague Fr. Leopold Beccaro noted that Kuriakose was zealous in the service of God without any consideration for worldly achievements. He was quite orderly and God fearing.<sup>2</sup> Chavara was an ascetic and mystic. Asceticism leads one closer to God. Asceticism is a rigorous way of disciplining and ordering one's mind, body and environment in such a way that it keeps one attuned to God. The desire to be away from the mundane to the sublime spiritual entities is symbolically expressed and internalized through the ascetic practices. Dante's poetic line, "sorrow remarries you to God," speaks of the worth of such practices. Fire and pressure bring one to the noblest part of oneself. The baptism by water and spirits is to be completed by fire and blood. Fire and blood are metaphors of refinement. They have apparently the power to destroy; it

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<sup>1</sup>Panthaplackal, *Athisahanangalum Athyandadangalum*, 136.

<sup>2</sup>Beccaro, *A Biography of the Venerable Person*, 24.

destroys some elements of life and vivifies other dimensions. Here destruction stands for resurrection, orienting towards a new life.

He maintained a mindset of surrender, by which he had become a pliable instrument in the hands of God to do greater things. It was his experience that he did not lose anything through such acts of abandonment. By giving up his mind and will, he attained the mind and will of God, which put him in perfect peace with himself and others. He was blessed with spiritual wisdom to understand that the more one is focused on one's self, the more would be one's conflicts and loss of peace. By attaining the mind and heart of Jesus, he could enjoy peace and tranquillity, the gifts from above. In popular parlance, it is said that the amount of disturbance on a given day is an indicator of one's spiritual maturity. Saint Chavara kept his composure, peace and tranquillity all through his life, being fully anchored in the divine consciousness.

Faith begins with trust. Emotional trust is the foundation of spiritual faith. Belonging to something other than self is foundational to any healthy spirituality. A sense of belonging is absolutely vital to human wellbeing. Spirituality that enhances life involves the whole person: the body, emotions, sexuality, longings, desires, imaginations, the unconscious and much more. The spirituality of Saint Chavara is incarnational as it is enfleshed and lived, not simply believed or practised; being holistic in nature, it was transformative too.

## Chapter 8

# REFORMIST WITH A PASTORAL HEART

In the latter part of the twentieth century, we witnessed a renewed interest in pastoral ministry. Jesus, taking the Old Testament imagery of a shepherd, pointed out the characteristics of a good shepherd (Jn 10:11). Feeding and protecting the flock and leading it to the greener pastures are vital part of pastoral ministry. In the life of the Church, traditionally, a shepherd or pastor was in the role of preaching and teaching. In this changed times, the Body of Christ needs to be built up by a holistic leadership and service that have far ranging implications in the true care of the faithful. Natural or charismatic gifts are given someone to build up the body of Christ. The salvation and grace given through Christ is for the whole person. It shall touch the deeper part of the unconscious as well as the socio-economic context so that people may experience a holistic growth. To effect such a holistic growth pastors are often challenged to make anguished decisions and to develop new path untried so far.

### **8.1. Pastoral Personality of Saint Chavara**

Pastoral ministry calls for a pastoral personality. Not all are endowed equally with this pastoral personality, but all can develop a personality that can enhance the pastoral attitude. Priests by the virtue of their call and religious by virtue of their commitment to the Church and by the profession of evangelical counsels are bound to develop a pastoral personality so that the mission of Jesus is continued in a

more meaningful way in the given socio-cultural context. Though the pastoral ministry is shared by all in the Church, in the priest or pastor, there is an abiding sense of Jesus as the word made flesh who invites all to come and see.<sup>1</sup>

Pastor is anyone who is engaged in the mission of Jesus through a personal commitment. Chavara was a true pastor in this sense. While an action may be good, it is not ministry unless it is an expression and overflow of one's relationship with God. Commitment to ministry and mission warrants the skills to accompany people. Chavara in his pastoral leadership and ministry realized the Jungian position: "Condemnation doesn't liberate, it oppresses, and I am the oppressor of the person I condemn not his friend and fellow traveller."<sup>2</sup> When the schismatic bishop Roccas showed signs of repentance and expressed the readiness to leave Kerala coast, Chavara, a good and merciful pastor, following the advice of the Vicar Apostolic, withdrew the excommunication, heard his confession, and made arrangements for his return. Antony Thondanattu, who at different times joined with the schismatic groups, made immense trouble for Chavara. Later, however, he showed signs of hope and readiness for correction. Chavara, with his pastoral heart, reached out to him and helped him in all respects. Later episodes indicate that the unstable Thondanattu failed Chavara.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, Chavara had that pastoral heart of the Good Shepherd who looked for the one, leaving aside the ninety-nine. He had maintained an

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<sup>1</sup>Bowlby, "Parish: Pastoral Care," 183.

<sup>2</sup>Jung, C. G., *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, New York: Routledge Classics, 2005, 235.

<sup>3</sup>Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 215f.

instinctive sense that condemnations enslave all parties, the giver as well as the recipient.

Pastors or ministers shall first accept their own negatives in the love of Christ that they may know that they are loved at a deeper level; with this knowledge they can listen non-judgmentally. To accept oneself with all wretchedness is the hardest of all human tasks which is almost impossible to fulfil. Owning one's own shadow is the primary task for all pastors before they set out to help others. Chavara could accept and own his slightest blemish and minor shortcomings. Thus, he was not in need of projecting the unwanted part of his personality on to others. A failure to honour and integrate the negative experiences of life will create dissonance and disharmony.

Chavara was a man totally engaged in ministering his people with creative ways. He could find time for prayer, manual works, learning, reading, preaching retreats, religious animation, etc. The core elements of life-giving ministry is compassion and forgiveness and Chavara had a rich depository of these attributes and, hence, a wholesome ministry in his life.

Chavara's pastoral skills and ministries were such that it could lead people to *metanoia* which means changing one's attitude and mind to meet the greater plans of God by adhering to a life demanded by the Gospel. In settling the conflicts among various groups and at the time of Roccas schism we see this power in action. The power to change our understanding is a gift of the Holy Spirit that we are called to cooperate with and appropriate. For example, Johannine Jesus emphasizes the gift aspect by reassuring the disciples that the Spirit will teach them everything and guides them into all truth (Jn 14:25; 16:13). On the other hand, Pauline epistles exhort Christians to cooperate and

appropriate: “Be transformed by the renewing of your minds” (Rom 12:2) and “Be renewed in the spirit of your minds” (Eph 4:23). This tension between change as a gift and change as something we have to work out is illustrated by the Pentecost story in the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles.

Pastor is a caring person and his personality is a central factor in the caring ministry. Psycho-therapeutic literature gives immense significance to the personality of the therapist; similarly, a pastor’s personality is significant in the Church ministries. A high degree of self-awareness and an insight into the dynamics of one’s own personality is essential. Saint Chavara’s pastoral personality is characterized by empathy, authentic respect for others, quality of firmness and an ability to respond with genuineness and openness. Because a pastor’s personality is a helping personality, usually motivated by high self-expectations and an altruistic desire to be helpful and to care for others accompanied by a strong sense of responsibility, they are likely to feel much more guilt.<sup>1</sup> Chavara became an example of integrating the traditional and modern in the ecclesial and social life. He was well aware of the preciousness of the apostolic traditions of the Kerala Church. This did not prevent him from embracing duly from other cultures and rites. He widened his own ministry by adapting many things from Latin rite traditions. He wanted to have greater exposure for the Syro-Malabar community and wanted to

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<sup>1</sup>A growing body of research suggests a distinctive helping personality is commonly found in the caring professions. Helping persons driven by idealistic expectations also deprive themselves of opportunities for pleasure and relaxation. These tendencies can be a source of tension unless properly looked into.

release it from its confinements. At a time when the Syro-Malabar Church was in decline due to the lack of proper leadership, God raised a holy man to ward off its spiritual and theological bankruptcy.

## **8.2. Founding of the Seminary**

An urgent need of the Church in Kerala was the reform of the clergy. Chavara realized that if the priests are renewed in the model of Christ and are properly informed in the spiritual and theological disciplines much of the problems in the Church could be resolved. What Chavara says in his biography of Malpan Palackal is indicative of the deficiencies in the system: The *malpan* category of leaders did not bother about this, because they taught all that they knew only to their nephews or to a few others in whom they were especially interested and taught the other students only how to say the mass and recite the canonical prayers. Chavara and his colleagues felt that much good that could have been occurred here did not happen because of the lack of a consecrated life in this Church and, therefore, wanted to have such a lifestyle in this land of apostolic tradition. Having a sense of history, he knew that the religious orders in the West were centres of holiness, learning, and social transformation. Chavara, a lover of God, Church and people wanted to make up for this deficit. He did not simply wait a redeemer to come; instead he put himself on to the path with a definitive purpose and vision and strenuously worked at the realization of religious life with an indigenous soul. The late Archbishop Kuriakose Kunnacherry once remarked: Chavara is the "Indian Benedict" and Mannanam is the "Indian Monte Casino." It is Saint Benedict who lived in the fifth century who became the instrument in founding monasticism in the West. After the model of the *Rule of Saint*



*Benedict* many monasteries sprang up which all became the real power houses for the spread of the Gospel and many apostolic activities beneficial to humanity. The institutes that Chavara founded became models for many religious institutes of men and women and gave a boost to varied apostolic activities that energized the society and the Church.<sup>1</sup> John Wesley, a protestant reformer, had a motto: "Do all good you can, by all the means you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can as long as you ever can." Do as much good by all means was a guiding principle in Chavara's life. There was a fire in his heart to do something beautiful for God and His people.

The seminaries under his initiative started a new era in theological education among the Saint Thomas Christians.<sup>2</sup> The visionary malpans – Porukkkara, Palackal, and Chavara as a collaborative team – felt the need of recasting seminary formation to revitalize the Church. They realized the importance of grooming new leaders in the Church with an enlightened mind, spiritual and theological outlook. The outcome of any theological education shall be quality training for pastors and teachers for effective ministry. Jesus selected twelve Apostles for one purpose: to be with him and to be sent out (Mk 3:14). If there is any justification for theological education in the New Testament, it is because Jesus trained his disciples in personal discussion, counselling, preaching, dialoguing, and listening to the teacher.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Pathrapankal, "Workshop on Theological Studies on Saint Chavara," 13.

<sup>2</sup>Mundadan, *CMI Legacy of Theological Education*, 45.

<sup>3</sup>Achandy, Inaugural Address: CMI Philosophers and Theologians Forum (CMI-PTF), 2017, Dharmaram College, Bangalore.

The legacy of the holistic visionary founder is translated into action later in the growth and the present stature of Dharmaram College and its constituent units, Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Christ University, Christ Schools, and Christ Special School, etc. The organic growth and realization of different faculties, both secular and sacred, in the same campus speak for itself the legacy bequeathed from the founder. A harmonious synthesis of Eastern, Western and Indian genius is the characteristic of Dharmaram. The present Dharmaram College, the central study house of CMI congregation, is the mother of so many priests who made their indelible impressions in all walks of human life. It has produced hundreds of priests in the Church, who are competent, integrated, and God experienced.

People imitate and follow people. This is the basis of social learning theory. Social learning theory is a theory of learning and social behaviour which proposes that new behaviours can be acquired by observing and imitating others. It claims that people learn through observing, imitating, and modelling. Given the dolls, the children did to it exactly the way the seniors treated it, the researchers observed. Learning theory is what Jesus employed in the teaching of his disciples. Paul instructed the believers to follow his example just as he follows Christ; Peter urged Church leaders to be example to the flock. Saint Chavara taught more by modelling than by verbal teaching. Though verbal teaching is significant, he realized that it is not everything. He himself was an embodiment of all that he taught and preached. Many lament today about the problems of seminary formation in contemporary times. The serious lacuna in the seminary system is a deficit of models who can inspire and teach by their lives.

### **8.3. Media for Christian Formation**

The centrality of the media in today's life in social, political, economic and personal realms is beyond dispute. Media, whether audio or video, print or electronic, are powerful instruments to create networks of relationships and communication. The universality and ever ready presence of media in different forms and shapes radically influenced the people's lifestyle. As a writer, organizer, social reformer and, above all, a spiritual guide, Saint Chavara realized the significance of media and thought ahead of time to utilize it in the best possible ways. He turned his attention to the print media which was the only main mass communication facility of the time. Pope Pious X, in his 1930 encyclical *Divini Illius Magistri*, warned the need for healthy principles in the media. Chavara, with his farsightedness and visionary nature, sensed that the pastoral care and the evangelization won't be complete without utilizing the potential of print media.

During the early centuries of Christianity, Christians relied on oral traditions, parchments and scrolls to communicate the good news. Church was carrying out its evangelizing mission adapted to the changing times. The invention of printing press changed the whole scenario of communication. In Europe, the renaissance was ushered in because of the information revolution. Printing machine popularized new ideals and ideologies that were kept deep in the human minds. Ideas and ideals when transcribed onto paper could easily spread like fire; it can light up or scorch whatever is in its way. Renaissance and modernity were slow to reach India and, particularly Kerala in the southern part, until the eighteenth century, though there were exceptional enterprises here and there. The face to face discourse between faith, beliefs and values became possible

along with political and philosophical ideologies. Though late, modernity was introduced to Kerala by the printing technology. In this endeavour, Saint Chavara's name is to be etched in golden letters. Printing technology and its knowhow didn't advance having a strict monopoly over it by foreign evangelical missionaries and government. It was strictly confined to the purposes of those institutions. It was an exotic technology unavailable to the general public. The technology was expensive and hard to get, for its trade was controlled by the colonial powers. Perhaps they might have sensed the danger of giving away this technology into the people's hands. Because of the political and economic interests of the colonial powers and the missionaries allied with them, it was a herculean task to afford it for indigenous purposes. Nevertheless, Chavara dared to tap this treasure that was hidden or unjustly reserved for a few. He was like the Prometheus of the Greek epic who stole the fire for humanity's sake and suffered on account of that. It was with severe hardships and shortage of funds that he made it happen for the good of the Church and society. His holistic vision could foresee the good that it can bring to the people at large and his own community. In dealing with people of all types and kinds he had displayed proper sensitivity and inclusiveness so that he did not alienate anyone in the planning and execution of this project. He could be a catalyst of social reformation through his spiritual outlook that encompassed everything that brings good to humanity.

It took a long period to have the ripples of printing technology to reach in the Indian Continent and especially to the Church in India. After the invention of printing press in Europe it took three centuries to get it across Kerala. There was no Catholic media or print house to share or to proclaim the Gospel to the whole nation (Mk 16:15). It is

Saint Chavara's passion to evangelize and to create a new humanity in Jesus that motivated him to explore uncharted territories. The colonialists identified technology as a key tool for their expansionist ambitions. Chavara faced hurdles to get permission from the government to put up the press. Technology, ink, and paper were hard to come by and were in need of importing. It is amazing to see how a single individual could assemble all these by tirelessly going after every item by traversing across the land by foot, country boats, and bullock carts. He triumphed by perseverance and sheer will power, which testified to his sense of mission. His small triumph led to a spate of changes subsequently in the social horizon of Kerala. Printing resulted in a never before communication start in the nineteenth century Kerala.<sup>1</sup>

The dream of realizing a printing press took him to the existing presses of that era in Kerala. There were only two such presses in Kerala at that time, namely, the Government Press at Thiruvananthapuram and the CMS (Christian Missionary Society) Press at Kottayam. Printing machine of CMS Press was imported from England and had already printed Malayalam translation of Gospels in 1829. Though Chavara went there with great expectation, individuals he contacted were not helpful. He also made a journey to Kollam to learn the technical aspects of the print media. Though he was disappointed by the non-cooperation of persons in offices, he did not give up; for, he was pursuing an important mission.

He did not lose heart when he learned that a printing press would cost Rs 50,000, an exorbitant amount of money at that time. He went around collecting information and technical aspects of the printing press. Finally, he thought of

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<sup>1</sup>Rajasekaran, "Chavara and Indigeneous Printing Technology," 73.

making a model of the press after having an opportunity to see a press in Thiruvananthapuram as he was able to find some Christian workers there favourable to his cause. This creative mind, burning with the zeal for God, could put up a model of the press in plantain pith. According to the model he had prepared, he got a press designed in wood by a skilful carpenter. A base crafted in granite was fixed to it.<sup>1</sup> He faced further hurdles to get ink, letters and paper. Lack of money, unfavourable civil and ecclesiastical authorities and not so helpful other denominations were all enough to put a break in this endeavour. However, his determination and passion to set up a press for furthering the mission of the Catholic Church and the good that it could bring to the people of his land and community made it happen, though he had to take the toughest route for its realization.

The books for Divine Office for clerical use were not there in print. This was a real concern for Saint Chavara. To a great extent the new press helped to make up the lack of books related to the Bible, liturgy and spirituality. A number of Malayalam and Tamil books came out of this unprecedented act of courage and determination. Establishment of the press promoted the spiritual and intellectual climate of Kerala at a critical time in history.<sup>2</sup> Though he was involved in promoting modernity in his society and Church, he was focused on the primacy of the spiritual. Thus, the first book he printed in the press was *Jnana Piyusham* in 1846. This is the first Malayalam book made available to the Catholics in Kerala in their mother tongue. It was a translation of Tamil prayer book. It is in the same press, later, the first Malayalam daily *Nasrani Deepika*

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<sup>1</sup>Bernard, *A Short History of TOCD in Kerala*, 26-27.

<sup>2</sup>Kochumuttom, *Blessed Chavara*, 112.

was printed. It is interesting to note that he didn't print any of his own books or works. It was years later, after the demise of Saint Chavara, that Fr. Leopold Beccaro printed *Atmanuthapam* of Chavara from Koonammavu Immaculate Mother Press. Chavara would have thought of printing more urgently needed things and probably put himself at the bottom of his priorities.

Pope Benedict XVI, recognizing the power of digital media, encouraged the Christians: "Without fear we must set sail on the digital sea, facing into the deep with the same passion that has governed the ship of the Church for two thousand years." Notably, a Roman Pontiff chose the theme for the forty-seventh World Communications Day as "Social Networks: Portals of Truth and Faith; New Spaces for Evangelization."<sup>1</sup> Church aptly recognized the potency of new technologies that continue to emerge and influence our social and cultural life. Traditional preaching from the Church pulpits has limited power to transform hearts. Therefore, new methods are required according to the advancement of technology and changes in the cultural context. Saint Chavara's interest in media was to serve his people with the best available knowledge of the time. He wanted to disseminate the Gospel and Christ's message in the best possible manner. He was concerned about the scarcity of good books in Malayalam. He foresaw the role books could play in social and religious life. In his *Testament to Families*, he stresses the dangers stemming from corrupt books and warned people against keeping books of the kind.<sup>2</sup> Chavara knew that the weak and fragile people may be easily swayed by the negative power of the media and

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<sup>1</sup>Cyriac "Evangelisation through Digital Media," 23, 27.

<sup>2</sup>CSK, IV: *Kathukal: Chavarul*, 142:21.

may lose their faith or may further weaken their faith life. It was a time when only print media existed; still, he could see the prospects of good and bad that can come out of media. The warning still holds good as we are having more challenges from the information technologies. Many families have been broken and relationships ruptured by the excessive use or misuse of the modern gadgets of communication. By using the print media to bring out books on faith and life, Chavara was announcing the good news from the 'house top'.

#### **8.4. Letters and Communication**

Letter writing in one's own hand has been a tool of communication, management and part of leadership and mentoring over the centuries, until it was replaced in the past few decades. Saint Paul used his letters to guide, correct and mentor different Churches with occasional meetings with the faithful. In his absence, it was his letters that helped him teach and instruct. Chavara penning 86 letters over a period of two and half decades reveals what a powerful tool it was in his dexterous hands. As Pauline letters display his personality and his theology, so too Chavara's letters bring out his personality, theological vision and spiritual outlook. The will of God in all things was the driving force of his life. He wanted to serve as an obedient religious priest all the time.

In his letters we find exhortations that can be easily taken. Exhortation is a God-given ability to help people who experience some weakness and are in need of encouragement. Exhorting tends to have a less demanding tone and is closer to guiding and encouraging or urging people to change by giving reassurances of faith in their uncertainties. The letters Saint Chavara wrote throughout



his life have this quality of exhorting through which he promoted spiritual formation. Spiritual growth and formation are often a slow process that may involve travelling through times of difficulty with the gentle instruction and wise guidance.

Chavara maintained his connection through letters and used up a lot of ink. He maintained a steady line of conversation in an intimate way through letters. Chavara's written communication to the bishops and ecclesiastical authorities and even to Rome is now kept in the Mannanam archives and they constitute an important part of historical information about the nineteenth century social and ecclesial life in Kerala. The letters also epitomize his spirituality and ascetic life. The letter he wrote to Kainakary parish was a fervent exhortation reminding them to do all the good they can, especially in charitable ways, and convincingly pointed out the ways and means to accomplish such tasks. It stressed about the need of orphanages, asylum for the sick and homeless, care for the sick and bedridden patients. His commitment to the most underprivileged is pronounced in the letter.<sup>1</sup> This letter addressed in the context of Christian faith community contains universal values and principles that strengthen any human society like that of the Ten Commandments. 150 years have passed since its arrival; it is still valid in the postmodern society. In all his letters we come across the emotional maturity that he had attained as a result of tranquil philosophical and theological reflections. It was the status of his soul that came out through his letters.

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<sup>1</sup>Gopinath, "In Pauline Language," 128.

### **8.5. Liturgical Innovations**

Saint Chavara sensed the significance of liturgy in the life of the faithful and the Church. He composed ten books for liturgical use in the Syro-Malabar Church. Since the liturgical texts of the time had errors of different kinds, the Synod of Diamper had effected radical changes in the liturgy. Many East Syrian and Indian usages were replaced with those of the western Church, especially of the Council of Trent. This produced an unhappy admixture of Latin, East Syrian and Indian practices. The intention of Fr. Chavara in attempting to reform the liturgy was that the public worship should be performed with decorum and dignity. He borrowed from Latin resources wherever it was found appropriate. His close associations with western missionaries and the Latin practices prompted him to draw whatever was judged to be good for enhancing the piety and devotion of the ordinary people. He was anxious to preserve all that is good in the traditional liturgy of the time. One also needs to take into account that he was the Vicar General under the Latin Vicar Apostolic. Latinisation was not his intent, but giving people a more living liturgy with greater devotional and piety aspects. Thus, whatever he found helpful in other traditions, he sometimes brought in to the Syro-Malabar liturgy. Only people with a tunnel vision could see latinisation interest in him. His action was prompted by pastoral concern for his people. Pastoral concerns may demand some flexibility. As long as the essential characteristics of the liturgy are retained and the purpose of the liturgy is served, it shall not be an undue concern or obsession. Liturgical formulas and expressions shall be conducive to enhance the spirit of worship. Liturgy is not for its own sake.

### **8.6. Renewal of Parishes**

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

He realized that in the formation of a Christian community, it should be properly fed from the Divine Word; for, the Church is built upon the Word of God; she is born from and lives by that Word. "We declare to you what we have always seen and heard so that you may also have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his son Jesus Christ" (1 Jn 1:3). We believe that all that exists came into being because God "spoke." The existence and identity of the Christian community derive fully from Gods Word, spoken in history by the One like us. Listening to God's Word is one of the fundamental principles of Catholic theology.<sup>1</sup> Chavara was a motivational speaker. With style and substance he could influence the faithful and could lead them to the desired destination. Immediately after his ordination he began undertaking

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<sup>1</sup>Achandy, "Inaugural Address: Contextual Ecclesial Education," 16.

preaching ministry. He began parish retreats for the renewal of parishes and encouraged his colleagues to do it and made it a feature of parish life thereafter. Again, he was deputed to preach and bring back people who strayed to the schismatic bishop. In his *Last Testament* to his parish family, he wrote how to face and live through difficult times. His paternal heart and pastoral mind are seen vividly in the *Testament*. He never preached anything that he did not practice. Since he walked his talk his words enjoyed the power of authenticity.

### **8.7. Rendering Dignity to the Dying**

Saint Chavara wanted everyone to enjoy the human dignity conferred by the creator. Being created in the image of God, the final and critical stage of life shall have loftiness despite any physical or mental illness. Dying people shall have an inner joy and peace coming from the spiritual resources available to them. He felt that the Church has an immediate and urgent responsibility to confer spiritual joy and peace that come from the hope of eternal life. The sacraments of the Church are designed to help the dying; especially, sacraments of reconciliation and anointing of the sick shall be available to all. In his pastoral openness, he took special care in this regard. He himself went to people who were dying by epidemic to console and to administer last rites and blessings, despite the warnings that it is dangerous to his health. Though he was dissuaded, he took such acts courageously and set an example before the community he was pasturing. He witnessed the peace and joy of many as they received sacraments and blessings of the Church. He nursed his own colleagues Valliara and Nellisery who happened to be sick. He could see the difference in the dying people as they were surrounded by loving and caring

people who represent the Church. He saw to it that no Christian died without needed spiritual care and assistance required at the last minutes of their life; for, the whole life will lose its lustre, if humans die like brutes. This prompted him to make a *Confraternity for Happy Death*. He asked the people of Kainakary to keep a charity box to meet the expenses of the dying people.<sup>1</sup> As he pointed out to the parishioners, it was important to prepare ourselves and others for a salutary death. In response to his request, the parishioners wrote:

We shall not only pray for all those who were instrumental in establishing this confraternity in our chapel so that all may be blessed with happy death, but we also pray for the poor folk who have none to take care of them so that they also may be given a happy death, and we propose to open here a home to give a hospice to the poor and the destitute and to take care of all their needs. Hoping to get from our Christian brethren small gifts by way of charity to aid us in this venture we have placed here a charity box.<sup>2</sup>

As a man of compassion and Christian charity, Chavara desired the poor and the destitute to feel wanted and loved and to be taken care of in their helpless situations. When he asked his parishioners to start the *Confraternity of Happy Death*, he was proving to be a father to all in need, in their spiritual and material wants. Palliative care for the terminally ill is deemed to be a modern concept. In fact, Chavara began it in his humble settings with the collaboration of lay faithful from his native parish. He knew by experiencing personal love and care in distressed time;

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<sup>1</sup>Panthaplackal, *Athisahanangalum Athyandadangalum*, 135.

<sup>2</sup>CWC, IV: *Letters: Testament*, 127-128.

people are much more naturally disposed to be recipient of God's love and grace. Palliative care units, supported by numerous welfare agencies, are founded all over in Kerala. When a disease is incurable and health cannot be restored, it is time to turn attention to the otherwise dimension of life, namely spiritual; towards the end of life, naturally, people have greater opening towards the spiritual. But, at that stage, many would need help or guidance, especially for people who have been away from their religious practices, to make steps towards further growth. In fact, human spiritual consciousness is expanded through suffering and struggles. We see that great spiritual giants had faced a lot of suffering, physical and mental, by which they further grew in their spiritual consciousness and were seen at their best.

Medical care alone is not sufficient. People may be helped to find new meaning in their suffering by awakening their spiritual sensibilities. People in their last stage of life tend to evaluate and make assessment of the worth of their lives and accomplishments. Most people at this point feel that they have not done enough or that life could have been different. This and similar kind of wishful thinking lead some people to accentuated guilt. The assistance and presence of loving and spiritually sensitive people can render a great service to such people. Proper palliative care warrants for the availability of pastoral care in all forms. They need emotional reassurance and validation coming from worthy persons. All these may help them recognize and regain their self worth. Those who have been spiritually awake all through life may be helped by rendering the spiritual helps designed for the sick, that is, by way of reading scriptures, praying with them, and availing sacraments to their state. Actually, effective palliative care

needs a good team work of pastorally minded people, family members and medical people. Chavara, by starting the confraternity for the dying, went far ahead of his time. He started *the Confraternity of Happy Death* with Saint Joseph as its patron. He viewed Saint Joseph in the tradition of the Church to be the patron of blessed death, as he had a blessed death surrounded by his spouse and son, Blessed Virgin Mary and Jesus. Chavara wanted to have everyone assisted by the Holy Family in their last moments.

In 1843, Saint Chavara sent a circular letter to all priests to establish more of such confraternities. What Mother Teresa began doing in the streets of Calcutta, he was doing in a different context; he helped people to die with dignity receiving human love and warmth and, thus, helping them to open up to the grace of salvation. As the sons and daughters of the Church who believe in afterlife, they should be able to have a glimpse of the future in the wake of their death. Most people are able to have some glimpse of their future at these moments and could prepare themselves in a more radical way. Chavara who helped and witnessed the happy death of his predecessors, Thomas Porukara, Thomas Palackal and many others whom he personally assisted in terminal illness, felt the need of more facilities to care for the sick in order to prepare them for a happy death.

The desire to save the souls lost otherwise was the motivational fire behind such acts that Chavara initiated. What you give away with love, you are likely to receive, perhaps in manifold way, as the Lord said: "And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life" (Mt 19:29). He was blessed with a happy death in the company of all who loved him, of course, with the Holy Family and hosts of saints

invisibly present with him. Fr. Leopold wrote in his diary: Today, on 3 January 1871, Tuesday at 7:15 am, Fr. Cyriac Elias of Holy Family, the first Prior died after a life of great innocence. He could declare before his death that he had never lost the baptismal innocence.”<sup>1</sup>

### **8.8. Rendering Wholeness to the Mourners**

Death cannot be overlooked in Christian life; for, Christian life is orchestrated from the very beginning to the end for a happy death. A happy death means dying in full human dignity knowing one’s status as the son or daughter of God. To modern man death is an unpleasant topic that is to be avoided as much as possible. But mortality is part of being human; humans won’t be humans without having mortality built into their being. It gives a sense of urgency to make life beautiful. The art of good living involves the art of dying as well. Death is related to life, and life is related to death; they mutually complement and enrich each other. Life and soul surpass the body, for body did not create it. Body has been an aid for the soul to evolve, grow and reach its destination. Body is the mediator we could see, feel and interact with; therefore, the loss of it is painful for the survivors. This pain is real and it needs to be addressed. All religions and cultures have many rituals in the wake of death. It is often presented as helping the departed soul: in fact, most of it is all for the grieving people. Rituals help them to grieve properly taking time, revisiting the traumatic times and incidents. Recalling and verbalizing our loss and giving it spiritual vibrations help people to reconnect with lives after traumatic experiences of death.

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<sup>1</sup>Beccaro, *A Biography of the Venerable Person*, 17.



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

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

than gritting the teeth and facing it, grieving makes more sense, for as we feel the pain and sadness, we are less likely to be alienated from our real selves.

The *Pana* begins with the story of a man who had three friends. They had promised to each other that each will be alert to come to the other to rescue him in the wake of any tragedy. The assurance did not go well as the King sentenced one to death. The parable unravels the nature and identity of each companion and why they couldn't help. The first companion is the world. All the powers of the world, medicine, money or magic could not help the one who is dying. All human means are obviously powerless in the wake of death. The second friend was kith and kin. Their love and good will are not enough. They too look helpless like any one else at this critical moment. The third one in line is one's own ego, self, which perceives that it has no prospect of survival. When all friends failed and looked helpless the real friend enters the scene, namely 'virtue'. The only friend who could help was his own virtues that he had earned in life. It was the fourth friend who was invisible and refrained from making any promises. This last friend was the only helpful friend in the journey to heaven. The chant is powerful enough to evoke a sober mood in the sad and disheartened people surround by the deceased. The personal emotions are raised to a universal and supernatural sphere.<sup>1</sup>

In a culture in which mortality was very high on account of many epidemics like smallpox, cholera, malaria, etc., Chavara felt the need of people to deal with these exigencies of life in a religiously mature manner making use of their faith in the eternal life and the redemptive love of Christ. He

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<sup>1</sup>Gopinath, "An Ode to Inner Engineering," 152.

himself was a victim of such calamity as he lost his whole family in his younger days. Bible and Christian theology are the obvious sources of his inspiration and his immediate purpose is spiritual consolation. From a Christian perspective, life is like a journey to one's heavenly abode. For here, we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come (Heb 13:14). This and similar message is seen in many classic Christian literary works. John Bunyan's monumental work *Pilgrim's Progress* tells the story of a pilgrim-'Christian' who makes his way from the city of destruction (the world) to the celestial city (heaven). We are pilgrims here on earth; naturally, this pilgrimage comes to an end when it reaches the pilgrims' destination.

### **8.9. Holistic Reformer of all Times**

As a reformist in the Church, Chavara is more akin to Saints Francis, Benedict, and Ignatius of Loyola. Unlike Martin Luther, he tried to effect changes in the Church from within. There were enough and more divisions in the Church. This astute visionary sensed that one more division in the Church will make no good to anyone. He wanted to keep the unity in faith and fellowship in the indigenous Church to which he belonged. He could inspire his people by his humility and sanctity; when he spoke it was received as the voice of a father who longed always the good of his children. The true Christian discipleship involves the call to become a father to the needy and all people of good will. Church and society in Kerala were not free from the feudalistic remnants in the administrative and social set up. There were always different classes of people that are protectors and protected. The protected was not really protected but at the mercy of the protectors' discretion. Socially, economically, and religiously there were

untouchables who maintained life apart from the normal stream of life. He understood that education is the only way to effect changes in the society.

In the religious sphere, Chavara wanted to have more *darsanaveedu* and *thapasu bhavanam* to promote authentic spiritual life. He himself was an epitome of integrated life by means of his simplicity, asceticism, service, and love for all humans without boundaries and segregations. He could imbibe the Indian spiritual genius of Buddha and Mahavira in his compassion and charity.<sup>1</sup>

Chavara was a man of different reformation in the Church unlike many others; he did it through his humble and meek style. He felt the need of more scientific priestly formation and greater scholarship for priests in theology, languages and all socially relevant themes. He sensed the need for proper seminaries in his land after the model of the West. As the Jesuit congregation, during the Reformation, was a tool and competent weapon to fight against the opponents who were negatively inspired by the corruption and unenlightened religious practices of the sixteenth century, here under the leadership of Saint Chavara and his newly found congregation, some meaningful reforms were carried out both in the Church and in the society at large. All great leaders, who had a special vision and purpose in their life, while fulfilling their message and mission, always wanted to perpetuate it for the greater good of humanity. In order to consolidate the gains they started new movements defining the nature of the new institution or the principles and values to be adhered to while following the ideals envisaged. Saint Chavara felt the need for such an institution from the very beginning; so, with the support of

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<sup>1</sup>Pilla, "*Sukrutham Smara*," 43.

others, he nurtured and maintained two congregations based on his initial ideals and reformatory acts. Even though in the initial periods it faced roadblocks of different kinds, those institutions sustained by the virtue and vision of the founders as well as the subsequent generations are in the forefront with multiple innovative ministries.

Saint Chavara was basically a religious without any masks. Though he was a multifaceted genius, he kept his humanness without being corrupted by any pomp. He had many feathers on his cap being a poet, writer, literary genius, educationist, social reformer, administrator, orator, and spiritual guide. It seems that he was not really concerned about titles, name or fame. He was all concerned about uplifting all in a holistic manner. Therefore, he explored different realms to bring about the good from all domains. He believed that there is so much good around, even when there has been occasional gloom. He maintained an optimistic outlook all through; his optimistic and holistic worldview stirred him to be active.

He creatively planned many remedial programmes to strengthen the apostolic community of the Syro-Malabar Church. He awakened a sleeping giant; the reforms he started found its fruition in bringing up many to the path of holiness. He lamented that this Church has been barren having not produced saints with so much spiritual patrimony. Today, in this Apostolic community, a few are already in the process of being raised to the status of Blessed and Saint. He himself set the best example as the Holy Catholic Church had canonized him for universal veneration. Authentic people start every good thing with themselves. His reform in the Church of Kerala was a success in every respect, for he himself was the starting point. Instead of blaming the socio-political and ecclesial

milieu of the nineteenth century, he transformed himself in the Gospel ideals. The monastery he initiated at Mannanam became a reserve bank of spiritual currency and ecclesial animation that could refashion the ecclesial and social life. At the same time, as Pathrapankal observes, an important characteristic of all society is that it is very slow in understanding and appreciating the significance of the role played by its great personalities and Chavara's fate was no exception.

### **8.10. Fundamentals of Wholesome Ministry**

Saint Chavara, through his spiritual leadership, was trying to form the body of Christ. It was the love for the Church and Christ that stirred him to act untiringly. It is said that Christianity is not a do-it-yourself-religion. God made us social creatures and declared that it is not good to be alone. By their baptism, all Christians are called to be the body of Christ, acknowledging its head Jesus. Each one is given gifts and abilities to build and perfect the body that the Church is, so that many may experience the gift of salvation in a more complete manner. All have varying degrees of responsibilities for spiritual formation based on the unique position one occupies in the Church. Christian formation includes all attempts, means, instructions, and disciplines intended towards deepening faith and furtherance of spiritual growth. By introducing retreats and homilies as well as making greater participation in the liturgical worship he was reforming and rebuilding the Church.

Church desires that the human personality of the priest is to be a bridge and not a hindrance for others in their reaching out to God in Jesus Christ. The value of communion is one of the most eloquent signs and one of the

most effective ways of transmitting the Gospel message.<sup>1</sup> The capacity for communion presupposes an adequate level of affective maturity in a person. As the humanity of the word made flesh was the channel of salvation, so humanity of the priest is instrumental in mediating the redemptive gifts of Christ to the people.<sup>2</sup> Pastoral ministry in the Church becomes a reality when priests involved in the projects have human maturity. Human personality of the priest should be acceptable to the community that he serves as well as to the team of ministers.

The human formation, which we emphasize today, has been the need of all times in the ministry of the Church. Human qualities are to be fostered in oneself. Authorities in offices of the Church shall endeavour to promote human qualities for collaborative ministry. What Saint Chavara achieved was the result of fostering such qualities in him and others. Chavara was a good steward of the material possessions, a prudent and discerning man in the public life, and a man resembling Christ in the Church. The human foundations of a priest's personality shall be strong enough to allow flow of the Divine through him. Authentic pastoral ministry needs men and women of balanced integration of feelings and values, so that they may not be driven by raw feelings and needs but be enriched by proper affectivity. This kind of affective growth is evidenced in Chavara's ability to live well with authority and in his ability to take direction from others. Mature and integrated persons can exercise authority over the peers and can productively deal with conflicts and stress which are naturally part of ministry. Saint Chavara's dealings with his peers,

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<sup>1</sup>Pope John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, §43.

<sup>2</sup>Neli, "Human Formation in the Documents of the Church," 96.

authorities, and faithful reveal how his integrated personality contributed to the efficiency of his ministry. As a sensitive, genuine, and intuitive person, he could sense the dynamics of the human nature. All engaged in the ministry of the Church should know the depth of human heart so that trust and cooperation can be created and sustained for the furtherance of the Kingdom of God.

Those who engage in mission shall be carriers of the Spirit to transform oneself, society and culture by being individuals of deep living faith with God as the very heart and centre of their lives and maintaining of their innermost selves. Chavara embodied the mission in his personality and pastoral ministry. He always carried in his heart and in his entire ministry what Pope Francis spoke about mission:

My mission of being in the heart of the people is not just a part of my life or a badge I can take off; it is not just an extra or just another moment in life. Instead, it is something which I cannot uproot from my being without destroying my very self. I am a mission on this earth; that is the reason why I am in the world.<sup>1</sup>

Chavara was a charismatic personality. He employed without any reserve the gifts he was endowed with for doing good to his fellow human beings. He had realized that only holy and learned priests can do anything worthwhile for the spiritual transformation of people. Only such can cultivate and maintain unity in the Church. He took pains and went through immense struggle, and sometimes humiliation in various endeavours, like introduction of the printing press and other reforms. But like Saint Paul, he deemed all these as trivial for the sake of

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<sup>1</sup>Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, §273.



Christ (Phil 3:8). He was a true holistic reformer in the pastoral field.

## Chapter 9

# LEADERSHIP AND COLLABORATIVE MINISTRY

Ministry is the expression of one's spirituality in action; it is one's relationship with God overflowing into an action. While an action may be good, it need not be a ministry, unless it is an expression and overflow of one's relationship with God. By baptism Christians are called to holiness and ministry, that is, to a spirituality that has two dimensions, a deepened relationship with God and an expression of that relationship in action. Saint Chavara, as a religious and priest, was totally engaged in the mission of Jesus, continuing it in the immediate context through a personal commitment announced publicly.

### **9.1. The Triad Teamship**

The triads Palackal, Porukara, and Chavara joined hands with some common objective to live together and to strive together in the bond of faith, prayer and charity to do all possible good as they were revealed to them in the Spirit. They felt the need of organized efforts to achieve optimal good for the Church and the society. The collaboration and association started in the seminary days with the Malapans began to blossom after the ordination of young Fr. Kuriakose. The inspiration to start off a religious community initially came from Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara. These venerable fathers saw in young Kuriakose the needed aptitudes for religious life, and shared their vision with him in words and desires. Saint Chavara, by his close association with these saintly priests, could easily take in and tune in to

the dreams and desires of his senior associates and slowly begin to work for the realization of the religious congregation. Being a new idea and having no model before them, it took some time to assume any definite shape of their project. These people had something in common: a solid spirituality, balanced thinking, and mature way of handling things.<sup>1</sup> Chavara nurtured the initial idea mooted by the elders without being lost, held it close to his heart, eventually consolidated and completed the foundation of the congregation. During the gestation period, both these holy men, who mooted the idea, went for their eternal reward. Young Kuriakose heroically took up their legacy and made bold steps. In the changing socio-political and ecclesial scenario, things were not easy. Unfavorable winds affected the floated boat but the ardent faith and commitment of Chavara kept the boat sailing. The ascetic discipline and pastoral zeal of the inspirers of the religious life became his own.

Palackal and Porukara were people with different charisms and giftedness; however, by an inner desire to do greater service to his people and Church, they were led to think beyond their individual differences and immediate interests. They were people with openness; therefore, they could accept the proposal of the bishop to be more active in ministry rather than retreating with an eremitic life. Though they initially thought of eremitic life, finally they opted for formal monastic life when they realized that they could enjoy some patronage and support of the bishop.<sup>2</sup> They were not sure how the monastic life and its requirements could be fulfilled without some royal patronage, as it

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<sup>1</sup>Kochumuttom, *Blessed Kuriakos Chavara*, 138.

<sup>2</sup>Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 78.

entailed considerable financial liabilities. It was settled when bishop himself offered the first financial offer of 200 rupees immediately. He also recommended the cause by issuing a letter to the public to this effect.

Three of them could find common grounds. They sensed that an active life without strong prayer would not yield proper results. So, they followed a discipline and scheduled prayer life. The spiritual vision they shared and the spiritual engine beneath them gave them needed energy for their life. Today, in the charismatic movement, acquiring strength and vision by living together, praying together, and sharing together are very much valued. In the genuine charismatic retreats designated people come together to pray for few days as a preparation for the retreat so that it may be fruitful. God is the main partner in a collaborative ministry. Though the triads experienced many problems in the beginning, they could locate the best place to start the Ashram. They complemented each other's efforts, encouraging each other, as they knew that they have been doing God's business, and nothing of their own.

Though the bishop had some initial consternation regarding the new order envisioned, seeing the real fervour, faith, and pastoral zeal of these people which they continued to manifest, made him support them wholeheartedly. At its realization the bishop supplied them with sacred things, vessels, books, etc., for the new chapel.

The people of God sensed their altruistic actions that they are not building any earthly kingdom but God's kingdom and they cooperated liberally. These three were transparent in their dealings; people could see the divine actions coming through them. They had differences regarding the nature, name, and identity of the new congregation that they had envisioned. The deep respect for each other and, above all,

the openness to admit the good from wherever it comes helped them move forward cordially. When the senior Malpans departed at an early stage, Chavara took the mantle upon himself, proceeded along by respecting their spirits. By this time, Chavara had assimilated and internalized the cherished spiritual vision of his senior colleagues. The spirit of Palackal and Porukara propelled him to complete the divine project. He believed that it was not his project but God's own. Through community, communion, and comradeship, these three permitted the Spirit to move them and, thus, God's hand could be visibly seen through them.

Through their collaborative ministry they could awaken a Church that was in slumber and could bring many blessings to the Christian community and society at large. It is through the unified spiritual thrust, purpose, and prayer experience they could work together; thereby they could be on the same page or could feel the pulses of each other regarding the issues to deal with. Saint Chavara could collaborate with all people of good will. He identified with all people whom he served and, thus, was continuing the incarnation of Jesus in his ministry, identifying with people in need and becoming one with them to save and lift them up. This kind of identification could draw cooperation of people in all walks of life. He identified with the underprivileged and up-privileged. The salvation Jesus envisioned was not simply an offer of heaven after death; it was not to rescue few individuals from their rottenness or sinfulness but to open up a new future for the entire humanity.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Mundadan, "Mission in the Pluralistic Context of India," 51.

## **9.2. The Sacred Dimension of Leadership**

Ultimately speaking, all leaderships have a sacred dimension, if they are to be a good leadership. Bowles argued that as religious worldviews are displaced by scientific and economic ones, mythology loses its sacral associations and assumes instead secular dimensions.<sup>1</sup> Thus, myths about religious leaders are supplanted by myths about business leaders, heroes like Steve Jobs or villains like Kenneth Lay. We expect our ecclesial leaders to care – not just in an impersonal manner ‘about’ a project, but ‘for’ the organization and its people, indeed for each and every faithful. In this regard, we expect leaders to care not as professionals, but as true leaders with a sacred duty. Saint Chavara saw his leadership as a sacred duty and did not see it as privilege for his sake.

A leader is one of the archetypes that populate our mind, someone who may be a saint in some plotlines, or a devious schemer in others, and a sacrificial lamb in yet others. This is how we encounter the leader in myths, stories, fairytales and other narratives that give expression to collective fantasies.<sup>2</sup> Archetypes, as Jung argued, are elements of the great stream of ideas and images that flow through the soul of every human being, surfacing from time to time in dreams, images, fantasies, and stories, ecstatic and other experiences. If the heroic archetypes have received quite substantial attention both from sacred and secular, underpinning leadership like in the metaphor of the good shepherd, the archetype of the caring leader, was not much explored in the leadership discourses. At the level of archetypes, a caring leader may be even more significant

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<sup>1</sup>Bowles, *Recognizing Deep Structures in Organizations*, 398.

<sup>2</sup>Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, 65.

than a heroic leader. A leader who is experienced as not caring can hardly be viewed as a true leader or as a moral agent. In fact, caring outweighs any other consideration. A leader may be strong, may be legitimate, and may be competent; but, if he is seen as 'not caring', he is likely to be viewed as a failing leader. Looking from this angle, not every leader is caring, nearly every leader would lose his legitimacy if he is perceived as 'uncaring'; in other words, at the level of archetypes, all leaders are expected to display some degree of caring. Therefore, all good leaderships are sacred. This is found in the parable of the good shepherd, who would abandon ninety-nine sheep in order to search for the lost one (Lk 15:3-7).

### **9.3. Shepherd Leadership**

The caring leader is compassionate, giving and concerned for the wellbeing of his or her subjects, willing to go the extra mile to meet their needs and ensure that they flourish. The leadership Chavara manifested was the caring shepherd leadership after the model of Jesus. All the reforms he made in the Church especially the liturgical and spiritual were gestures of genuine care. It is the caring leader in him who reported to the Vicar Apostolic in the wake of entering the religious life that it is hard for many of his companions to follow the strict and extensive rules prescribed after the model of the Carmelite contemplatives. It is the same care that prompted him to write letters to Rome stating facts about tumultuous ecclesial context of his land and his mother Church. As a caring leader, he was ready to take the burdens of his actions.

#### **9.4. Leadership with Soft Power**

Though Saint Chavara had held many offices and ministries, his greatness is measured in terms of the service and not his status. At a time when Christian leaders were jockeying for positions, power and prominence, he preferred to be a servant and showed the greatness of servant leadership in his own life. Servant leadership needs spiritual and psychological maturity. Real servants put on the apron of humility and maintain a low profile. It happened that Fr. Kuriakose, in his post ordination months with his initial enthusiasm, moved around preaching and teaching. Malpan Fr. Palackal was not very pleased with his journeys and outgoing tendencies. Without being told, he realized Malpan's displeasure, returned to Pallipuram seminary and settled with him. He began a shared life, supporting and collaborating with Malpan Palackal in everything. Regarding this phase of his life, Chavara wrote: "Thereupon in all matters, I followed his directions and advises."<sup>1</sup>

God raises his servants in due time. "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all" (Mk 9:35). Servants think like stewards and not owners.<sup>2</sup> Though Chavara was equally involved from planning to the execution of the new convent and, thus, opening religious life for women in Kerala Church, in the chronicles he wrote, he gave credit to Fr. Leopold OCD. In everything he projected Fr. Leopold and preferred to take the backseat. As a result, later years many deemed Fr. Leopold as the sole person behind the opening of the new convent. In the same fashion, he generously gave credit to the senior Malpans as the architects and champions of whatever he has achieved.

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, I: *Chronicles*, 22; CSK, I: *Nalagamangal*, 25.

<sup>2</sup>Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Life*, 266.



In the Bible, a steward is a servant entrusted to manage property. Faithfulness is their character strength. It is this kind of unflinching faithfulness and commitment that made Chavara's leadership ministry acceptable to all. Like David, Chavara "served God in his generation" and God called him a man after His own heart; indeed, it is a compliment every saint rightly deserves.

If power is the dominant feature of a heroic leader, love is the *sine qua non* of a caring leader.<sup>1</sup> Though Chavara was proposed to be a bishop candidate for the Syro-Malabar faithful, he did not care about it, nor did he make any attempt to secure it. Chavara derived his legitimacy not by the power he enjoyed or by virtue of his designation but by the genuinely caring actions of a shepherd. Shepherd leadership is bound to the followers with a bond that reaches far beyond expedience and mutual benefit. It is a deep emotional bond with desexualized erotic character, one in which libido becomes sublimated into powerful feelings of empathy, compassion, and solidarity that bind the followers with each other through a bonding experience of being loved by the leader.<sup>2</sup>

A loving, caring leader is accessible and visible, especially in times of stress and crisis. An inaccessible leader, or the one who is not there when needed, is the one who deserts his flock and betrays his duty of care. Proper leadership is an area of soft power. Gone are the days of arbitrary acting and imposing one's will on others in the pretext of efficiency and common good. Soft power is the ability to alter the behaviour of others to get what one wants. There are three ways to do that: sticks, carrots, and

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<sup>1</sup>Parry and Kempster, *Love and Leadership*, 26.

<sup>2</sup>Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, 92.

soft power. With the help of soft power one can economize the sticks and carrots. Soft power rests on three resources, namely, culture, values, and moral authority.<sup>1</sup>

### **9.5. Pastoral Discernment**

The dynamism and openness in Saint Chavara's ministry were welling up from his discernment. Discernment is born in the heart and mind through prayers when one puts the people and situations entrusted to one in contact with the divine word pronounced by the Spirit. It is through the intimacy with the Lord inner freedom matures and makes one firm. Only in the silence of prayer one can discern the voice of God among many choices. Discernment is a remedy for the immobility as expressed in expressions like "it has always been so" or "let us take time." It is a creative process that does not apply schemas. It is an antidote against rigidity, as the same solutions may not be valid everywhere.<sup>2</sup> A sensitive and pastoral heart shall ask whether the proposals of yesterday are still valid today. Having only one answer to apply in all cases is a reductionism. It may leave the Church relegated to the margins and may let Church remain barren. True discernment is always open; it cannot be reduced to the repetition of formulas. Chavara, guided by the Spirit, engaged in discernment to come out of the routine and rigid patterns of his time. In discernment, humility and obedience are essential, as they help one to forgo one's own project, and place Gospel values in its place. In the end, we will be measured not by counting our achievements but by the growth of His Kingdom. Chavara

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<sup>1</sup>Achandy, "Inaugural Address: Contextual Ecclesial Education," 18.

<sup>2</sup>Pope Francis, "The Holy Spirit, Protagonist of Any Authentic Discernment" [online].

with his pastoral heart thought, less of himself and more of God's kingdom and God's people.

### **9.6. Collaboration for Synergy**

Collaboration is the union of all gifts in the community. Cardinal Mahoney states in the USCCB document *Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium*: "Priestly ministry of Jesus is not fully exercised, if the gifts of the Spirit are not exercised for the community and mission of the Church." The union of gifts is the quintessence of collaborative ministry. Chavara connected his gifts with others' gifts in order to effectively foster the mission of Jesus. First, he was bent on developing his gifts and, then, maintained a sense of humility to accept a variety of gifts in the community. In his ministry and leadership, he could perceive the needs of the Church and could discern the gifts of the people and blended them together to produce a right synergy. Collaborative ministry in the Church or in any society does not happen automatically; it demands attention to both process and structures.

Paraphrasing Proverb 29:18, we could say that wherever there is no vision, people would perish. Jesus had a clear vision of His mission for which He had come into the world. This vision to bring all people to the knowledge and union with the Father served as the criterion for all His activity.<sup>1</sup> Many good projects fail in the dioceses, congregations, and parish communities due to the absence of an articulated vision which clearly defines the direction. If the goal is collaboration, then the ideal is to involve everyone who is potentially affected. In Chavara's ministry and mission, we come across people involvement all the time. The

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<sup>1</sup>Sofield and Juliano, *Collaboration: Uniting Our Gifts in Ministry*, 148.

community involvement is obviously evident in his educational apostolate, media, and in women empowerment projects. The essence of all collaborative ministries is identifying, releasing and uniting all the gifts present in the community for the sake of a mission.<sup>1</sup> Discernment of gifts in each one and in each group is a critical part of collaborative ministry, while gift of discernment is a very affirming experience. The goal is to discern the person's call to ministry based on his or her gifts and to determine how those gifts can be combined with others for effective ministry.

Every Christian leadership is a call to advance the mission and ministry of Jesus in the world. Based on one's particular call this mission may take varying forms in the practice. Church being a community and communion, all leadership shall essentially involve the collaborative style. Jesus was a collaborative leader. We see Jesus in the very beginning of his public life gathering a group of disciples to minister with him. He taught, formed and instilled in them a sense of mission. Jesus, the collaborative leader, sent disciples in pairs into ministry even before they were perfectly formed.<sup>2</sup> He was there to receive them and listen to them when they returned; he helped them to review and reflect upon their experiences. Jesus was a secure collaborative leader, for he could leave them and return to the father and, in his absence, he could let them continue his mission through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Chavara gave guidelines and instructions to his newly formed communities and left them to the providence of God. Without focusing on the giftedness of others no sustained

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<sup>1</sup>Sofield and Juliano, *Collaboration: Uniting Our Gifts in Ministry*, 153.

<sup>2</sup>Sofield and Juliano, *Collaboration: Uniting Our Gifts in Ministry*, 104.

ministry in the Church is possible. Many are unable to focus on the giftedness of others. There is a propensity to work individually rather than seeking ways to work collaboratively. Regarding his leadership style that could draw the cooperation of others, Mundadan observes:

Chavara could easily develop friendly relations with any person and get his or her cooperation or his endeavours. During the troubles caused by the intrusion of Bishop Roccas, Chavara realized that many of the means, such as issuing pastoral letters or imposing excommunication, had not succeeded much to deter the people following the intruder bishop. He sent word to some influential people ... to meet at Mannanam to deliberate on the point... Their influence helped Chavara to get the intervention of civil authorities.<sup>1</sup>

Chavara could enlist the support of influential groups as well as ordinary people in putting up the new monastery. In identifying the location, clearing the plot, and doing initial work he could enjoy the support of many in the locality. Doing things by oneself was not his style of functioning. When planning the monastery the spot identified first was Pullarikkunu. It was close to the radius of a *Devikshetram* (temple); hence, when some *Devi* devotees expressed concern that the proposed religious house will be directly in *Devi's* eye view, all of them, including Chavara, did not hesitate to shift the venue and, therefore, they looked for a new place. What they wanted was a peaceful coexistence of all God's people. Speaking of the importance of solidarity, John Paul II stated that, for the disciple of Christ, solidarity is a moral duty stemming from the spiritual union of all

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<sup>1</sup>Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 163.

human beings who share a common origin, a common dignity and a common destiny.

The three men, Palackal, Porukara, and Chavara had a vivid sense of the world's need for Christ's message and the Christian life. They knew their difficulties, environments, and their personality differences. Paul and Peter were the pillars of the Church; their lofty positions did not do away the differences among them. Paul took Silas in one direction while Bernabas went with Mark to Cyprus because of sharp dissent between them. But all is forgotten when they were united in a reconciliation "profitable to ministry."<sup>1</sup>

Saint John Paul II of happy memory, on the occasion of the beatification of Blessed Chavara on 8 February 1986 at Kottayam said: Throughout his earthly life Blessed Chavara laboured generously for the renewal and enrichment of Christian life... With great generosity he collaborated with others, especially his brother priests and religious in the work of salvation. Like a *bodhisattva*,<sup>2</sup> he wanted the best things for others.<sup>3</sup> When Chavara remarked "A lot of good has not been done in Kerala due to the absence of a *thapasu bhavanam*" he was manifesting this *bodhisattva* mind.

### 9.7. Interdependence and Interconnectedness

Chavara was not independent but interdependent. He knew his identity as a priest and religious. As the Vicar General who was in charge of the faithful he was entrusted with, he

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<sup>1</sup>Sheen, *Treasures in Clay*, 310.

<sup>2</sup>A *bodhisattva* is one who has received enlightenment through his austere and intense meditations and knew about his new status as Buddha but he delays entering to Buddhahood to help his fellow beings out of compassion.

<sup>3</sup>Kadankavil, *Chavara: A Multidimensional Saint*, 208.

was bound to keep community and communion among the faithful. It is the meaningful interconnectedness with laity and hierarchy that enabled him to accomplish numerous things in a revolutionary manner.

It is by relating, sharing, and trusting other humans, finally one's self comes to accept itself. As we grow in compassion, understanding, forgiveness, and reconciliation, our network of relationships acquire a qualitative dimension. Eventually, we will be much more kind to ourselves and our follies as well as kind to those people who are less intimate, and less sharing. Gradually, this will incline a human to be less absorbed in oneself, one's isolation or loneliness. Contemporary physics favours a perspective of interrelatedness and affinities. Nothing exists by itself without a relation to the other, not even the tiniest atom. Elementary particles do not exist independently. Properties are observable or definable only in terms of relationship. Since Church is a pilgrim community making a sojourn to the heavenly Jerusalem, Chavara realized that it is interdependence and interconnectedness that would make it a community as God has envisioned it. This understanding made him to say that "The strength of the monasteries does not consist in the thickness of their walls but in the religious zeal and virtue of their inmates... We are progenitors of the monasteries here. We are the corner stones."<sup>1</sup> As part of the interdependence we enjoy relationship with God and others and experience tensions in the relationships too. By virtue of the ecclesial dimension of life Christians are part of a community, parish or a particular Church. Chavara lived his life relating to these entities in a meaningful and fruitful manner.

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, IV: *Letters*, 65, 94, 95.

In collaborative ministry, one needs discernment of knowing peoples' strength and weakness. One shall seek help or cooperation seeing the goals envisioned. Simple likes and dislikes may not take leaders to the desired goals unless people of competence and moral calibre are enlisted in the respective areas. When Chavara was deputed to counter the schism and divisions, he looked for right people to line up with him in the fight. Leaders need people with communication skills and influence based on the nature of the objectives. Chavara's interdependent style speaks for itself in the construction and development of institutions he had initiated. Thomas Kochumuttom observes:

When eventually the construction of the Mannanam Monastery was completed, it was truly the people's achievement. While launching the project the only resource the founders had with them was the unwavering trust in God's providence and people's generosity... The entire expense was met by the generous contribution of the local people. They were happy to cooperate in all possible ways because they were convinced of the worth of having a monastery among them, and that the founders were really poor but utterly sincere and well-intentioned. Their poverty and moral integrity won the people's hearts.<sup>1</sup>

### **9.8. Servant Leader**

Having deemed himself as a servant leader, Chavara could never act arbitrarily and arrogantly; to him authority was for humble service. He always sought the advice of his elders Palackal and Porukara in all important matters. In serious matters he was particular to get consent from the

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<sup>1</sup>Kochumuttom, *Spirituality of Saint Chavara*, 153.



Vicar Apostolic and Fr. Leopold. He always held the lofty ideals and charity before taking decisions. He knew open revolt and revolutions did not bring any good anywhere. He looked for more prudent and practical ways for resolving issues. In a mass petition sent to Pope Pius IX by Saint Thomas Christians on 13 January 1876, the sagacity and wisdom of the Prior were acknowledged.

Many of the Saint Thomas Christians were unwilling to submit to the Vicar apostolic of Verapoly but longed for a prelate of their own rite. When they began agitating for this, our venerable Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara, the first Prior of the Monasteries and founder of many monasteries in Malabar, Vicar General of his Excellency Archbishop Bernardine, by his wise counsel dissuaded them, telling that although their desire and petition were good in themselves, they could present it at an opportune time, after first humbly submitting themselves to the reigning Vicar Apostolic. With this and similar counsels he, in a short time, made us obediently submit to the Vicar Apostolic.<sup>1</sup>

### **9.9. Communicator Par Excellence**

He had tremendous documentation skill. This is beautifully seen in the letters that chronicles First Vatican Synod in Rome from 8 December 1869 to July 1870 (the Council was adjourned on 20 October 1870). The letters he wrote to authorities during the schism give a vivid picture of the nature of the pastoral challenges of the time. A different facet of his communication skill is visible in the letter of 12 June 1857, in the name of Thayil Pothan and Thuruthumalil Yakob. The letter articulates the provisions of the title deed

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<sup>1</sup>*Positio*, 358.

and the *modus operandi* of utilizing thousands of acres of land for the cultivation of paddy, coconut, etc.<sup>1</sup> This was meant to help the lunch for deprived children of the schools and other institutions. Because he had noble purposes and goals in this communications and having no hidden agenda behind anything, his letters and circulars were accepted readily and followed accordingly. His letters had the signature of his spirit and blood. His communication style was lucid with no ambiguity and room for misinterpretation. The letters he wrote to the religious sisters as well as to his own priests as the Prior addressed problems as and when they occurred and, thus, he kept the fledgling religious life on proper path. The letter addressed to Bishop Bernadine, dated 12 December 1853, shows how efficient he was in addressing and resolving routine issues and handling various administrative developments. In his style of communication he was brief and unambiguous. Ideas have been always well-structured with proper salutations. He took care to have an inclusive language which shows his respect for children and women. He expressed personal concern and maintained personal bonding through the letters.

The letters Chavara wrote on different occasions to heads of institutions or communities reveal his wisdom and his gift of counselling. With least offence he was able to give correction. Mathias Mundadan observes that, with prudence and humility, he pointed out to the bishop that the rules crafted for them to initiate religious life would adversely affect the progress.<sup>2</sup> The Vicar Apostolic did not heed to it, and moved many things as the bishop has planned. Later,

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<sup>1</sup>Gopinath "In Pauline Lanugage," 130.

<sup>2</sup>Mundandan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 458.

the Vicar Apostolic realized the wisdom in Chavara's words and mitigated the laws after a lapse of one year. Chavara's good office was used to settle disputes among factions. Chavara was given the duties of mentoring erring priests. He was wise and prudent in dealing with schismatic Roccas and Antony Kudakkachira, two people who disturbed the ecclesial and religious life of the time. He was firm and never lost his temperance and charity at any time while dealing with them.

The Vicar Apostolic on many occasions sought his counsel and acted accordingly. When the Vicar apostolic conveyed the financial difficulties of the Vicariate, Chavara proposed a solution to collect ten percent of the income of the parishes, and it was accepted and promulgated. Chavara in his lifetime embarked on many projects like spiritual, social, and educational, though in none of them he burdened people as some pastors or vicars of our time do. Without being sensitive sometimes faithful are pressurized to give away beyond their abilities in cash and kind to put up Church-related projects. Such actions can create a lot of bitterness among the faithful. Chavara's leadership did things differently; without burdening them, his style offered scope for involvement and participation on the part of the people. His *pidiyari* and *kettuthengu*<sup>1</sup> are simple but effective ways to raise funds without burdening the faithful. For the maintenance also he found ways and means by setting apart cultivable lands so that yearly yield from them could be used to maintain the schools and lunch for the children.

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<sup>1</sup>*Pidiyari* is setting apart a handful of rice as house makers take rice to cook and keeping it separately, which would be collected at the end of the month. *Kettuthengu* is reserving a coconut tree and its income for any noble cause proposed.

### 9.10. Humility and Leadership

Saint Chavara never projected himself anywhere. He liked to be in the background and always valued others better than himself and offered prominence to others. He rendered always prominence to his elder priests and gave them credit on all occasions. He observed the fasting and feasting of the community without distinguishing himself in anything. Chavara could accomplish many things for the people of God not by the power of wealth, influence, or status but by the spiritual capital he acquired and invested. In a letter to his nephew Fr. Joseph Thresia, Chavara remarked:

When I came here, Koonammavu, I found the sisters in a dire fix, being unable to pay the tax of Rs. 120. I borrowed the amount and paid it. For this I have sent Fr. Chandy with 'the net and some bait'. Till now, I have never had to draw the net empty after casting it in the name of our Holy Mother. But Fr. Chandy has not yet replied that he has failed to draw ashore any fish like Saint Peter on that Easter morning.<sup>1</sup>

Effective and productive individuals, whether inside or outside of ministries, think of *me* goals and simultaneously envision *we* goals. The realization that all people are part of a larger world is growing in our times even though parochialism and narrow-mindedness are also rampant. We are becoming increasingly interdependent, and nowhere is this more obvious than in the global market that influences everyday life of everyone. So, greater interdependence and cooperation are going to be a higher value and greater strength in the upcoming years. The once forgotten and overlooked Christian values are turning up again couched in different forms and shapes.

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, IV: *Letters*, 55.

### **9.11. Sensitivity and Forcefulness**

Saint Chavara was man with tender emotions and sensibilities. He didn't destroy anything that is human. He raised human emotions and needs to sublime heights. Being created in the image of God, he knew that it is within the purview of all to transcend the natural without destroying it for achieving greater goals. Saint Chavara lived always with affective maturity. Chavara possessed a sensitive spirit. This sensitivity made him responsive to the needs of the Church and the society he lived. A sensitive spirit is vulnerable to personal wounding. The sensitivity helps one to be responsible and prompt in action in the social set up and can be turned inward as soul rending grief. This kind of grief we can see in Chavara when he is grief-stricken and remorseful for learning in the *kalari* (local tutoring centres in the backdrop of Hinduism) as it was the school system of the day. In his poetic autobiographical work *Atmanuthapam*, we see the spiritual self wounding of sensitivity. He portrays himself as a wayward son. We watch a harmonious blend of forcefulness and sensitivity in his life. When he acted as the Prior of the Congregatoin and the Vicar General of the Syro-Malabar Church, it had the ring of authority as Jesus did it (Mk 1:22). In dealing with the schisms, we witness his magnetic boldness. His forceful repudiations and warning letters made everyone to think twice in siding with the schismatic Bishop Roccas.<sup>1</sup> He was courageous and bold in the face of opposition. He was assertive when speaking the truth, warm and empathetic when working with persons as is displayed in his social actions and ecclesial administration.

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, I: *Chronicles*, 161.

**9.12. Barriers to Collaborative Ministry**

Low self-esteem is viewed as a prime barrier for any kind of collaborative ministry. Low self-esteem of the minister leads to behaviour-related obstacles such as competition, parochialism, and the like. Personal traits as well as education and life experiences affect our ability to collaborate. Some people develop inordinate destructive competitiveness that blinds them to the gifts of others and interferes with their freedom to unite their gifts with others in ministry. The emphasis on perfection also can contribute to a lowered self-esteem which produces excessively competitive behaviour. People adopt compensatory behaviour to counteract lowered self-esteem. Diminished self-esteem drives people to rebuild self-esteem by devaluing others. Any individual who begins to rise above others or stands out would be immediately knocked down. Ministers who possess low self-esteem can become knockers. Belittling is the opposite of affirming and it impedes collaboration. Although no one can give self-esteem, one can create a climate that fosters and contribute to build up or maintain self-esteem. There are countless situations in which clergy and religious convey an attitude of superiority and arrogance toward the laity by presuming that they had much to teach the laity and little to learn from them. Chavara never assumed any air of superiority and arrogance; instead, he was competing to give the best to others by being a servant leader with a collaborative approach.

Arrogance and self-righteousness can affect anyone's ministry. People in position or authority may perceive themselves as superior to those they lead. It is important for leaders to remember that leadership gifts and abilities are not superior to other gifts, but different. Arrogance in one's

own self is hard to perceive. Everyone needs the feedback of others to arrive at fuller self-knowledge. Arrogant people are not attracted to collaboration, because they don't see the need for the gifts of anyone else. Perceiving themselves as the storehouse of knowledge, wisdom and giftedness, they are convinced that just listening to them would make everything fine.

### **9.13. Hostility**

Often feelings of anger are converted to hostility. While anger is an emotion, hostility moves beyond an emotion becoming one's behaviour, which would often lead to treat others as enemies. In other words, wherever hostility exists, others are perceived as adversaries to be overcome, rather than as potential allies. Increased understanding and dialogue at many different levels may reduce the amount of anger one carries around. The challenge is to find constructive avenues of expressing anger rather than converting it into hostility, which ultimately destroys any collaborative ministry. The anger of priests and ministers has distanced many from the Church. Chavara knew that he is in charge of the ministry of reconciliation and not hostility and rivalry. The way he dealt with rivals or opponents has already been mentioned elsewhere, hence needing no further mention.

Too many ministers, while dealing with conflict, are so fearful that they constantly function from a stance of "peace at any rate." A glance on the history of the Church reveals that despite its divine origin, the members of the Church are characterized with their frailties, shortcomings, and self-interests; therefore, sometimes conflicts are unavoidable. Early Church and its ministries were not free from conflicts as we see them in the *Acts of the Apostles*. To suppress

conflict in any group or section results in apathy and tension precluding collaboration. If collaboration is to occur, conflict must be confronted and properly dealt with.

#### **9.14. Intimacy Issues**

Ministering in Church brings people together in personal and intimate ways. Sexuality is a gift and should be acknowledged, appreciated and accepted as part of the total person. Inadequate sexual integration tends to affect ministry adversely. People working in close collaborative relationships should not be surprised to feel strong emotional attractions. Feeling sexually attracted or falling in love is not a problem; what is potentially problematic is the denial of this reality. If these feelings are not accepted and acknowledged, and even when appropriate not discussing together or with a third party, difficulties will ensue in ministries. One should have the courage to discuss the sexual aspect of his or her life honestly and openly. Chavara closely collaborated with women for their empowerment. His love for the religious sisters, as is manifested in the letters he wrote to them, reveals the nature of caring love. Those letters were personal, parental, and thoughtful.<sup>1</sup> A real father-daughter relationship existed between the sisters whose spiritual direction and discipline he was entrusted with. To have proper synergy in collaborative ministry, erotic love shall be sublimated by exercising a caring shepherd's love. This is possible and practical only through an appreciation of the transcendent religious values and solid spiritual foundation.

Erikson, a psycho-social developmental theorist, calls the period of middle age as the stage of generativity.

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<sup>1</sup>Kochumuttom, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 348.



Generativity includes care for others beyond one's family, future generations and for the kind of world in which those generations will live. Erikson observes that one must accept one's own identity and have intimate relationships to community and others before one is ready for generativity.<sup>1</sup> Generativity has both sides: care for oneself and care for others. A common way of generativity is through parenting children; it can assume more sublime forms such as teacher, mentor, spiritual guide, reformist, etc. Chavara was passing on life and meaning to next generation in so many ways. In his generativity, he moved beyond his family and community to the entire people of God.

Collaborative leadership and ministry are possible only for people who show a developmental readiness for collaboration. The more a person has developed psychosocially and psycho-sexually, the greater is the person's ability to minister collaboratively. When people reach the level of development called *generativity*, they are capable of greater collaboration.

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<sup>1</sup>Linn, *et al.*, *Healing the Eight Stages of Life*, 188ff.

## Chapter 10

# A MAN OF POSITIVITY

The concept of positivity is not a utopian ideology claiming that humans have no bad experiences to undergo. Life being a mix of good and bad, humans may experience a wide range of emotions from positive to negative; hence, we experience sadness, joy, anger, gratitude, etc. Unless humans guard themselves, it is negativity that comes our way often. Negativity hits life fast and hard than positivity unless one is armed with spiritual tools to cope with. In a layman's language, positivity is the ability to be optimistic and happy even when desired results are not attained.

### 10.1. Positivity and Character

Positivity acknowledges some positive individual traits, such as strength of character, talents, interests, and values.<sup>1</sup> When we practise something over time, we become good at it; because repetition is the mother of character and skill. The character building habits are often said to constitute spiritual discipline. Character strengths and virtues are the key domains in positivity.<sup>2</sup> "To be a virtuous person is to display by the acts of the will, all or at least most of the six ubiquitous virtues, namely, wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence."<sup>3</sup> Throughout his life, Saint Chavara consistently displayed all these virtues. These virtues are core characteristics valued by moral philosophers and religious people. Character strengths are

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<sup>1</sup>Christopher, *A Primer in Positive Psychology*, 107.

<sup>2</sup>Christopher and Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues*, 36.

<sup>3</sup>Seligman *Authentic Happiness*, 47.

understood as the psychological ingredients that define the virtue.

Saint Chavara was a man of positive affect. He appeared almost always filled with joy and gratitude. Joy is the hallmark of the Kingdom of God. In the scripture, Kingdom of God is often likened to a banquet. Those who are able to radiate joy in their life by their very presence are telling to the world that they have the Kingdom within. The reason for all his positive emotions is traced back to God's goodness. The realization that God is the source of all goodness and that he does not have any automatic rights but God's merciful love simply found him meritorious is seen in all his reminiscences. Regarding his birth, family, and all accomplishments he could see God's hand and was ready to acknowledge it with humility. Thus, we have such positive notes and verses in *Atmanuthapam*:

Oh! Lord of all good things, out of your compassion you did not create me among the ignorant and non-believers or those afflicted by various handicaps or those suffering from different diseases and poverty. This makes me obliged to serve you. You have granted me yet another favour by not including me among the kings and princes of the world, nor did you count me among the rich. How unfortunate it would have been if I were born among them! You graciously made me neither too rich nor poor.

That is the reason why I am so happy today.<sup>1</sup>

According to the positive psychology researches, negative emotions tend to narrow our thoughts to a limited set of possible actions.<sup>2</sup> When we are angry or fearful, we become

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<sup>1</sup>Kochumuttom, "Blessed Chavara: A Man in God's Hands and Moved by God," 50.

<sup>2</sup>Baumgardner and Crothers, *Positive Psychology*, 40.

self focused and absorbed in the emotions. This may result in a kind of tunnel vision and unduly limited consideration of possible options. In contrast, positive affect opens up people's thinking to a wider horizon of actions. Hardly have we noticed anger, resentment, unforgiveness, or bitterness in the life of Saint Chavara.

Positive emotions and negative emotions seem to produce opposite effects. It is hard to imagine experiencing both at the same time. According to the Broaden and Build Theory of Positive Emotions, experiences of positive emotions broaden thought-action repertoires, which, in turn, lead to building enduring personal resources and eventually transform people to produce upward spirals. Saint Chavara's upward mobility and raising his resources and transforming the Church and society can be looked from this psychological perspective too.

Now, psychologists speak of the flow of experience. What they mean is an activity or engagement in which you feel completely absorbed and lost. In such moments one may feel highly effective in expressing one's skill. In such times you don't have to think about what you are doing. There was a flow experience in the life of Saint Chavara. The multifarious things he could accomplish in the short tenure of life would not have been there unless he experienced this psychological phenomenon. Psychologist Csikszentimihalyi found that the most satisfying and productive work involves a level of challenge appropriate to our skill that actively engages our talents which is deeply meaningful and produces a sense of vital engagement.<sup>1</sup> In flow, there is a merging of action, awareness, and sense of self such that we lose the feeling of consciously controlling our actions. The

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<sup>1</sup>Baumgardner and Crothers, *Positive Psychology*, 51.

Christian discipleship calls for such wholehearted engagement in the Lord's cause so that no kind of duality exists between self-awareness and environment.

### **10.2. Positive Desires and Emotions**

Our deepest self has an innate ability to promote the unfolding of the whole person in a way that activates and integrates all human potentials. In the initial stages of Christian life or religious life, we tend to promote negative virtues, exercises of denial, detachment, sacrifice, etc. Positive virtues happen only when one attains psycho-spiritual wholeness, or, in other words, having spiritual maturity and autonomy.

Our basic desires become the principle of auto suggestion. The dominating thoughts, which one permits to remain in the conscious mind, reach the subconscious mind and slowly influence the thoughts. Our subconscious mind is like a fertile ground in which weeds and wheat grow together. What grows is what we permit. Sometimes permission may be in the form of passivity. Unless we feed the subconscious mind with thoughts of creative nature, by neglect, we are permitting thoughts of destructive nature in the rich garden of mind. Bringing creative or positive things alone and repeating it million times may not help one, unless the positive desires are embedded with proper emotions in tune with it. Unemotional words do not influence the subconscious mind.<sup>1</sup> As we look into the life of Saint Chavara, his spiritual growth was a natural corollary of the positive emotions and desires. Spiritual desires and emotions will create spiritual realities and spiritual experiences. In his poetical work *Atmanuthapam*, he has

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<sup>1</sup>Hill, et al., *Life Changing Secrets*, 53.

given expression to his spiritual desires and longings in rich metaphors and images.<sup>1</sup>

### **10.3. Subconscious Resources**

Humans are created in the image of God; human faculties, therefore, contain God's own creative potentials. The human expression of the divine has its own limitation based on the psycho-physical development of the particular individual. Psychologists assume that the creative powers reside in the unconscious of the person. Unconscious is often viewed as the seat of wisdom. Jung speaks of the archetypes of the unconscious. The divine wisdom and energies are contained in the unconscious images inherited by the humankind. William James, father of American psychology, opines that the power to move the world is in your subconscious mind. It is one with infinite intelligence and wisdom. The greatest secrets are within rather than without. Sages and seers realized this truth and could awaken these powers from within. Often our conscious mind interferes with normal rhythm of the heart, lungs, functioning of the stomach and intestines. In such times we experience worry, fear, anxiety and depression. Thoughts of the conscious mind interfere with the smooth functioning of the person; these thoughts in many instances are negative and detrimental. All seers found it necessary to cap the mind in order to arrest the nonstop flooding of our system with thoughts of disharmony and dysfunctionality.

The conscious mind by its nature is juggling with hundreds of thoughts every minute and, thus, the subconscious mind and its wisdom is smothered and it fails to find expression. If a greater part of our mind is not

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, II: *Atmanathupam*, 2:1-100.

finding expression or gets discarded, it will naturally create disharmony and conflicts in the total functioning of the individual. Though Chavara was experiencing problems one after another in his life, he did not let his conscious mind interfere in the harmony of life. He could overcome it with a kind of power and conviction that he created in the subconscious via his spiritual faith. Probably, he could talk with authority and conviction to this inner system because of a spiritual understanding.

There is a source of power and wisdom inside us which helps us to keep in touch with the power that moves the world and the power that causes us to exist. Our subconscious can be termed as the seat of divine spark in us that it can be flared up and can produce a lot of light and energy to realize one's existence. To many psychologists, subconscious mind is the source of ideals, aspirations and altruistic urges. It is through this subconscious mind Shakespeare perceived the great truths hidden from the average men of his time. It was the urgings of the subconscious mind that made Phidias, the Greek sculptor, to portray beauty and order, symmetry and proportion in marble and bronze. By that same virtue Italian artist Raphael could paint Madonna, and Beethoven composed symphonies.<sup>1</sup> All these people employed their subconscious to make the best out of their life for themselves as well as for the society. By employing the powers of the subconscious one can grow and develop intellectual, artistic and ethical qualities and can bring them to a higher level. Human potentials are not finished with intellectual or artistic level of growth; it can go further as has been made clear by Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

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<sup>1</sup>Hill, *et al.*, *Life Changing Secrets*, 229.

Many stop their evolution or growth being stuck up at the rational or intellectual level, and never enter into the arena of transcendental level where one meets spiritual potentials and realizes oneself with peak experiences. Infinite riches are around us, because we behold a treasure house of infinity within us. Saint Chavara was an ordinary man who did not have any outstanding giftedness. He did not have any scientific and academic background nor had any systematic theological training. But he could employ many faculties in an astounding way. The achievements he made in multifarious fields tell us that he could find some resources within. Christian anthropology and faith help us to understand this phenomenon, that by stirring and perfecting his spiritual powers seated in the deeper self and subconscious, he could transcend his human limitations. It is observed that a properly magnetized piece of steel can lift about twelve times its own weight and if you demagnetize this same piece of steel, it will not even lift a gram. Spiritually magnetized persons are full of confidence and faith in the power of the divine intelligence in them. When saints are presented with difficult situation, they assume that the spiritual in them, the divine consciousness, with which they have a close communion knows all, sees all and has answer for all that it will occur in the perfect time. With this kind of awareness they maintain harmony and peace in their lives. Chavara's slogan was that this is not our work but God's, and that God would provide once we do what we can.<sup>1</sup> All the success and achievements, small or big, he saw as a sign of God's powerful presence and boundless love for him as well as for the community he was called to serve.

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<sup>1</sup>Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 470.



#### **10.4. Gratitude and Abundance**

Saint Chavara accepted life as a gift with a generous and grateful heart. The gratitude for this gift always filled him at every step of his life so that everything else remained trivial. He maintained awareness that we truly possess nothing in ourselves; all belong to God, including all our human faculties. By offering life to the Lord or employing it to serve the giver of gifts, one can multiply and magnify it, for generosity begets generosity, charity begets charity. Saint Francis of Assisi understood that it is by giving we receive; so, he gave away everything to receive more, and indeed he did receive more. Apostles asked Jesus to perform miracles to feed the people who had been listening to the Lord for many days. The materials for the miracles were actually inside; they did not have to go outside. What happened when five loaves and two fishes were handed over to Jesus? The attitude to give away in gratitude made the miracle happen when the Lord's power enjoined on them. When we surrender, the giver, the true resourceful engineer and architect, knows how to make the best out of it. What is needed is willingness and permission to place it in the hands of the giver with trust and confidence; then, one will see miracles. It is this kind of miracle that we witness in the life of Saint Chavara.

"Here am I; Send me!" (Isa 6:8). Chavara asked the Lord to send him which the Lord did. He sent him not with empty hands but with the Spirit of God. Endowed with the Spirit, Chavara could turn the human brokenness into a best quality self. Multiplication of fish and bread is a true metaphor of our interior life.<sup>1</sup> When we give totally – our mind, heart and body to God – he moves the mountain, in

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<sup>1</sup>Erving, "Multiply Our Gifts in Confidence," 24-25.

and through and for us. Momentous things happen with surrender and abandonment which is the highest form of trust and faith. The trust in the providence of God, as we saw earlier, was Chavara's spiritual capital. Investing this spiritual capital, he never failed to bring to fruition what he was looking for. When we hand all that we have to the Lord in trust miraculous things happen.

God surpasses our greatest desires when we surrender in faith. Faith here is a confident trust in the One who can fulfil all our desires in magnificent ways that surpass all our calculations. Sometimes humans cannot give away that easily and they tend to hoard a little, in case there is an emergency. This tendency to reserve or cover up a little from the whole is a reflection of the lack of trust in the providence of God. It is the fear of being impoverished, which is expressed in the common thinking, "if I give up, what, then, will I have?" Jesus was requesting Saint Chavara to feed the spiritually, morally and culturally impoverished masses. Saint Chavara's resources were meagre, environment was not great, still he did not reserve anything but surrendered all and, thus, he was completely emptied to be filled up from the Lord's abundance. The generosity and mercy he showed was returned in manifold ways.

### **10.5. The Power in Surrender**

The need for control is part of human nature. We want control over our environment, body, and mind; we look for control on other people too. This need for control is often the source of many human problems. With limitations of the created nature, humans find helpless in various situation. Our control on nature and its destructive powers is minimal and often we become victims of such uncontrollable powers of nature. There are lots of ways to respond to this

creaturely helplessness. One beneficial approach is to 'let go' and surrender. Surrendering is incredibly powerful in some instances. To surrender is absolutely active. Surrendering is not done once and for all; it is done over and over again. Surrender in faith to the One who is benevolent and omnipotent empowers the surrendered beyond calculation.

According to the *Twelve Steps of Alcoholic Anonymous*, surrender to a higher power is imperative in the alcoholic to regain control of life. Excessive striving seems to produce distraction and negative energy. This understanding helped Saint Chavara to have complete submission to the will of God.

Psychologists emphasize the need of acceptance for a happy and peaceful life. But acceptance does not come by any technique or trick. Acceptance needs a radical recalibration of our mind-sets as well as complete trust and faith in God's plan. Unless one cannot give up one's plan and see through faith something more beautiful than what is given away, one may not be able accept the apparently unattractive and lowly things. Often it is the pride and stubbornness that prevent us from total acceptance.

### **10.6. Forgiveness and Reconciliation**

Bitterness is an attitude of anger and resentment over what appears to be justified grievance. The bitter person is often intent on getting revenge, though, instead, he often gets ulcers and such organ damages and finally rejection from others who do not want to be around a hyper critical and fault finding person. Bitterness may be directed toward others and God. Unlike anger which can appear and disappear, bitterness tends to persist sometimes for a lifetime. They rarely show willingness to forgive.

Eventually, they sink into the self-created swamp of negativism, hypercriticism, and self pity.<sup>1</sup>

Forgiveness involves one's willingness to abandon one's right to resentment, negative judgment or even passive aggressive behaviour. Doing something positive will accelerate the momentum of complete reconciliation. Fostering undeserved compassion, generosity and love towards the perpetrator are the positive way of overcoming the need for revenge. Forgiveness goes beyond human logic and reasoning. It is divine and calls for developing spiritual outlook, compassion, humility, and trust in the Lord who heals us and guides us.

Endurance in love, hope, and charity brings the best for all. In writing chronicles, Chavara was extra cautious that he would not make any unnecessary remarks that would tarnish any one's name and fame even in dealing with his opponents. Once Antony Kudakkachira, one of the priests of the Syro-Malabar Church, was arbitrarily moving along with his personal agendas and was creating troubles to the people of God. Penning about him in the *Nalagamangal*, Saint Chavara showed extreme sensitivity, though he had every right to to make punitive action. He did not want to discredit him; hence, he prayed to keep him straight so that he may not sway either to the right or to the left due to his frailties and commit any wrong.<sup>2</sup>

God always open new doors when we are willing to forgive. Recall the incident of preventing Chavara's formal entry in the parish after his tonsure. Probably, the parish community felt that their revered traditions were not heeded and took offence and was waiting for the time to

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<sup>1</sup>Collins, *Christian Counselling*, 800.

<sup>2</sup>CWC, IV: *Letters*, 183-184.

react. In all these, Saint Chavara, innocent as he was, suffered humiliation beyond words. In the end, an unplanned reception was accorded to him with all pomp in another place. Eventually, the parish community felt that their reaction was inappropriate. Dialogue and discussions happened and all got reconciled. Later, Saint Chavara continually came to this community for its great feast and delivered the sermon.

Whether we feel personally responsible for our problems or not, suffering apparently helps us to grow and mature psychologically and spiritually. Problems refine faith, make one more Christ-like, teach us about God and produce perseverance and character. Caring and understanding for our fellow human being's weakness is enhanced often by one's own suffering.

Saint Chavara's attitude to opponents was like that of Jesus; no wonder as a true disciple who followed Jesus, he displayed the qualities of the Master. Jesus did not abandon the panicked and lost disciples after his crucifixion. They were going to Emmaus away from Jerusalem having not much hope left in them. Jesus joined and walked along with them shared their feelings, admonished and corrected them. He gave himself to them in the Eucharist (Lk 24:30-31), and thereby they could recognize him. In dealing with detractors or stubborn people Jesus moved along with them without losing friendliness. He distinguished between sin and sinner. Although Saint Chavara never imposed himself upon others, he never permitted his own self to be contaminated by what was going around. This may not happen ordinarily, unless, one has a powerful light within to dispel the darkness around.

**10.7. Mediator and Reconciler**

Being a man with the signature of God on him, Chavara could reconcile many groups and quell ethnic strife and infights among rival factions in the parishes. One of the families, which was closely associated in helping to put up Mannanam Monastery, was Perumalil. It is they who helped in exploring and identifying land in the area. A lot of search for appropriate land had already happened. It is at this point they located the Mannanam hill and thought it would be the right place. By the grace of God it happened to be in the ownership of Perumalil family. This family helped the first team by cash and kind and the community was grateful to them. Being influential people, legal requirements were made without delay. They provided water and food to the labourers in the initial times. At every step they were immensely helpful. In the course of time some difficulties arose as the superior of the Mannanam monastery sacked the supervisor from the Perumalil family for some reasons. This led to a rupture in the relationship. Fr. Porukara Elisha, the then Prior, who knew all the history and the benefits that the community received from the beginning, had to do it despite all the gratitude they have for the family. Nevertheless, the householder took offence at it and severed the relationship with Mannanam community and stopped going over there even for the Holy Mass.

Saint Chavara was very sad at the turn of events. He did not want good Christians to be alienated from the Church by one reason or another. He knew Prior Elisha as a prudent man and wondered how this could happen. He walked over to the monastery and met the prior and inquired about everything. Then he visited Perumalil family; when he got there, the householder was in an irreconcilable mood and did not show any interest to welcome Chavara. He knew

that it resulted from misunderstanding. Saint Chavara being a man borne with wisdom, courage, and prudence broached the issue. At this time the householder was in great distress as he had one of his family members being seriously ill. He had come to know that medical science could do very little with the patient and had lost hope on the patient. Chavara offered to pray and conversed with the people who stood by. He, then, told the family: "God will see that your son is healed; be consoled now." Then, he engaged in conversation assuring them that Mannanam community loves and cares for them and ever grateful for all the good will they showed on different occasions. Slowly, he could dispel the clouds of misunderstanding. The family apologized for the unnecessary problems warranted forth. By this time it was told from the patient's room that the patient was feeling better as his temperature had come down. Reconciliation is pleasing to God and heals not only body but the whole person. Saint Chavara did not want to lose the good that come from warm relationships. He knew that if bitterness and resentment were left unresolved, they will fester and spread much like cancer and become detrimental to all parties concerned. Therefore, at the earliest he wanted to move into the path of reconciliation. In his *Chavarul* (Last Testament), keeping warm relationship in the families was made a matter of high urgency. Saint Chavara was always ready to extend the hands of friendship and forgiveness.

Antony Thondanattu was a trouble maker in the Malabar Church during the time of Saint Chavara. His over enthusiasm and efficiency sometimes went overboard and created a lot of troubles for Saint Chavara. With the intention of becoming a member, he joined the newly founded religious community at Mannanam; he, however, got displeased with some decision of the superior and left

the community challenging that he will put up another monastic community elsewhere. He succeeded in putting up a monastery in Plassanal, though it did not last long. Then, he joined the splinter groups after Roccas schism, got consecrated as Abdisho from a Nestorian Patriarch and reached Kerala in 1863. He spent few days at his office confinement and looked for reconciliation. Seeing that he cannot have acceptance among the faithful, like Chavara, slowly he returned to the Church accepting Chavara's leadership and the Episcopacy of Archbishop Bernadine. Though, he had many times taken offence against Chavara, Thondanattu knew that Chavara won't hold grudge against him. He was not courageous enough to approach the Archbishop. He wrote to Saint Chavara who by this time had shifted to Koonammavu.<sup>1</sup>

He met with Saint Chavara and allayed his fears. Chavara advised him to trust not only in God but also his representatives. Both the bishop and Fr. Leopold were happy that Chavara could work out a proper reconciliation with him. He was sent to Mannanam for retreat as required by the bishop. He even wanted to be part of Mannanam community rest of his life but some discouraged him. Subsequently, the irregularities were condoned and excommunication was withdrawn. He trusted Saint Chavara and was in close association with him. Unfortunately, later, by his personality flaw he fell off again by joining the Melus schism. This happened after Saint Chavara's death. May be that he lost a trusted friend and guide like Saint Chavara to keep him on track.

People with some personality disorders need constant vigilance and reassurance to retain them on track. Saint

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, I: *Chronicles*, 99; CSK, I: *Nalagamangal*, 120-121.



Chavara, inspired by the Spirit, could understand personalities and their needs and nurtured them accordingly. Love and good will manifested in times of need is powerful enough to change lives. Archbishop Bacinelli used the good office of Saint Chavara to bring Roccas to reconciliation, so that he could be sent away without losing his dignity. Although Roccas' party tried manipulation and threats against Saint Chavara and his colleagues during the bitter period of winning parishes to their respective sides, Saint Chavara put everything behind and whole-heartedly worked for a decent exit of Roccas. Saint Chavara had the mind and heart of his Lord who prayed and forgave his persecutors while hanging on the cross. Saint Chavara could always maintain a personal parental concern in his dealings with others. He always bestowed dignity to others. Jesus did the same with Judas who betrayed him and addressed him as 'my friend'; it was his earnest attempt to awaken Judas with love and concern. It is love that wins in the end, though it may experience short term failures.

In his *Last Testament*, Chavara reminds his parish family that anyone can retaliate and it is only animal instinct. Though animals instinctively retaliate, to ignore a wrong is possible only for a prudent, strong, and dignified person. Quoting stories, he reminded the parish family that to forgive is a sign of strength and highest honour.<sup>1</sup>

### **10.8. Empowering Love**

Anyone who identifies with Christ and Christ consciousness will have a share in his suffering, as it is an integral part of Christ consciousness. Jesus Christ became our redeemer on account of the suffering and violent death he courted in

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<sup>1</sup>CWC, IV: *Letters*, 104.

love. Accepting suffering for others for the sake of nurturing and saving them and for making up their deficits, especially of the loved ones, is a supreme form of love. By his very life, Jesus manifested the value of vicarious suffering. The weight of suffering inflicted by human misunderstanding or selfishness does not extinguish the fire of love and the joy that derives from such sufferings.

Chavara lived fully in the Church as a priest and religious, despite the constraints of religious traditions and practices of his time. In the unfavourable social, ecclesial, and political context, he could easily transcend those barriers and go beyond the borders of the systems as he was an authentic religious. Generally speaking, no forces can block love, forgiveness, compassion, etc. They are more powerful than their negative opposites. Love is the greatest force that keeps life and the world going.

Love and hope together become a healing balm when humans live in a fallen world that tends to hurt. The confident faith in an uplifting God now, here, and hereafter, imparts courage and confidence in oneself. Chavara drew his self-confidence from this awareness. A lot of talk about self-worth and self-esteem may not help in itself, unless one receives self-worth and self-love through someone who loves him or her in the heart. Feeling loved means feeling valued. God's love for us is constant; He will not love us more or less based on our behaviour. It starts to flow to me or I can experience it when I break from the routines of life, pause and focus on God's love, glory, forgiveness, etc. God and God's love are always present with us, but to feel it one must pause and shift attention to the spiritual and the transcendent. In this manner, saints like Chavara found God as someone who is very close to them like any other person. Saint Chavara could converse with God as one who

accompanies him, as if like a very close associate. We see examples of such conversations in his meditations and spiritual works. Though he looks on to himself as a sinner, he also sees the “love that covers the multitudes of sin” (1 Pet 4:8). The sins mentioned here may not be of mortal nature; rather, they must be covering his follies and shortcomings.

Christian charity enables us to see what is positive in others as God does. It was because of the ability to find good everywhere that God sent his only begotten Son to our world. Despite human frailties, God found that humans are still positive and redeemable even after the Fall and, hence, he gave his love through His Son. God cannot indulge in meaningless actions and pure negativity, as it is against the very nature of God.

### **10.9. *Bodhisattva* with Positive Emotions**

Saint Chavara was a *bodhisattva*, an enlightened being, which he attained by constant meditation on the Word of God and the revealed mysteries of God found in the Church teaching and traditions. Though *Bodhisattvas* achieve their liberation in this life itself, according to the Buddhist tradition, they remain on earth to help those who still need their assistance to attain liberation. Thus, an enlightened one becomes a source of light and grace to others in their sojourn. Saint Chavara was a *Bodhisattva* in this respect, who even though grew and matured in his ideals, always wanted to do much more good for the suffering brethren.

Buddhism advocates destruction of emotions and desires of all kinds. This, however, is a dehumanizing process. Of course, one needs to discipline desires and emotions and not destroy them altogether. Positively employing all human

faculties for the sake of higher goals and service of humanity is the ideal in Christian theology.

In his life, Chavara manifested many sterling qualities and virtues with right balance. The desire for pomp and fame never touched him. The good he did for six decades of lifespan made him immortal. A saint in Catholic Church is a very alive person. That is why devotees pray to the saints. Faithful enjoy many spiritual benefits and blessings through their intercessory powers. They express the same compassionate love for the humanity which they manifested in their lives. Heavenly life is not entirely removed from this life; it is a continuation of the life that has begun here on earth and is perfected in manifold manner; so, the faithful can relate and receive favours from them, as they are living now with their personalities intact with the Lord. Consequently, saints are powerful and their intercessions are a solace to the devotees.

### **10.10. From Brokenness to Integration**

Jesus could heal the broken and the wounded, for he was wounded and broken in many instances. Saint Paul tells that, except in sin, He identified with us. New researches in psychology make it amply clear, how humans undergo trauma and hurt even before they are born. The environment of conception and the time spent in mother's womb can make telling differences in the personality based on love and rejection the child receives. Jesus' birth was not in the normal fashion which resulted in confusion, dilemma and shame in Mary as she was a natural human being. The child in the womb also might have been affected by what happened to the Blessed Mother. Jesus and Mary, as full human beings, had no exception from their normal human experiences. He did not get even a little space to be born. In

his childhood, he had to flee from his own country as a fugitive.

Jesus was also rejected in his home town. His own disciple betrayed him for a few silver coins, and another one disowned him. He was misunderstood and broke completely, experiencing brokenness in its full measure as he was hanging on the cross. Jesus could understand human brokenness in all its depth. With all these experiences of brokenness, Jesus could easily develop mistrust in people and could become a reactionary criminal. But Jesus chose to trust and believe both people and the world, and tried to overcome his wounds by the power of love. Jesus, through his intimate relationship with the Father, could experience love and acceptance he missed in his surroundings; he could continually hear the words of his loving Father spoken to him, "You are my beloved son in whom I am well pleased (Lk 3:21).

Accepting and acknowledging the wounds and hurts of life and turning those to God in total trust can bring new life and integration. The lives of most saints, including Saint Chavara, amply exemplify this spiritual truth. Saint Chavara had his own share of troubles. Suffering seems to be the crucible in which God burns out all that is mean and lowly in human personality. God does not send hardships to humans without purpose. As he does so, he moulds persons into something that is more akin to the Divine. Saint Chavara reached wholeness and integration as he looked beyond the immediate happenings. When people are endowed with a sense of mission, they can easily surpass the troubles and can look beyond the immediate. Saint Chavara neutralized his scars and turned them into stars as he was driven by a sense of mission and purpose.

## CONCLUSION

### **Holistic Personality**

One of the fascinating words in the English language that has much interest for the general public is 'personality'. Although the word is often used in various contexts, primarily the term equates to the social skill that is able to attract positive reactions from a variety of persons under different circumstances. Contemporary definitions place emphasis on integrative and organizational function of the personality. Organization results from the personality that is an active force within the personality. It is this kind of an integrative and distinctive personality of Chavara that we have been exploring and examining in the foregoing discussion.

We watched a unique and integrative personality that had attained congruence in behaviour. This congruence or integration was primarily stemming from a basic spiritual outlook and mission he inherited and developed. Any integrative theology, whether known as psycho-theology or holistic theology, believes that a coherent understanding of reality begins with God's perspective mediated through general and special revelation. Developing a theology that relates revealed truths to humanity is not an elective but a requirement for any serious Christian. Till recently, Church only stressed the special revelation that is scripture and traditions. Today Church admits any non-contradictory set of findings deriving from nature, science, and different disciplines, as part of general revelation. The integrative approach also assumes that God may illumine the hearts created in his image to think his thoughts after him when human heart is in congruence with the Divine.

The holistic paradigms that we have analysed in the life of Saint Chavara were not developed based on any scientific understanding and pre-planned patterns, as may be the case with many academic theologians and spiritual authors; what we encounter in Saint Chavara was rather a natural unfolding of his holistic personality, which resulted from his response to the stirrings of the Spirit as well as his positive outlook towards persons and circumstances in his life. Thus, all what Chavara taught, wrote, and organized received a touch of his personality that was holistic in nature. In him faith and life were properly synthesized: spiritual, psychological, and physical dimensions of human nature were found with a sense of unity. Whatever he spoke and did had a touch of magnetic quality to draw people closer to him.

He was a conservative as well as a progressive person. Chavara was conservative and was a product of his time as his spiritual works and many other instructions and prescriptions indicate. However, we see him also setting his foot toward the future with ambitious goals and aspirations, where he could break the traditional patterns and paradigms. As a faithful son of the Church, he stood with the Church in all times and reconciled with the conflicts in himself, even in turbulent times; and he was also instrumental in reconciling others with the Church.

### **Integration Process**

Integration in human being does not happen automatically but through conflicts and tensions. An integrated life will have its natural vibrancy too as is displayed in Chavara. Researches tend to show that subjective wellbeing leads to the kind of behaviours that bring about success. Despite all the odds Chavara faced in the socio-cultural, economic and

ecclesial circumstances, as suggested by positive psychologies, he maintained happiness inwardly and outwardly by meaningful and positive engagement with others. As Chavara was engaged, involved, and fully committed all through, he got so absorbed in the sacred milieu, time passed quickly and his ego was lost in the process. It is about this ego that Jesus tells us while speaking about discipleship: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me" (Lk 9:23).

Chavara was a man who looked beyond himself to the future and future generations as we see in his innovative services in education, publication, and other reforms in the Church. Chavara was a serene and happy person. He could start many pioneering apostolates which displayed his concern for the wellbeing of others. Researches have confirmed strong positive relationship between life satisfaction and orientations toward the future. The culture and the time period humans are born and brought up definitely influence all what humans do. The Word of God, as we have it, is the product of many influences and cultural factors; but as we know, above all, it contains precious gems to modify any human personality. A properly formed self and its sense of identity can transcend much of the natural limitations as it happened in the life of Chavara. The power of self-actualization and self-realization is innate in humans, when humans are able to explore into the deeper depths of their selves. As a contemplative and mystic, Chavara was exploring his own self while fully engaged in realizing all that was good and meaningful for the Church and society.



### **Holiness Redefined and Relocated**

Holiness is often deemed to be a kind of passive attribute added to the soul. There is also a popular apprehension that it could be contaminated, if one were to enter deeply into the human world. In the Gospel, therefore, pharisaic holiness demanded external purifications to maintain holiness. Just as Jesus had redefined holiness by crossing over the traditional boundaries, Chavara too relocated it by involving in the world compassionately. Bearing the compassionate love of God in every new start up, he dared to carry a different kind of holiness along with the traditional one. He did not have to forgo or give up anything much from the traditions. He had learned the art of blending the old and the new. Thus, he didn't break the rules or traditions. By his holistic psycho-theological vision and understanding, he kept himself as a vibrant personality and imbibed the same to others through his multifaceted ministries and apostolates; thus, he realized the theological maxim that a fully lived human life is the glory of God. Stressing the need of personal involvement in the lives of the people of God, Pope Francis said: "Life means getting our feet dirty from the dust-filled roads of life and history." Chavara was imitating Christ at every step. It is not the speculative theology that enlivened him but the personal experience of God in Christ emerging from the depths of his personality and embracing everything God loved.

Chavara's life was holistic. His ministry and mission bore the characteristics of a holistic life. Life becomes whole when being, doing, and having are integrated in right proportions. Values, ideals and desires come together to produce a harmonious personality. It is like a triangle where each side supports the others. *Beingness* is the experience being of totally present to oneself and at rest within oneself.

*Havingness* is the ability to allow and accept things and people in our lives and developing good relationships. *Doing* is movement or activity that lets the creative energy flow from oneself to others and from others to oneself. A life and mission emanating from this kind of life would naturally be filled with vitality and vibrancy, and could touch and transform humanity. Theology is no more, then, a speculative discipline but a lifebound as well as life-related like applied psychology.

### **Today's Relevance**

Does Chavara, who lived in the nineteenth century pre-Vatican period, offer anything worth and meaningful to the contemporary world? Panthaplackal observes: Saint Chavara is an answer to the modern world tensed with activity and tired of involvement, a world that experiences loneliness without a God and neighbour, a world which cannot be silent for a moment and pray. Peter Cardinal Palaazini, Prefect of the Congregation for the Cause of Saints, remarked: "Even though he could declare on his deathbed that he had always kept his baptismal innocence, he had a deep sense of sin. In this sense he is a question mark to the modern world which seriously lacks the same sense of sin."

Chavara had genuine love in his heart. With that genuine love he embraced God, world, and others. Healthy spirituality always grows and nurtures a love for life. If we do not truly love life, we will never truly love anyone else and will be ambivalent about relationships. Those who genuinely love life will treat life as sacred. They will care for the world; they will care for generations. Love is the best criterion by which both insiders and outsiders recognize a true follower of Christ (Jn 13:34-35). In his lifetime to the

people around him, Chavara was a channel of God's love and grace.

He extended his wings fully and flew to the horizons touching the subsequent centuries. As we live in the twenty-first century, we can still feel and experience the breeze of that fluttering. He was not born immortal; rather he achieved immortality by a life virtue and good work aimed at the holistic life of others. He lives in the heart of God and God's people. He continues to be a true blessing to the Church and the humanity at large.

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# PSYCHO-THEOLOGICAL PARADIGMS

## IN SAINT KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA

*Psycho-Theological Paradigms in Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara* invites the readers to look into the life of Saint Chavara from a holistic perspective which encompasses spirituality, theology, psychology and much more. Psycho-spiritual wholeness aims at the full transcendent unfolding of the human person in Christ. The book sheds light on the personal, communal and ecclesial dimensions of Saint Chavara's life. Human beings are whole-makers, synthesizers of a wide variety of bodily, perceptual, cognitive, behavioural and spiritual experiences. The author offers a compelling reading on how Chavara synthesized all these realms into a meaningful whole. To him the divine order for wholeness is spirit over mind and mind over body. Saint Chavara was a whole person with a unifying pattern of thought and feeling which gave coherence to everything he did. He could bridge the gap between the sacred and secular, spiritual and material by unleashing the forces of integration. How to nurture and nourish each human dimension is a challenging question. This book renders a different narrative to the readers on Saint Chavara highlighting the psychological and theological dimensions.



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