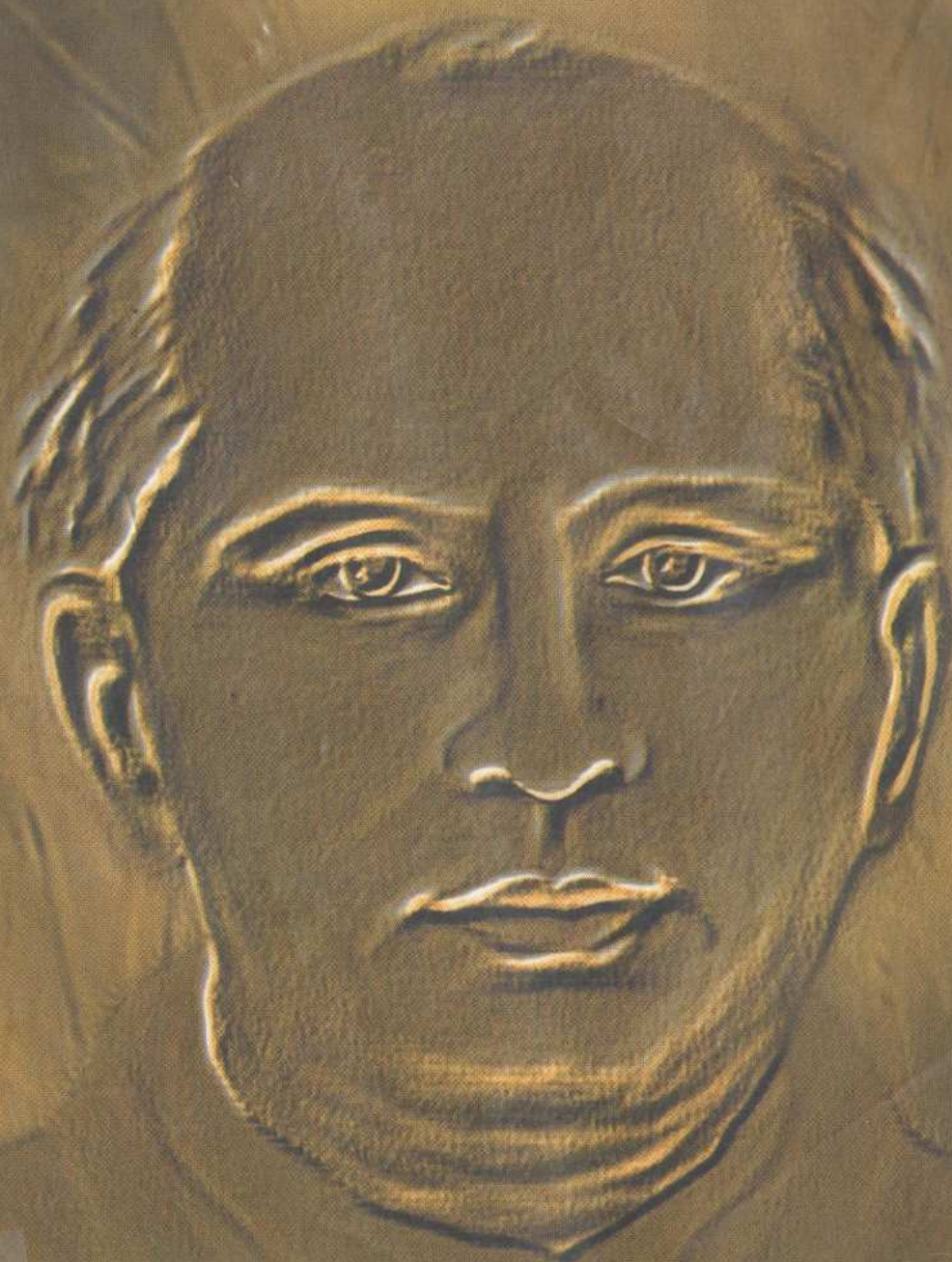


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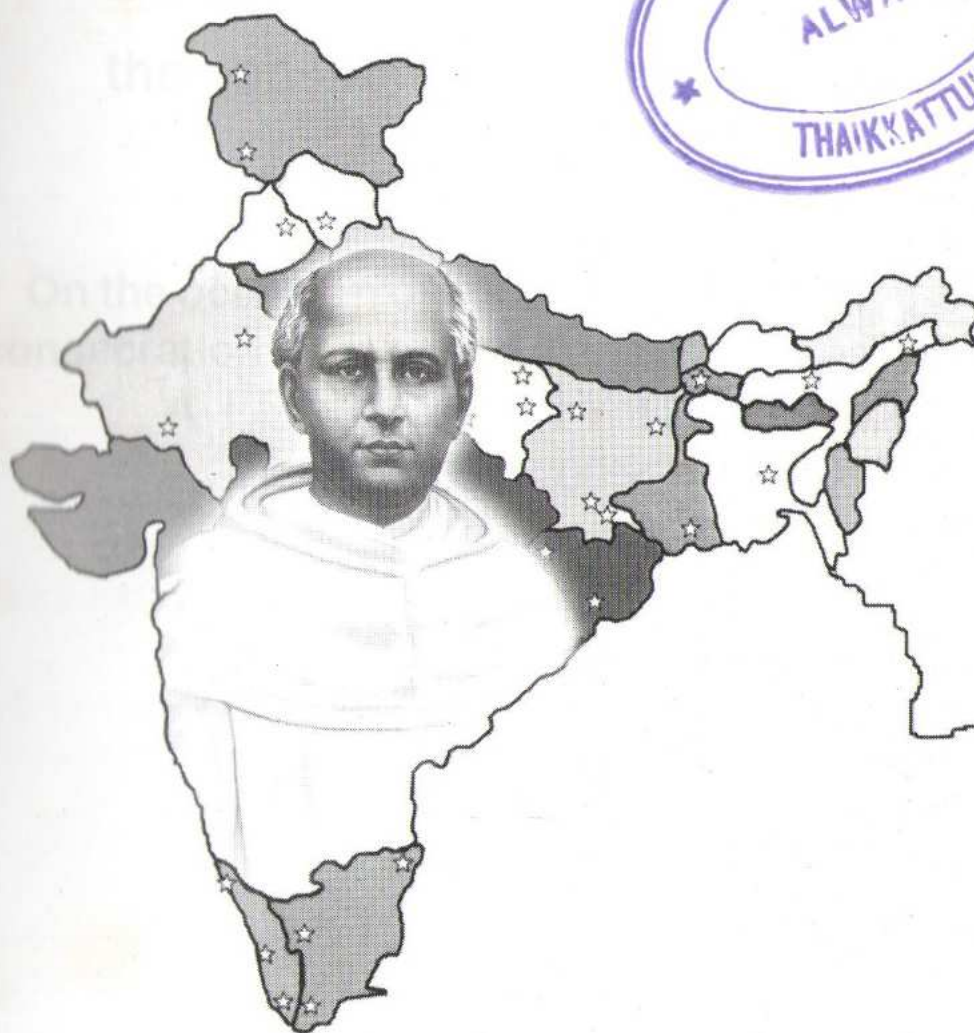
A PEARL TRULY INDIAN

BLESSED KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA



FR. THOMAS PANTHAPLACKAL CMI

A PEARL TRULY INDIAN



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(A Brief Biography on Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara)

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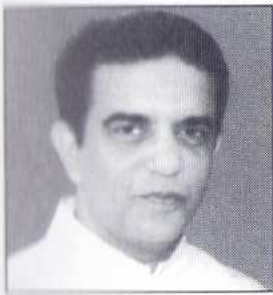


**Dedicated
to
the consecrated people of India**

**On the occasion of 150th year of the religious
consecration of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara
'A PEARL TRULY INDIAN'
1855-2005**

Fr. Thomas Panthaplackal CMI

**THE CMI GENERALATE
Ernakulam - 682 011
2005**



A WORD OF INTRODUCTION

It was after a very serious study on the life, activities and spirituality of Blessed Chavara, that Archbishop Antonius Petti, the promoter General of Faith, Rome, could present Blessed Chavara in 1983, as a pearl truly Indian and Oriental . The same has been re-affirmed by illustrious persons like Pope John Paul II, Mr. R. Venkataraman, the former president of India, the Major Archbishop Cardinal Varkey Vithayathil of the Syro-Malabar Church, the apostolic church of St.Thomas and Prof. A Sreedharamenon, a Kerala historian,

It gives me great pleasure to introduce this brief biography of our founder Blessed Chavara to the English speaking people around the world. Fr. Thomas Panthaplackal, my comfrere has taken the pain to sketch the life, activities, writings and spirituality of the Blessed in a picturesque manner for easy reading. Here he has also presented the religious and social settings of the early 19th century Kerala, in order to identify the distinctive and original contributions of Blessed Chavara for the country and the Church.

My sincere thanks and hearty congratulations to Fr. Thomas . I am also very happy to present this small book to all the promoters and lovers of Blessed Chavara. Let us hope that this book will help the readers to internalize Blessed Chavara's spirit of love for God, church and society.

Ernakulam
19th March 2005

Fr. Antony Kariyil CMI
The Prior General
Prior General's House

A WORD OF APPRECIATION

Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara is an authentic Indian, a pearl truly oriental, and not just one among the many Causes of India, as there have been many European missionaries, both men and women, who have worked in this vast country.

In fact, Kuriakose Elias Chavara is a native of India, born at Kainakary in Kerala, on 10th February, 1805, of an indigenous family. He had his formation in the religious Institute of the place (1818-1829), was ordained priest on 29th November, 1829 and became a religious on 8th December, 1855; worked among and for the people of his country. He was engaged in apostolic activities all along his native land, and his days full of merit came to a close at Koonammavu on 3rd January, 1871, lamented and admired by all.

A very zealous priest, Fr. Chavara was a true apostle of the renovation of the Christian life of Malabar (Kerala). It will not be an exaggeration to affirm that there was no aspect of the ecclesial life of Malabar which had not gained in some form by his beneficial influence. He was the initiator of the organized works of charity in Kerala. He started the first catholic printing press in Kerala, founded schools, not only for the Catholics but also for those belonging to other religions and especially for those belonging to the lower castes. He was a true apostle of the sanctity of family life. He worked

unceasingly for the spiritual renewal of the family, formulating besides norms and rules for leading an upright life. He was the reformer and organizer of the Syro-Malabar liturgy. He studied the Syro-Malabar rite so also the Latin rite. He enriched the Syro-Malabar rite wherever necessary by borrowing elements from the Latin rite. Having collected the available manuscripts he compiled book of the divine office and other liturgical books, all of which were in daily use in the Church until 1962, when the liturgical books began to be translated to the vernacular. He adapted also a few devotions, always keeping in mind the tradition and culture of the people.

In all the manifestations of his intense apostolic activity, the Servant of God figures as a perfect exponent of his country, formed in the millennial culture of his country, and above all an affectionate supporter of the customs and traditions of the place resulting in the happy combination of natural and cultural background and Christian faith, there emerged the spiritual personality of Kuriakose Elias Chavara.

Archbishop Antonius Petti,
Promoter General of Faith, Rome
Wrote in the Relatio at Vota
22nd November 1983



THE WISH OF THE AUTHOR

By knowing only one can love;
By loving only one can appreciate;
By appreciating only one can follow.

It is easy for the one to follow Jesus
By following another, who followed Jesus closely
Today, we need models to know, love and follow
That they may lead us to the truth that is Jesus himself.

Here is a man named Kuriakose Elias Chavara,
A model truly Indian and Oriental,
A model to follow Jesus of Nazareth
He shows us how to love and serve others
In family life, Religious life and Priestly life.

Let this brief biography of Blessed Chavara,
Help, inspire and lead you
To follow Jesus in your own unique way,
By meeting Jesus in your neighbours;
Serving them as Blessed Chavara did.
It is my wish and prayer!

Ernakulam
19th March 2005

Fr. Thomas Panthaplackal CMI
CMI Generalate

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THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE 19TH CENTURY KERALA

Introduction

As a contemplative in action Blessed Chavara and his co-workers took the initiative and leadership to renew the church of Kerala by starting two religious congregations, Carmelities of Mary Immaculate (CMI) for men and the Congregation of Mother of Carmel (CMC) for women. Through his various activities, he prepared the religious, priests and the laity for the spiritual and social up-lift of the Church and society.

The study on any aspect of a person necessarily needs to include an understanding of the time, place and the various circumstances in which that person lived and the cultural and religious elements around him or her. Now we look into the beginning of the 19th century Kerala to identify the social and church settings in which Blessed Chavara became a great champion with his own special contributions.

1. The Land Kerala

Kerala, that witnessed the birth of great philosophers like Sri Sankarachariya and social and religious reformers like Chavara and Sri Narayana Guru, is from the point of view of its geographical position, the joint gift of the ever blue Arabian sea on the west and the ever green Western Ghats on the east. Though very small in area among the states of the Indian Union, the picturesque variety of the landscape and the abundance of plant and animal life, invest this region with a distinct personality.¹ Kerala culture has been an integral part of the mainstream Indian culture. At the same time its special geographical position enabled Kerala to enjoy its own outlook, way of life, culture and institutions peculiar to itself. From ancient times Kerala emerged as the meeting ground of all Indian religions and philosophical systems as well as the most important world religions such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam².

2. The Situation of the Kerala Church

The St. Thomas Christians of Kerala trace their origin back to the Apostle Thomas. They form the most ancient christian community of India and the Far-East.³ They were united in faith and organization until the arrival of the Portuguese in the sixteenth century. Later the Portuguese Missionaries “sowed among them the seeds of division”.⁴ It is clear from the petition given to the queen of Portugal by the representatives of the St. Thomas Christians, Malpan Thoma Cariattil and Thomman Paremmakkal, that the foreign missionaries at work in India were in no way helpful, but a scandal and cause of division among the St. Thomas Community.⁵

From 1599 up to 1896, the St. Thomas Christians an Oriental Church, were under the Latin bishops, who were appointed either by

Portuguese Padroado or by the Roman congregation of *Propaganda Fide*. At the time of Blessed Chavara, the bishops or the missionaries at work belonged to the Carmelite Order. The earlier missionaries or the Carmelites could not appreciate the time-honoured traditions and practices of the country.⁶ It is a fact that most of the good endeavours of the St. Thomas Christians for the cause of the Malabar Church were misinterpreted or reported badly to Rome by the missionaries.⁷ The great historian of the Malabar Church, late Fr. Placid Podipara CMI writes:

In those days to speak of a ritual bishop, not to say of a bishop of one's own community, was considered a great crime. Seven CMI fathers who wrote to the Holy See with this mind were expelled from the CMI congregation by Msgr. Leonard. To write to the Holy See was declared by him "a reserved sin" to absolve which special faculty was to be had.⁸

Chavara identified the steady decline in the spiritual life of the community of St. Thomas Christians and the absence of a canonised saint in a community of Apostolic origin.⁹ This is not to underestimate in any way all the good done by the missionaries for the Kerala Church. The church in question during this particular period of time also was faced with a serious schism to solve which Chavara had to play a vital role.

3. Theological and Seminary Training

In the history of the Church of Malabar, there existed many parochial seminaries, similar to the *Gurukulams*,¹⁰ under *Malpans*,¹¹ like the one under Fr. Thomas Palackal in Pallipuram. But they were not sufficient to meet the needs of the Church and some of the Malpas did not conduct them properly. Chavara writes in his chronicles:

In some of the parochial seminaries *Malpans* showed more care and interest in the studies of their own relatives or those whom they loved more and for the rest, just taught the essentials of how to conduct the H. Mass and the Divine Office.¹²

Later major seminaries were established in noted centres like Cranganore, Vaipikot, Sampaloor, Angamali, Alangat, Kauthuruthy and Verapoly.¹³ In the course of time all of them fell off except the one at Verapoly and this was the only major seminary for Latins at the beginning of the 19th century.¹⁴

Yet another problem facing the seminaries was the lack of good spiritual, theological and moral books printed in Malayalam or Syriac. It caused a great setback in the seminary formation.¹⁵

The contemporary and the successor of Chavara, Fr. Kuriakose Elisha Porukara writes:

The Divine Office which was traditionally used on feasts and ferial days was slowly getting out of use (because many of them were in manuscript form or out of print)... And as books were rare, there was no uniformity in the Syrian Canonical prayers which were in use among the priests.¹⁶

4. Print Media and Propagation of Faith

As regards the printing press, there were only two printing establishments in Kerala at the time of Chavara: the government press at Trivandrum and the CMS Protestant press at Kottayam, and there was no press for the catholics.¹⁷ It is very clear from the biography of Fr. Thomas Palackal, Chavara's rector, that what a great struggle and even humiliation the *Malpan* had endured in collecting books from different sources and copying some of them for his seminary.¹⁸

The major seminary at Verapoly was under the propaganda and was fully controlled by the Latins. There the students of the Syro-Malabar Church were often ill-treated and sometimes deprived of their studies. Chavara himself was the victim of such an experience and returned greatly humiliated after having gone to Verapoly with two companions to further his Latin studies.¹⁹ This gives us some idea about the situation of seminaries in Kerala at the time of Bl. Chavara.

5. Religious communities among the St. Thomas Christians

It was not an unusual thing for the Christians of India, from the beginning to be inclined to monastic life, as they were in a country, which, from the Upanishadic times to the modern, has been venerating 'Rishis' (seers) and sages like Gaudama, Gargi, Vasishta, Vyasa and Sri Rama Krishna, and where Buddhist monasticism has flourished for a long time.²⁰

The wellknown historian Ossorius has recorded that from the time of the St. Thomas Christians in India, there were religious men and women who lived in caves keeping celibacy and poverty with high esteem. From some of the letters sent to Pope Urbanus VIII by Archdeacon Geevarghese, it is clear that in the beginning of the 17th century he had started a religious congregation at Edappally called "The Congregation of St. Thomas"²¹. There was also a monastery at Angamaly, as the Archbishop Stephen de Britto testifies.²² But this congregation did not last long.

Archbishop Grazia, the successor of Archbishop Britto, became unfriendly and even requested the Propaganda Congregation for its suppression. It could not survive the confusion that followed

the “Coonan Cross Oath” of 1653.²³ Thereafter nothing is heard of the Congregation of St. Thomas.²⁴

The Carmelite missionary Paulinus of St. Bartholomew also testifies to the growth and decline of Indian monasteries:

There were also monasteries of the like at Edappally, Angamaly and Milapuri on the coast of Coramandel but they all fell into decline after the Portuguese had established themselves on the coast of Malabar.²⁵

The St. Thomas Christians in course of time came in contact with several European religious orders like the Franciscans, Dominicans, Jesuits and Carmelites, who came for mission work in India.²⁶ Even the Jesuits and Carmelites who ruled over the St. Thomas Christians for long, from the 16th century, could not revive the long extinct religious life among them.²⁷

6. The Role of Women in the Church and Society

One of the greatest contributions of the Catholic Church to the modern world is the organized religious women communities, in the service of the suffering humanity, by means of their social and charitable institutions. As far as the St. Thomas womenfolk were concerned, till the second half of the 19th century, they did not come to the fore. There was no organized group of social workers or religious community among them, who came forward with humanitarian services. So there was no indigenous religious house for men or women when Fr. Chavara and others planned to start one to suit the needs of the Church.

7. The Educational Situation

Kerala has occupied a prominent place on the educational map of the country from time immemorial. A. Sreedharamenon, the author

of the 'Social and Cultural History of India, Kerala' writes:

With the rise of the temple to a place of prominence in the social and cultural life of the people, educational institutions received special attention as they formed an integral part of the temple complex itself.... Thus the practice of running educational institutions as part of the Hindu temple complex was a legacy of Buddhism and Jainism.²⁸

The 'Salais' (educational institutions attached to the temples), and 'Sabha Mutts' (temple universities) served in a way the needs of theological education as far as the Hindus were concerned. The Muslims had their 'Madrasas' and Arabic colleges and the former attached to the mosques were used to give a course of religious instruction.²⁹ While 'Salais' and 'Sabha Mutts' were mainly intended for the education of the brahmin youth, *Ezhuthupallis* (village schools), directed by *Ezhuthachan* or *Asan* (school master), functioned for the general education of the non-brahmins.³⁰ Fr. Chavara also did his primary education in such a village school.³¹

By the beginning of the 19th century the state government began to take more interest in the field of education in line with the Protestant missionaries.³² And both Hindus and Protestants profited much out of this. But the educational condition of the catholics was deplorable. On the one hand, the catholic missionaries who had been working in Kerala much earlier than the protestant missionaries did not take much interest in the educational needs of their flock.³³ On the other hand, the catholic community were afraid of western education on account of the spread of protestantism in the country. Any way, the catholics as a whole were very poor in the field of education till the first half of the 19th century.

8. Centre for Faith Formation

Another important point to be considered concerns the conversion of the infidels. There was only one catechumenate at Verapoly in Kerala before 1850's. The custom followed was that the adult candidates for baptism had to be sent to the catechumenate at the residence of the Vicar Apostolic.³⁴

9. Care of the Sick and Dying

Another area of life, at the time of Chavara, also has to be thought of in this context, namely, the area of the care of the aged and dying. In the history of the life of the Church in Kerala, before the time of Chavara, there was no charitable institute as such, where the aged persons or orphans were cared for and protected; there was no pious association to help the dying in a spiritual way.³⁵

10. The Unity of the Church in Trouble

The Syro-Malabar Church of Chavara's time was unable to enjoy its innate right to have a native bishop of its own as there was Latin control and domination over the Church. The Persian Church also was trying to reenter into the Kerala Church administration. Yet another problem was that the happenings in the West, affecting the unity of the Church, had their repercussions strongly felt here and the Church of Kerala was dividing into various denominations.

Blessed Chavara as a visionary and prophet of the times took the initiatives to solve the then existing problems in the Church and society of Kerala through his life and activities.

A BRIEF LIFE SKETCH OF BLESSED CHAVARA

In 1986, on February 8, His Holiness Pope John Paul II declared Kuriakose Elias Chavara Blessed. On the occasion His Holiness introduced Chavara in these words:

Kuriakose Elias Chavara is one who was born in Kerala, who lived in this land for 65 years and laboured arduously for the renovation of Christian life and growth of the Church. His deep love of Christ filled him with apostolic zeal, which has helped in a special way to preserve and strengthen the unity of the Church. In the apostolic activities he generously cooperated with all, especially with priests and his confreres in religion. Today the Church looking back remembers him with love and gratitude³⁶.

1. Chavara's Childhood

Fr. Chavara was born on February 10, 1805 of parents Kuriako and Mariam in the village of Kainakary in Kuttanadu³⁷. The same year on September 8, the child Kuriakose was dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary at the Marian shrine in Vechoor. Chavara, in his old age, recalls this event in his poetic work *Athmanuthapam*

*The Lord of mercy in His great compassion
To His beloved Mother did enslave me
And while on nectar mother on earth fed me
Mary at her feet, houtly kept me safe
Accept him as your humble slave
To your maternal love, I entrust him
My humble worthless womb's "tender fruit"
So saying, me her infant child
At Mary's feet, she humbly laid
An offering of holy waters and fragrant flowers
Handing me o'er to my mother, the august priest
Declared in deliberate tone thus to her,
"Tend him with care; know you that he's no more yours
But our Lady's- solemn your sacred bond!"³⁸.*

Regarding the formation he received from his pious mother, Fr. Chavara, again recalls:

*'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.*

*Huddled close to her feet, I learnt aright
Gently of matters sublime, of my Faith
As at midnight she rose and knelt at prayer
Warding off sleep and petty dullness to the air
Long hours, on her knees in prayer she stayed
Leaning on her then I would seat myself
While devoutly, a string of pious words*

To mother of God and the Christ King of kings.

In thanks and praise, heart strong with solid Faith

Light Eternal, Jesus Christ, save us all

Hail earth-born flower, Lord Immortal!

Thus she 'ld pray in her melodious voice

And I list'ning to the lullaby sweet

Near my gentle mother, quietly reposed³⁹.

2. Chavara's Seminary Life

At the age of five he began his studies in the village school, called *kalari* under a master, where he continued his studies until he was ten years old⁴⁰. Then the Rev. Thoma Malpan invited him to his seminary at Pallipuram. Subsequently he spent about two years in the parish rectory under the care of the zealous and loving parish priest. Here his parents discerned his divine call⁴¹. In the year 1818, he joined the Pallipuram seminary under the tutelage of Malpan Thomas Palackal⁴². Not long after, there was an epidemic in Kainakary and surroundings. His loving father, his good mother, and his only brother fell prey to the epidemic⁴³. In the meantime his four sisters got married. There was left in the family only his sister-in-law with her infant daughter. Consequently his uncles, other relatives and friends were insisting Kuriakose to return home from the seminary to continue the Chavara family. But the young cleric met his eldest sister at Edathua and her family and asked them to manage the affairs of the Chavara family as well, until his niece came to age and got married and settled at Chavara. Having organized these matters, young Kuriakose returned to the seminary and applied himself to his studies with greater dedication to his divine call⁴⁴.

On November 29, 1829, at the age of 24, Bishop Maurilius Stabilini, Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly ordained him priest at St.

Andrew's Church, Arthungal. In the Divine Liturgy which he concelebrated with the ordaining bishop, his special intention was for the realization of the religious institute which was being contemplated by Malpan Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara along with Chavara himself and Jacob Kanianthara⁴⁵. After ordination and first Mass at Chenankari, Fr. Chavara went round meeting the people. Feeling deeply how the faithful were yearning for spiritual food, he preached in a few churches. On the invitation of the faithful and of the parish priest at Pulincunnu, he preached also a spiritual retreat to the faithful. The spiritual benefit people received from the retreat was so great that people even after several years could recall his sermons and draw spiritual benefit out of them⁴⁶.

3. The Fulfilment of a Great Desire - the Indigenous Religious Life

Thomas Palackal was relieved of his office as the secretary to the Vicar Apostolic, and had started a domestic seminary at Pallipuram in 1818. He was greatly devoted to St. Dominic and was following in the seminary the Dominican way of life along with the seminarians. Fr. Thomas Porukara already when he was a deacon, about the year 1822, had shared his idea of retiring from the world and leading a secluded religious life with his friend and neighbour Jacob Kanianthara. Frs Palackal and Porukara had several occasions to meet together at the vicariate of Verapoly or at Pallipuram and discuss the idea of a religious institute. Chavara too, then a deacon, often shared in these discussions. Slowly their idea of the religious life got matured⁴⁷. They proposed the matter to the bishop. Thus on November 1, 1829 Malpan Thomas Palackal and Fr. Thomas Porukara finally approached the Vicar Apostolic Bishop Maurilius Stabilini, then camping at St. Andrews church Arthungal with the request:

*'In this Malabar not even the priests have a religious institute (Thpasu Bhavanam). Consequently several good things are not being realized here. Hence it is our earnest desire that a religious institute (Darsana veedu) be started here, at least for priests'*⁴⁸.

The Vicar Apostolic Mgr. Stabilini encouraged them and granted permission to establish a religious house, and gave a patent letter addressed to the churches and the faithful of the Vicariate to contribute donations to establish the religious house. The Vicar Apostolic himself made the first donation Rs. 200⁴⁹. On May 11, 1831, the foundation stone for the proposed religious house at Mannanam dedicated to St. Joseph⁵⁰ was laid by Fr. Thomas Porukara at the order of the Vicar Apostolic. This was the first indigenous religious institute for men in the Indian Church of modern times⁵¹.

4. The whole responsibility on Chavara's Shoulders

More members began to join the religious institute at Mannanam. However they did not have any written rule or regulations. In 1840, the members then present resolved to start a community life, sharing their assets in common and meeting all their expenses from the community⁵². In 1841, on January 16, Malpan Thomas Palackal, and on January 8, 1846 Malpan Thomas Porukara died, leaving the whole responsibility of organising the religious community to Malpan Kuriakose Chavara⁵³. On December 8, 1855, the first anniversary of the official proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of our Blessed Mother, Fr. Chavara made the profession of the religious vows, before Fr. Marceline Berardi OCD, the delegate of the Vicar Apostolic, assuming the name of Kuriakose Elias of the Holy Family. Then his ten companions made their religious vows before Fr. Kuriakose of the Holy Family, who was constituted the Superior of the religious community. The new religious community

was known at the time as 'Servants of Mary Immaculate'⁵⁴. Later from 1858 by the influence of the Carmelite missionaries, the community began to be known as 'Servants of Mary Immaculate of Mount Carmel'.

5. Affiliation to the Discalced Carmelite Order

The common religious habit consisted of white cassock with leather belt. Fr. Chavara in his testament refers to it as an expression of their attachment to the Dominican Order⁵⁵. However there was also the brown scapular worn inside the habit. Archbishop Bernadine, the Vicar Apostolic gave to the members long white scapulars joining to the cassock worn above the cassock in 1859. The same Vicar Apostolic gave the members the hood also white in colour⁵⁶, joining to the cassock in 1868. In February 1861 the monasteries then existing, without any previous information, received the official communication from Archbishop Bernardine, affiliating the budding congregation as the Third Order of the Discalced Carmelite Order, TOCD⁵⁷.

6. The Establishment of New Institutions

Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara governed the Congregation for 16 years as the Superior General, under the name 'Common Prior'. The people at large took note of the transformation that was taking place in the Church and in the Malabar society through the apostolic activities of the members under the able guidance of Chavara. Thus priests and people from various parts of Malabar began requesting Chavara to open houses in their midst. Thus Monasteries were started at Koonammavu-1857, Elthuruth-1858, Plasnal-1858, Vazhakulam-1859, Pulincunnu-1861, Ambazhakad-1868, and Mutholy-1870⁵⁸. In order to carry out the apostolic activities in the Vicariate more efficiently, the Vicar Apostolic, in 1864, transferred Fr. Chavara to Koonammavu, which was near the Curia of the Vicariate.

7. Chavara in the path of suffering

Suffering is part of human life. When one accepts sufferings as a participation in the sufferings of Christ, it becomes conducive to his/her salvation and sanctification. When one accepts suffering with this vision, it becomes an experience of love.

Rheumatic fever, which Chavara contracted at a young age in his priestly career, was a constant companion of his till his death. Once in his apostolic activities he was affected by fever, so as to lose his senses for some time. He had to be carried in a palanquin to the nearby monastery⁵⁹. His legs were also affected by elephantiasis, but only in a small degree and did not affect seriously his apostolic activities. For about three months prior to his death, his eyes were affected seriously and had accute pain. For many days he lost his vision completely. The medicines applied by doctors to regain his vision were also really painful though he never complained about it.⁶⁰

More than the bodily pains what could have affected him most were his mental sufferings. For example, when his loving parents stood in the way of his divine call in the beginning; much more when his loving parents and the only brother died, prey to the epidemic in the region; when the family itself became an orphan by the death of his parents and brother. He also had a very humiliating experience from his own parishioners and parish priest, when the traditional official entry to the church after receiving the tonsure was denied due to certain misunderstanding.⁶¹

The impediments that happened when the construction of the monastery had begun, impeding in a way the very project of the religious institute⁶²; when 2 priests 8 scholastics and one aspirant left the budding congregation on account of the hard rules imposed on it in 1855, at the time of the first profession of the members⁶³; the

schism that threatened the Malabar Church carrying off the great majority of the churches into schism, when the prominent people of the Church, like the Malpans, one after another left the mother Church and joined the schismatics⁶⁴; when the schismatics threatened to occupy by force the monasteries of Mannanam and Elthuruth etc⁶⁵, his sufferings should have been immense.

But his faith in the divine providence was never shaken. It was in the providence of God that he found refuge on all these occasions.

8. Chavara never afraid of death

It seems that Fr. Chavara had an insight of it much before his death. But this did not hinder him in any way from his apostolic activities till he approached his death bed. He wrote his testament in August 1870. In a sealed envelope he gave it to a novice, asking him to give the envelope to Fr. Leopold OCD only after his death and funeral⁶⁶.

Actually he was laid up only by the middle of October, after the feast of Saint Mother Theresa. During this period he fixed a small note on the door requesting visitors to speak with him only spiritual matters. He also wished that good spiritual books might be read out to him occasionally in the room. At the death bed when all assembled around in tears, on the eve of January 2nd, he said to them: *'Why are you sorry, and are crying? Every man, whoever he be, has to die one day. Now it is my time. As I had always the protection of the Holy Family, I have never lost the baptismal grace I received in baptism. I dedicate our little congregation and each of you to this Holy Family. May the Holy Family protect you all'*⁶⁷. After these words he asked that he be ministered the sacrament of anointing. On January 3, 1871, at 7.30 in the morning, he calmly slept in the Lord.

CREATIVE RESPONSES TO THE NEEDS OF THE TIMES

1. The First Common Seminary of the Syro-Malabar Church at Mannanam

In order to bring about a spiritual awakening in the Malabar Church, one of the first things the founding fathers, especially Malpan Palackal, felt was the need of a well- educated and properly trained clergy. Thus within two years after the laying of the foundation stone, a seminary was started at Mannanam. This grew up in course of time, as the first Major Seminary of the Malabar Church, There was convenience here to accommodate 150 seminarians at a time⁶⁸. In 1844 Bishop Francis Xavier Pescetto conferred the title of Malpan on Fr.Kuriakose Elias Chavara. He was also granted special faculties to approve candidates to priesthood, to examine and approve priests to preach in the churches and to hear confessions⁶⁹. Fr. Chavara worked in the field of priestly formation for about 40 years. Archbishop Bernardine, having personally experienced the good formation the priests received in the Mannanam seminary, ordered Fr. Chavara to start seminaries attached to other monasteries as well. Thus seminaries were started at Vazhakulam-1866, Elthuruth-1868 and Pulincunnu-

1872. Subsequently the domestic seminaries conducted under Malpans, which were about twenty at the time, were suppressed⁷⁰.

2. Leadership in the Syro-Malabar Church

Fr. Chavara was convinced that only holy priests could do anything worthwhile for the spiritual transformation of the society. In view of the spiritual life of priests Chavara introduced annual retreats for priests. The Vicar Apostolic made it obligatory for priests⁷¹. In order that priests may celebrate the Divine Liturgy with devotion and in a uniform manner, Chavara wrote the rubrics in detail and made it obligatory. He prepared the liturgical calendar of the Syro-Malabar Church and systematized introducing the traditional nine liturgical periods, which had almost been forgotten during the Latin regime. The divine office, then in vogue, being extraordinarily long, many priests had practically neglected to say the divine office. Fr. Chavara abridged the divine office, but maintaining the traditional structure of the same and with the approbation of the Holy See, the book was printed and introduced in the Church⁷². In view of the instruction of the faithful, Sunday homilies were introduced in the churches. Annual retreats for the faithful were made a regular feature in the parishes. When he was appointed the Vicar General, he divided the Vicariate into four zones and entrusted them to CMI priests as deputies in view of the spiritual welfare of the faithful. In order to overcome the financial difficulties of the Vicariate, Fr. Chavara, with the order of the Vicar Apostolic introduced new means of collection, such as 5 % of the gross income of the parishes to the Curia, *Pidiyari*, keeping a handful of rice every day in families as an offering, and *kettuthengu*, setting apart for the Church the yields of a coconut tree from the family property. Some of such practices are still current in the churches according to the particular needs⁷³.

3. Chavara's initiative regarding Press and Publications

Fr. Chavara has proved his interest in printing press and publication. The then existing two printing presses in Malabar, one owned by the Government of Travancore, the other owned by the CMS missionaries were not available to propagate catholic literature. Greatly pained at the situation, he established a hand-made printing press at Mannanam in 1846, which was the first printing press of the Catholics in Malabar⁷⁴. He was also the first Indian to start a printing press in the private ownership. This served to publish several books of devotion, prayers, and catholic doctrine. These served to propagate catholic news and literature among the people at large. This has also helped to create many young literary men and women among the Catholics in Kerala.

4. Chavara an Educationist

In addition to his being a brilliant scholar in literature, he knew Malayalam, Tamil, Sanskrit, Latin, Italian, Portuguese and Syriac, Fr. Kuriakose Elias was a great educationist. Till his time, the Church in Malabar had not advanced much in the field of education. It was natural that proficient as he was in several languages he became a powerful influence in the cause of education.

Chavara realized that the community would even remain downtrodden if they did not move with the times and so he decided that his new congregation should concentrate on educational work. So in 1846 the monastery at Mannanam started a new institution of Sanskrit studies where the seminarians, and students from any caste or religion sat together and studied.⁷⁵ As a Catholic institution, it was the first of its kind in the world.

As Vicar General of the Syrians, he took a very bold step, for which the country at large should be grateful to him. He issued a

mandate, calling upon all parish churches under his jurisdiction to raise schools attached to each of them⁷⁶. For the poor students he supplied study materials, clothes and mid-day meals, which even the government schools were not providing at that time⁷⁷. If today the people of Kerala are literate to a high degree, it is largely because of the farsighted policy of Fr. Chavara in the establishment of a school for each parish.

5. Chavara's Efforts to preserve the unity and identity of the Church

During the period of Roccasian troubles in Malabar, those interested in the cause of the intruder bishop Roccas, gave a promise to consecrate Chavara as bishop, hoping thereby to attract him to their fold. His stern reply rooted in his faith was: 'It is not my desire to become a bishop; what I strive for is the salvation of my soul'⁷⁸. When he was appointed vicar general of the Church in 1861 during the troubled times, he calmly reflected over how to proceed and what to do. The schismatic group in their assembly at Thaikkattussery decided to occupy by force the monasteries of Mannanam and Elthuruth to make them the official residences of Bishop Roccas. Though Chavara got information of this decision, he was not disturbed. Confiding in the providence of God, he entrusted the monasteries to the protection of St. Joseph and went round the churches conscientizing the people of the facts and the deceitful machinations of the intruder bishop and his party. However, within a short time the majority of the churches passed on to the fold of the intruder bishop. Chavara without losing hope, proceeded legally and systematically receiving a letter of truth from the Pope Pius IX. The intruder bishop was forced to return to his native land. Once the intruder Bishop was repatriated, all the 116 churches, which had passed to the schismatic group, one by one, not

by violence or force, but by the peaceful reconciliatory method of Chavara, returned to the mother Church⁷⁹.

Fr. Chavara was conversant with the traditions of the Syro-Malabar Church. At the same time Fr. Chavara was a faithful son of the universal Church. He would not tolerate any shake in its unity. He also respected the legitimately constituted authorities. He would not tolerate any revolt against them. There had been several instances in his life with respect to all these.

The greatest strain Chavara had to endure during his life was in keeping the Malabar Church in unity. With respect to the different Rites in Malabar, lack of true Christian charity among the missionaries, sometimes the misunderstanding between the faithful and the missionaries etc, were very evident. Schismatic problems were yet another. It was a Herculean task on the part of Chavara to maintain the Malabar Church in unity. At the same time conscious of the identity of the Syro-Malabar Church, he wished that the Vicariate of Verapoly be divided between the Syro-Malabarians and the Latin Catholics and that the Syro-Malabar Church be given a bishop of the proper Rite. The letter he wrote to the Prefect of the Congregation of the Propaganda in 1869 illustrates this truth. He pointed out to the Cardinal the benefits if the Vicariate were divided and if not the dangers that threatened the unity of the Church⁸⁰.

6. Chavara and the women liberation

A religious congregation for women in Kerala was a great desire of Fr. Chavara. It was a long cherished desire of his and the result of several attempts⁸¹. In 1866, on February 13, with the cooperation of Fr. Leopold Beccaro, Carmelite missionary, the first Carmelite convent of the sisters was inaugurated at Koonamavu, under the name 'Third Order of the Discalced Carmelites'. The motive of starting such an institute of religious life was not only for the self sanctification but

also to help others in both spiritual and material matters.⁸² The Congregation which began with four candidates is divided today into two communities, CMC and CTC, with over 7500 members. By this the Kerala women who were for life confined to the kitchen at home, were brought to the limelight for the service of womenfolk. They do involve today in education, pastoral and social work. They conduct schools, university colleges, boarding houses and hostels for girls and have started professional job-oriented courses and special schools for the handicapped. The CMI and CMC started as sister congregations⁸³ today work in different parts of the country and abroad engaged in education, pastoral ministry and social work.

7. Chavara and home for the sick and aged

The home for the sick and aged which Fr. Chavara started in 1869 at Kainakary was the first of its kind in Kerala. This was an institution to give refuge to the sick and destitutes who had no one to look after them, and to prepare the dying to face a happy death. This was being run by the members of a lay charitable organisation 'Confraternity of St. Joseph for happy death'. This was the beginning of the organised humanitarian work of the Kerala Church. In order to give food and clothing to the poor, Fr. Chavara had also bought few acres of land for financial support near the Mannanam Monastery⁸⁴.

8. In quarrels and disputes, Chavara had the last word

In quarrels and disputes, be they in the affairs related to the church or among private families, Fr. Chavara was often called to intervene, sometimes officially deputed by the Vicars Apostolic, sometimes called in by the parties themselves. His influence among the people and among priests was so great that Chavara had the last word. They had also the conviction that Chavara a man of God would stand only for the truth⁸⁵. Fr. Chavara has recorded several clear cases in the chronicles. For example, in the parish of Anakallu there

were two groups, one under the Propaganda jurisdiction and the other under the Padroado. The contention among them grew to the extent that it became beyond the control of the parish priest. There were also priests involved in the groups. But both the groups agreed to stand by the decision of Fr. Chavara and he was informed of it. Having studied the problem, Chavara addressed to the groups assembled together. Here are his words: *'As you are now honouring us⁸⁶, and we all are so happy to be together. I wish so much that we should become one, though you have broken away I am speaking out to you because I feel that otherwise I would be failing in my duty towards God and you. Even if you do not now realise the truth of what I am saying, the words will remain in your mind and benefit you later. Remaining in Padroado will only keep you away from the truth. You will perceive that it will not be for the good, or welfare of your soul, if you look with your spiritual eyes⁸⁷...*' In the end both groups realized the truth and were reconciled. He promised that he would send priests to preach a retreat for them.

9. Chavara's efforts for the re-union of the Jacobites to the Church

One of the great desires of Fr. Chavara was that the Jacobites among the St. Thomas Christians who in certain circumstances split away from the Mother Church, returned to the mother Church. One of his letters to the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation gave assurance that if the Syro-Malabarians were granted a bishop of the proper Rite, the event would facilitate the union. When Fr. Chavara was thinking of the reunion of Jacobites, or when he actually met with cases which needed solutions for reunion, such as the changes that ought to be made in the texts of liturgical celebrations, the case of married priests etc., he did not hesitate to contact the Holy See through the Vicar Apostolic for solutions to these problems. Fr. Mathai

Mariam Palakunnel, a student of Fr. Chavara, refers to the efforts they together made in the matter of re-union of Jacobites⁸⁸. Pope Pius IX invited also the bishops of the Churches which were not in communion with Rome to participate in Vatican Council I. Taking into account this invitation, Fr. Chavara took the initiative through the Vicar Apostolic to invite the Bishops of the Jacobite Church to take part in the Vatican Council. Documents related to this are found in the archives of St. Joseph Monastery, Mannanam⁸⁹.

10. Chavara's zeal for the salvation of souls

Right from the beginning of the foundation of the CMI congregation, especially from 1853, there was a catechumenate at Mannanam, where hundreds of people of low castes were coming regularly to receive instruction. In the chronicles of St. Joseph Monastery Mannanam we find that there were occasions when up to 100 baptisms were administered in one day. All the first monasteries of the congregation had catechumenates attached to them⁹⁰. The dalit christians about 400 families who are now around the monastery of Mannanam, whose origin goes back to Chavara's time, tell with pride that their forefather is Blessed Chavara and not the Apostle Thomas. There was also a school for the dalit Christians at Arpookara near Mannanam.

11. Chavara's fraternal charity and love for enemies

There is no doubt that love of God is manifested through love and service done to the neighbour. There was a forty year old seminarian by name Philipose along with cleric Chavara in the seminary at Pallipuram. The patience the rector, himself and others manifested in teaching him Syriac, recorded in the chronicles of Chavara, is a clear example of his love and tolerance⁹¹. There was in the seminary at Mannanam a certain Antony Kudakachira. Though he aspired to

join the monastery, he was not accepted by Fr. Porukara because of his rebellious character and he went out challenging the Mannanam monastery that saints would come out from the monastery he was going to establish before Mannanam monastery produced one. Later Chavara visited the monastery of Antony Kudakachira at Plasnal. Chavara was really surprised at the ascetical practices there. On returning to Mannanam he spoke in high terms of the ascetical life practised in the monastery of Antony Kudakachira. The same Kudakachira was the immediate cause for the Roccasian schism⁹². Antony Thondanad, who was the secretary of the intruder Bishop Roccas and the instigator of all the troubles created by Bishop Roccas in Malabar, later, when he was left alone by all, turned to Fr. Chavara craving help and sympathy. Fr. Chavara lovingly accepted him, gave him occasion to make a retreat at Mannanam and helped him to return to the Church. It was really a generous act of mercy and love⁹³

Mathen Kalapurackal of Manjoor, who was once the steward of the Mannanam monastery, later filed a fake case against Fr. Chavara at the district court of Alleppey to humiliate Fr. Chavara. But even then Fr. Chavara later knowing his family condition instructed that the Mannanam monastry should help him in all possible ways⁹⁴. There are number of events which narrate how Fr. Chavara was charitable towards others.

12. Special Devotions of Blessed Chavara

At the age of 11 Chavara began his personal relationship with the Jesus of the Tabernacle at the Parish Church of Chennankary when he stayed with the Parish priest for some time before his entry into the seminary.⁹⁵ Later throughout his life he enjoyed spending hours day and night near the tabarmacle.

He was a great devotee of the Eucharist through hours of adoration, holding Eucharistic procession and introducing the 40 hours adoration.⁹⁶

At the feet of his own mother, he started his Marian devotion. He considered himself as a child of Blessed Virgin Mary. He took the Immaculate Mary's name for his congregation and entrusted the members to her as her servants. He was instrumental in spreading the Marian devotion in Kerala through the monthly devotion of Mary⁹⁷ and spreading the scapular and rosary.

Similarly, he was a great devotee of St. Joseph. In honour of St. Joseph he started the pious practice of serving a man, woman and a child by helping them on 19th March on the feast of St. Joseph.⁹⁸ He also started a charitable association with the name 'confraternity of St. Joseph for a happy death' to help the poor and dying.⁹⁹

Blessed Chavara's belief in the communion of saints was very well expressed in his poem to be sung in the bereaved house. His love for the salvation of souls was such that he used to spend time in prayer at cemetery for the souls in the purgatory.

He considered St. Theresa of Avila as his mother in teaching him prayer.⁶⁵ In his spiritual life, he took special refuge in interceding saints of great repentance, Mary Maydalen, Mary of Egypt and Margaret of Corthon for practising a mystical aseeticism leading to repentance to remove the fundamental barrier of sin.¹⁰⁰

His ardent love for the mother Church and to the supreme head of the Church, the Pope was filial and he used to shed tears when he heard about any sad news about them.¹⁰¹

13. Chavara's Reputation and Saintliness¹⁰²

Bishop Francis Xavier Pescetto (1831-1844) constituted the Servant of God *Malpan* (worthy to teach and direct in the seminaries) and examiner of priests.

Bishop Ludovic Martini (1845-1852) nominated him preacher of spiritual exercises in the vicariate.

Bishop Bernardin Baccinelli (1852-1868) constituted him the vicar general for the Syrians of the vicariate and wrote in the appointment letter:

“I am convinced that you have the fortitude, zeal, wisdom and the virtues necessary for the right fulfilment of this office.”

The same Baccinelli described him before the Sacred Congregation of the Propaganda Fide recommending him for a bishop with these words:

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

A disciple of the Blessed , Fr. Varkey Muttathupadathu, had so much veneration for him that he treasured up a wisp of the hair of Chavara and later, he passed it on to his nephew.

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

The testimonies on the life and activities of Kuriakose Chavara came to the congregation for the cause of saints in Rome, from a variety of sources, from bishops, priests who were his masters and superiors, co-disciples, his own disciples, confreres in religion, public officials, non-Catholic bishops, Hindus etc. All are unanimous in recognizing in Chavara “a man of eminent sanctity, who has practised all the virtues.”

The Syro-Malabar Bishops' Conference, after describing him as "a man of prayer", completed the description, by saying that "he practised all the Christian virtues and that in a heroic degree." They further elaborated:

"Divine faith, confidence in God, intimate and personal union with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, a tender love for the Blessed Virgin Mary, humility and charity were shining in him." Acknowledging him, along with the historical consultors, (Antonius Petti, the promoter general of faith says) that every page of the *Positio* brings to one's notice one or the other of the characteristic virtues of Fr. Kuriakose, namely the union with God, the spirit of prayer, the loyalty to the Church, humility, obedience, spiritual equilibrium and the zeal for the good of souls.

14. Way to Chavara's Sainthood

Immediately after the funeral, the novice, Bro. Leopold gave the sealed envelope to Fr. Leopold the missionary. On reading the testament of Fr. Chavara he was so impressed that he immediately took manuscript copies of the same and sent a copy of the testament to all the monasteries then existing. Along with the copy of the testament he distributed to the monasteries some of his belongings, like his cassock dress etc. asking the monasteries to conserve them all safely as sacred relics¹⁰³. We presume that he did this with the firm conviction of his saintly life and with the hope that he would soon be canonised a saint. Fr. Leopold might have taken the initiative to start the process of his canonization soon after his death. But he was called back to Italy by the end of 1875. Hence he could not do anything regarding the process of his canonization. However, the note which he wrote in his personal diary on the day of Chavara's death is very important, which ends with the words: '*Anima bella e santa, prega per me*' (O beautiful and holy soul pray for me)¹⁰⁴

The canonization process was begun only in 1955. In 1957 the Archbishop of Changanassery officially started the process. In 1984 April 7th Chavara was declared venerable and in 8th February 1986, Pope John Paul II on his pastoral visit to India declared him, Blessed at Kottayam, Kerala. The formal declaration of the Pope runs as follows:

'Accepting the requests of our brother Joseph Powathil, Archbishop of Changanacherry and of many of our brother Bishops and in fulfilment of the great desire expressed by many faithful, and having consulted the Congregation for the cause of saints, we, on our Apostolic authority, decree that the Venerable Servant of God Kuriakose Elias Chavara — be called henceforth by the title of 'Blessed', and that his feast be celebrated on his heavenly birth day, namely on the 3rd day of January in the places and in the manner prescribed by the ecclesiastical laws, in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit'

What we have stated above is valid for now and for future, and nothing contrary to this obstruct the same.

Given on the 8th of February 1986, 8th year of our Pontificate¹⁰⁵

Pope John Paul II.

*Augustine Casseroli
State secretary*



BLESSED CHAVARA'S WRITINGS¹⁰⁶

The writings of a person are one of the best sources for interpreting his personality, vision and religious spirit. So we consider it necessary to enter into the writings of Bl. Chavara in order to understand him better. Only a few decades back, all the writings of Chavara appeared in printed form under the title *Chavarayachante Sampoorana Krithical* (The Complete Works of Chavara) (CWC), in four volumes. They are: *Nalagamangal* (Chronicles), *Sahithya Krithical* (Literary Works), *Adhyatmika Krithical* (Spiritual Writings), and *Cathucal* (Letters). From his writings Chavara cannot be called a theologian in the modern sense that he made some positive contribution to the Catholic theology. Even though his works were written for practical purposes, rather than for expounding any doctrine, we see in them so many theological and dogmatic insights.

a. 'Nalagamangal' (Chronicles) (Vol. I)

The first part of the chronicle (pp. 1-76) deals with events between 1829 and 1855: about the founding of the congregation, starting of a seminary, printing press, Sanskrit school, etc. This part of the chronicle contains certain events which show clearly his spirit of obedience to ecclesiastical superiors, his faith in the providence of God and his deep humility. The second part of the chronicle (pp. 77-244) from

1855-1870, includes the opening of a number of religious houses and the founding of the congregation for women and the history of the Malabar Church of that time, with principal events like the 'Rochosian schism' in which Chavara and his confreres took an active part in defence of the faith and unity of the Church.

b. 'Sahithya Kritical' (Literary Works) (Vol. II)

This volume includes three sets of poems: '*Atmanuthapam*' (The Lamentations of a Repentant Soul), '*Maranaveetil Paduvanulla Pana*' (A poem to sing in the Bereaved House), and '*Anasthaciayude Rakthasakshyam*' (The Martyrdom of Anasthacia).

1. The Lamentations of a Repentant Soul

In the first two chapters of this work, Chavara speaks about his childhood up to joining the seminary (pp. 1-16). Here he recollects the formation he received from his mother, his school studies, the influence of his parish priest on him and so on. In the following chapters the life, passion and resurrection of our Lord are treated in a touching way so as to enter deeply into the life of Christ the redeemer. Also he presents the Bl. Virgin Mary, her life and death, after the ascension of our Lord, in an appealing manner as the mother of the Church and our great intercessor (pp. 17-127).

2. A Poem to Sing in the Bereaved House

It expresses in the words of a dead person, the state of the soul after death, how the soul views its past life, how the souls are purified in purgatory etc. (pp. 135-172). The main idea the author had in mind was to impress on the readers the need for praying for the souls in purgatory. The idea of the communion of saints is also very well brought out in this poem.

3. The Martyrdom of Anasthacia

It is a poem which narrates the persecution of emperor Valerian

and the courageous martyrdom of Anasthacia and Cirillos for preserving their christian faith. It seems that Chavara wrote this with the intention of instilling in the minds of people courage and faith to stand up against the enemies of the Church. He might have been influenced by the bitter experience he himself and the Kerala Church had in the Rochosian schism, when he wrote this poem. This poem is considered the first narrative poem of the Malayalam literature.

c. *Dhyana Sallapangal* (Colloquies in Meditation) (Vol. III)

This work of Chavara forms the part of his spiritual diary. This, however, is not a systematic meditation written for others as we find in other meditation books. The meditations in this book are, rather, personal filial conversations of the soul with God. He calls Jesus with great emotion 'Appa' (father). The freedom which he enjoyed with saints especially his filial devotion to St. Joseph and St. Therese of Avila, finds expression in this book (pp. 13-47). The meditations on the priestly vocation given in this book (pp. 48-65), express the author's great appreciation for the priestly vocation and its sanctifying function in the Church. His 'Colloquies in Meditation' bears testimony to his sanctity and mysticism. This book also includes a prayer to the Bl. Virgin Mary, some of the prayers Chavara daily used for the morning and evening and so on, and the rituals for the 40 hours' adoration (pp. 66-83).

d. '*Cathucal*' (Letters) (Vol. IV)

Chavara's letters can be grouped into three main divisions: In the first group there are 21 letters (pp. 5-55), of which two are addressed to the Holy Father Pius IX, seven to the Cardinal Prefect of the office of Propaganda, ten to the Bishops and two to the Carmelite major superiors in Rome. The second group includes 32 letters (pp. 59-118) which are sent to his religious members. 17 of them are sent to his

confreres in different monasteries, and four are common circulars to them. In this group eleven letters are sent to his religious sisters. In the third group of 14 letters (pp. 121-168), four are for the parish priests and another seven are common circulars to the priests and laity. And the remaining three are business letters to certain individuals.

Fr. Chavara was very zealous about maintaining the unity of the Church and the purity of its doctrine. Many of his letters and circulars are a proof of this fact. He even gives good suggestions through his letters (pp. 19-20; 28-29) to the Holy See to avoid confusion and division in the Church of Malabar. Some of the letters, those sent to the religious under him, express his deep humility in spite of the great things he was doing in the Church and in the society at large (pp. 79, 80, 103). From the letters to the sisters, we learn how deeply spiritual he was. He instructs them to read more spiritual books to grow in the love of God, and gives them methods of prayer (pp. 109-111, 116). The advice given to the parishioners in the form of a “Testament of a good father”, is of immense value for christian living. In another letter he instructed them to start a ‘Home of Charity’ for the orphans, sick and the old (pp. 137-163).

His main liturgical works are: 1) ritual for the celebration of the Mass, 2) ritual for 40 hours’ adoration, 3) ritual for the services of Holy Saturday, and 4) the little office of the Bl. Virgin Mary. These are not fully original works; but rather collections of existing rituals and the translations of the Latin rituals. Those works, except the ritual for 40 hours’ adoration, are not included in the Collected Works of Chavara. In his liturgical works, Chavara was motivated by the sole desire to improve the liturgical and devotional life of both the priests and the people. These rituals were in use up to 1962 in the Syro-Malabar Church.

SPIRITUALITY OF BLESSED CHAVARA

The general theme that runs through Chavara's thinking, is the mystery of man in relation to God: the greatness of God the creator and the unworthiness of man, the creature. This consciousness created in him great sorrow for sin. At the same time he recognized the great love and mercy of God, the Savior, whom he calls 'My Father'. This confidence in the Father gave him hope and solution for all his problems.

In Jesus he realized the mercy of the Father, the greatest expression of love by his identification with humanity and by his suffering and death, and the indwelling presence of the Spirit in the Holy Eucharist.

This was the experience of Chavara. *Jnana* (knowledge) of God he acquired from the Scriptures and from the Divine Guru,¹⁰⁷ Jesus Christ. This led him to think in silence about the greatness of God, and there he met Jesus in *bhakti* (devotion).

The Servant of God nourished his faith through the reading of spiritual literature. To be able to read such books in the original he learnt various languages: Latin, Italian and Portuguese.¹⁰⁸ For the same reason he dedicated himself diligently to the study of the Sacred Scriptures. His writings prove that he was a scholar in the Bible.

Deriving inspiration from both the Indian Spiritual traditions and

christian spiritual sources, Chavara became a contemplative and met God in his silent meditation. This he achieved by accepting the purifying fire of God's nearness and turning to God with a sincere heart, shedding tears with profound sorrow for his sins.¹⁰⁹

He loved the world in as much as he could serve the Lord in this world, esteemed himself in as much as he could boast in the Lord, and he loved his body in as much as he could serve others with it. He had the conviction that whatever he received came from God.¹¹⁰

The Indian approach to God through *tapas* was deeply in the life of Blessed Chavara. As he was getting old, he realized his incapacity to do physical penances. This awareness made him sing in his *Athmanuthapam* about his willingness to do physical penances and his inability to do so. "Tapas is the holy way for the reparation of sins, but the body is too weak now to become a tapasi" (ascetic)¹¹¹. When tapas is difficult for him, Chavara reaches a solution to do penance by meditating on the sacrificial death of Christ.¹¹²

Chavara was obedient not only to the ecclesiastical authorities, but also was an extraordinary example in the observance of the rules of the congregation of which he was the head. Authority and rules were for him, the instruments to see the mind of God. Even in old age, as the Prior General, he never relaxed or excused himself from the demands which community life made on him. Fr. Aloysius of the Latin Carmelite monastery of Manjummel, was a novice in Koonammav, and was present at the death-bed of Chavara and heard his last words to his spiritual children. He says:

In the observances of the rules of the congregation, Father Kuriakose was ever like a novice. He loved his religious institute as his mother, and considered it the terrestrial paradise bequeathed to its members by God.¹¹³

Chavara's vision of the Church includes, the glorious Church of

saints in heaven, the Church militant on earth and the suffering Church in purgatory. They form one family and are mutually related. In the attainment of perfection the heavenly Church helps the earthly one through the communion of saints.

Chavara believed in the communion of saints, and the Bl. Virgin Mary became the greatest human model and intercessor for him. Marian devotion came next in his spiritual makeup. Fr. Leopold wrote on Chavara's Marian devotion:

His devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary was characterized by a genuine filial love. He spoke eloquently of her glories to others and tried to inculcate upon them her devotion. Very often when the thought of death came to his mind, he would recall the kindness and mercy of the Blessed Virgin, whom he used to call his "Mother" to overcome the terrible fears and temptations associated with that fateful moment¹¹⁴

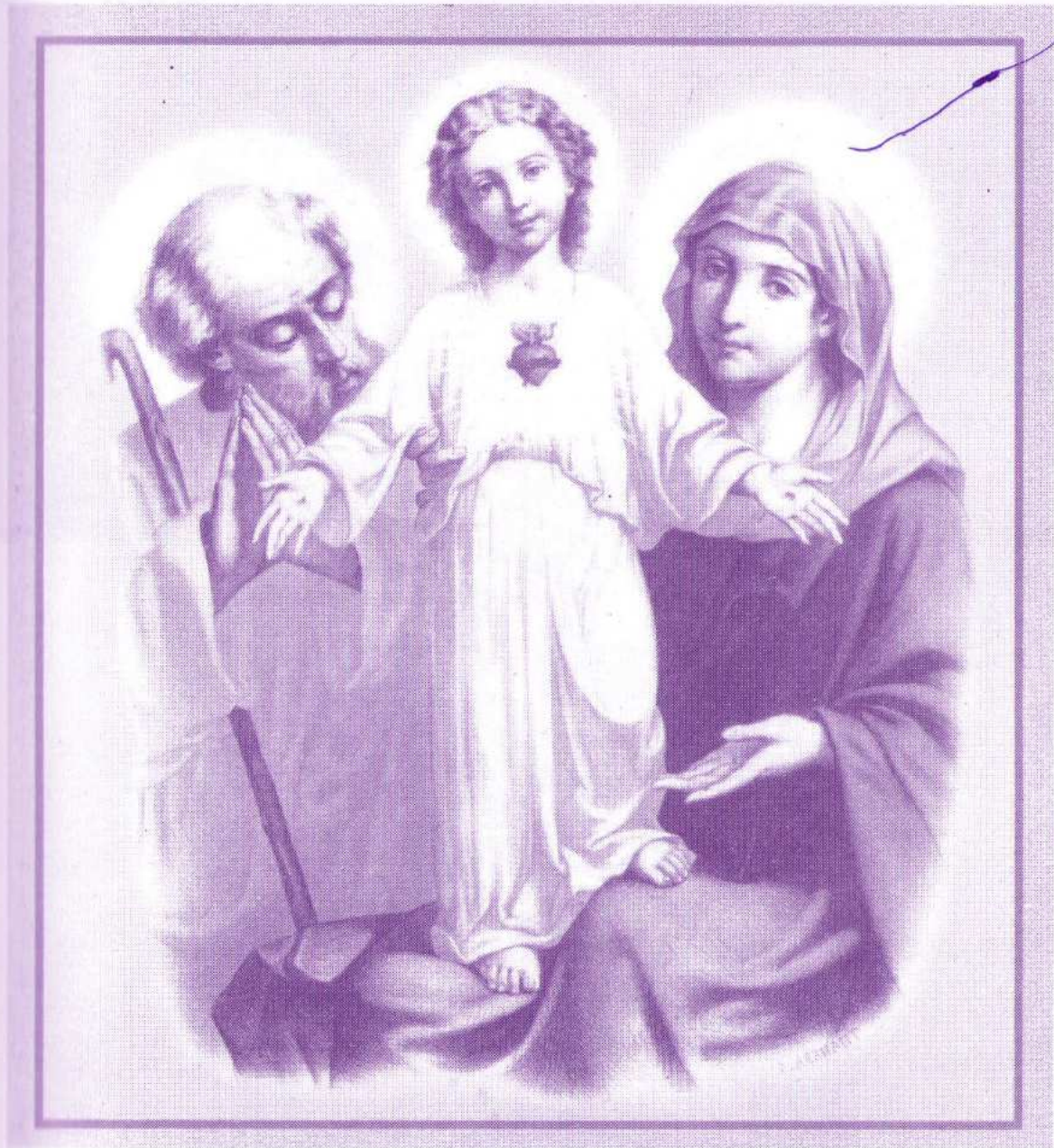
Blessed Chavara is an answer to the modern world:

Tensed with activity and tired of involvement, the man today feels loneliness without God and neighbors; cannot stay silent for a moment and pray.

Blessed Chavara was a person who could live in harmony with God and the world, prayer and action, solitude and companionship. To a world, which is losing the sense of sin, he is a question mark.

A message from Cardinal Peter Palazzini, the Prefect of the Congregation for the Cause of Saints during 'The Proclamation of the Beatification of Fr. Chavara' said to humanity: "Even though he (Chavara) could declare on his death bed that he had always kept his baptismal innocence, he had a deep sense of sin. In this sense, he is a question mark to the modern world which seriously lacks the same sense of sin".¹¹⁵

PHOTOS RELATED TO BLESSED CHAVARA



**“Let the Holy Family reign in your hearts”
(Chavara)**

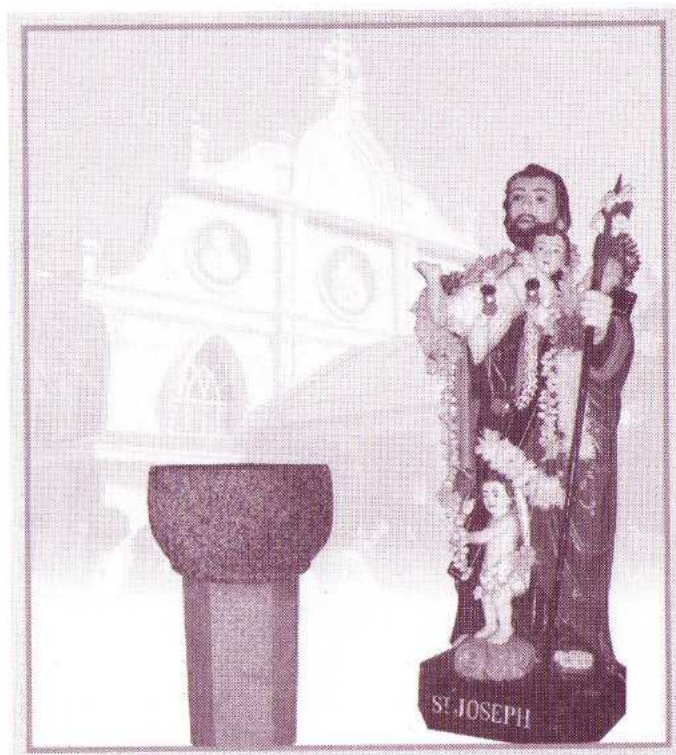
Blessed Chavara was a great devotee of the Holy Family. He had been using this picture for many years in his room. Just before his death, he showed this picture to the members of his community and entrusted the congregation to the Holy Family.



The house of Blessed Chavara at Kainakary in Kerala.



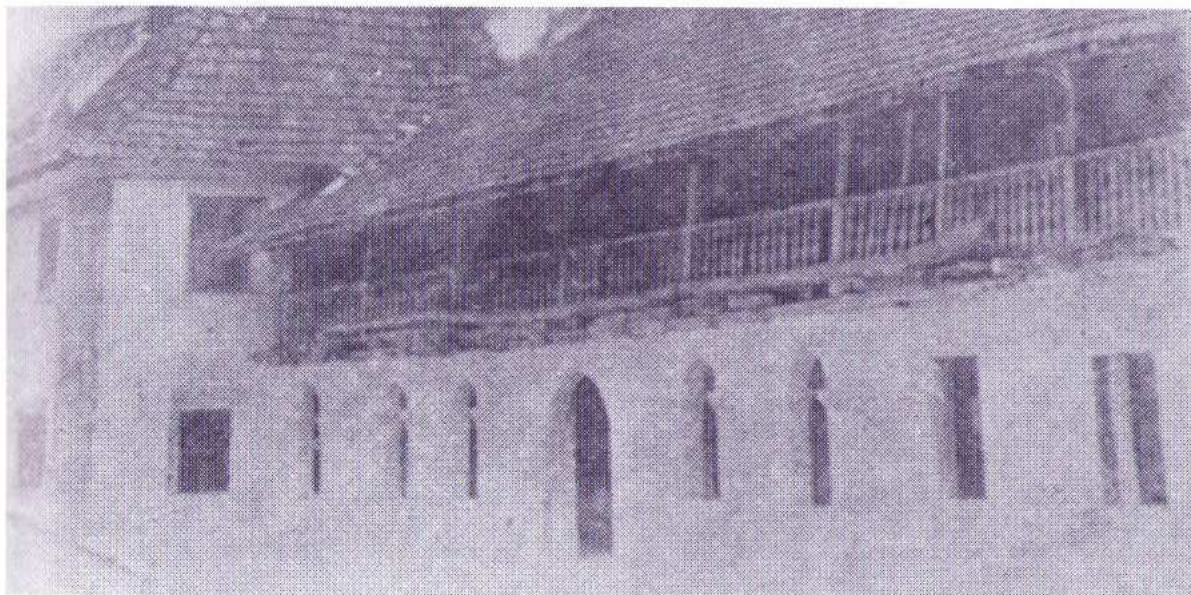
This is the room where Blessed Chavara was born on
10th February 1805.



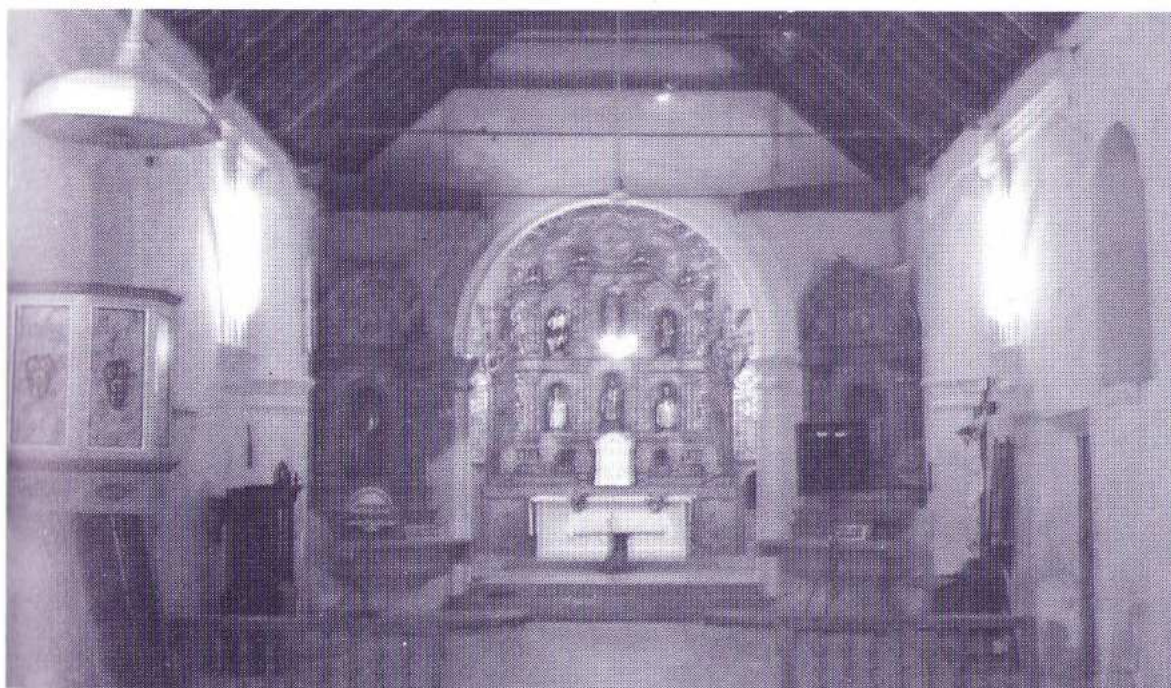
The baptismal font in which Blessed Chavara was baptized on 18th February 1805 at the Parish Church of Chennankary.



The Marian Shrine of Kodavechoor where Blessed Chavara was dedicated to Blessed Mary as her servant on 8th September 1805.



The Pallipuram Parochial Seminary where Blessed Chavara studied for priesthood about 11 years under Fr. Thomas Palackal.



The altar of Arthunkal Church where Blessed Chavara was ordained a priest on 29th November 1829.

The founding father's of the CMI Congregation (11th May, 1831)



Fr. Thomas Palackal
1783-1841



Fr. Thomas Porukara
1799-1846



Fr. Kuriakose Chavara
1805-1871

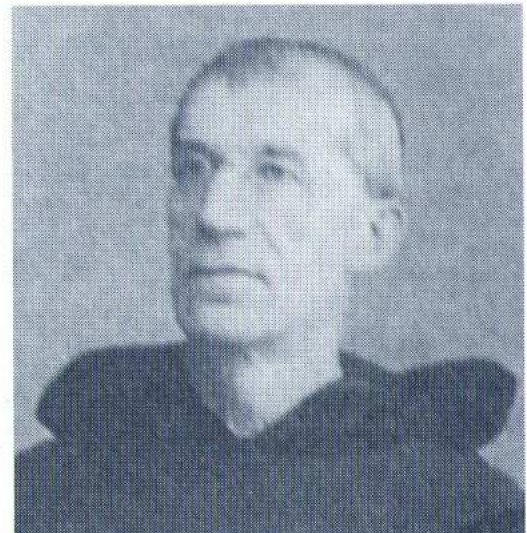


Br. Jacob Kaniyamthara
1800-1898

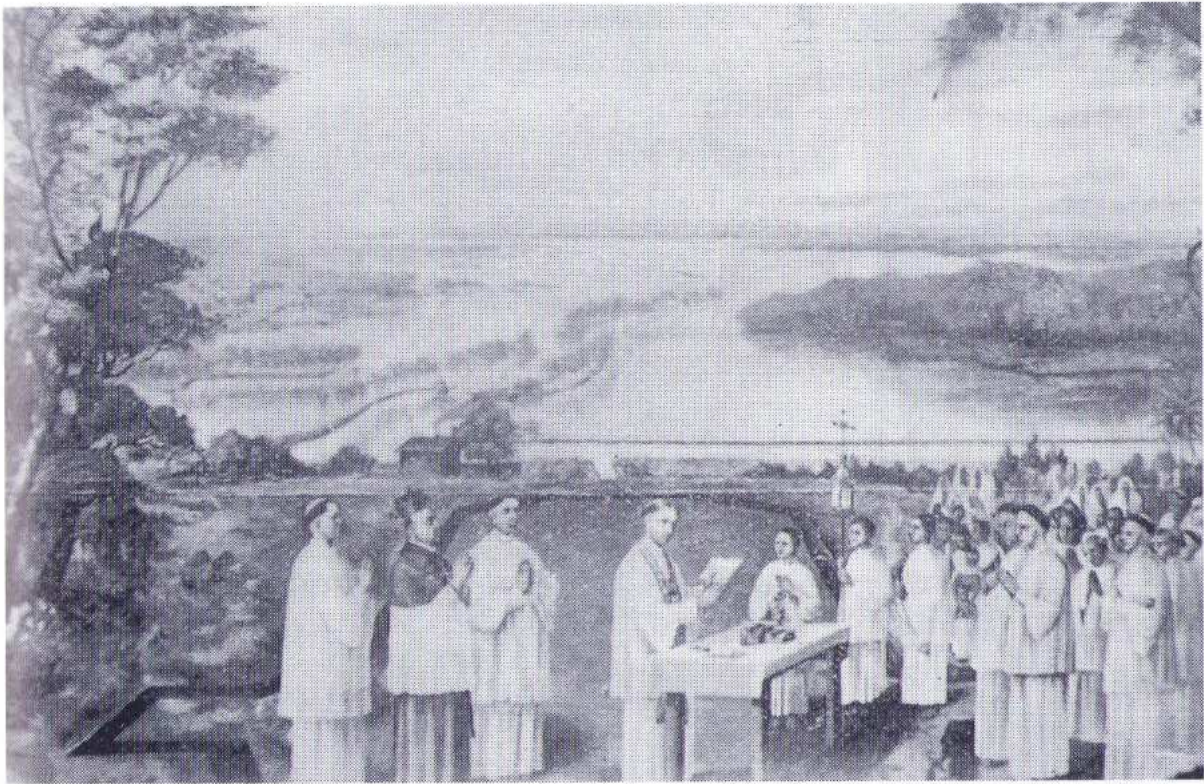
The founding father's of the CMC Congregation (13th February, 1866)



Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara
1805-1871



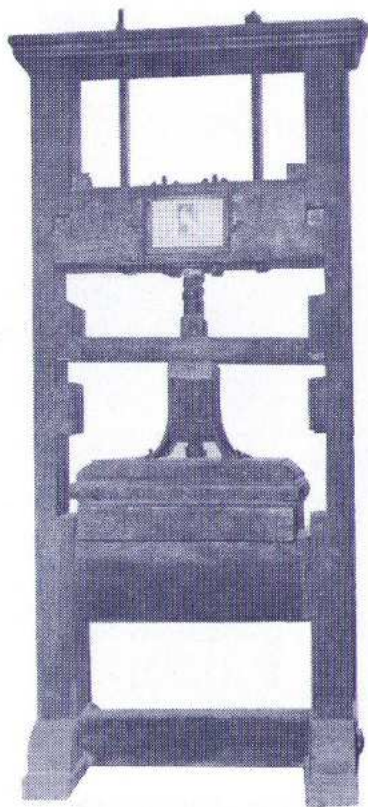
Fr. Leopold Beccaro OCD
1837-1914



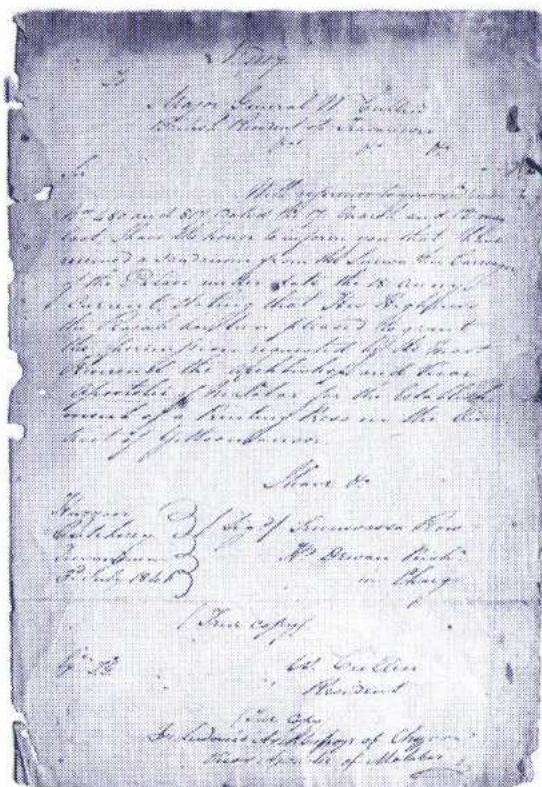
Laying of the fountation stone of the first Indian religious congregation (C.M.I.) at Mannanam on 11th May 1831.



The Mother House of the CMI Congregation at Mannanam.



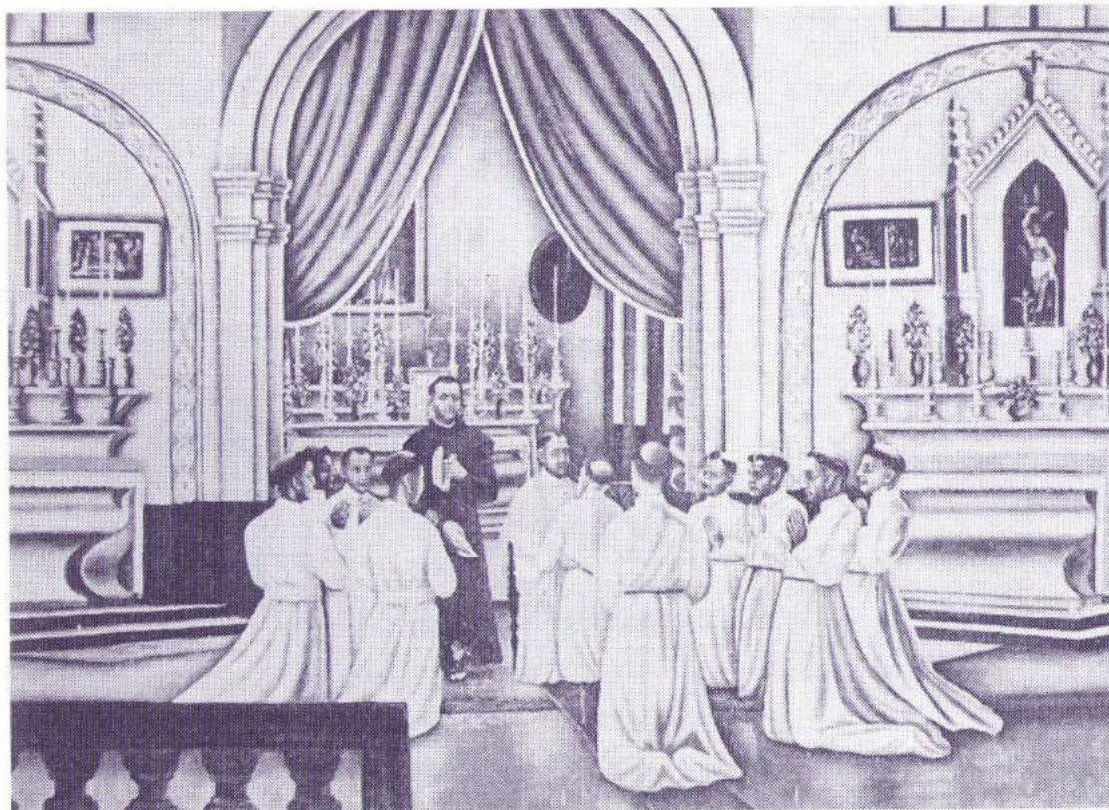
The wooden printing press
Blessed Chavara made in
1846.



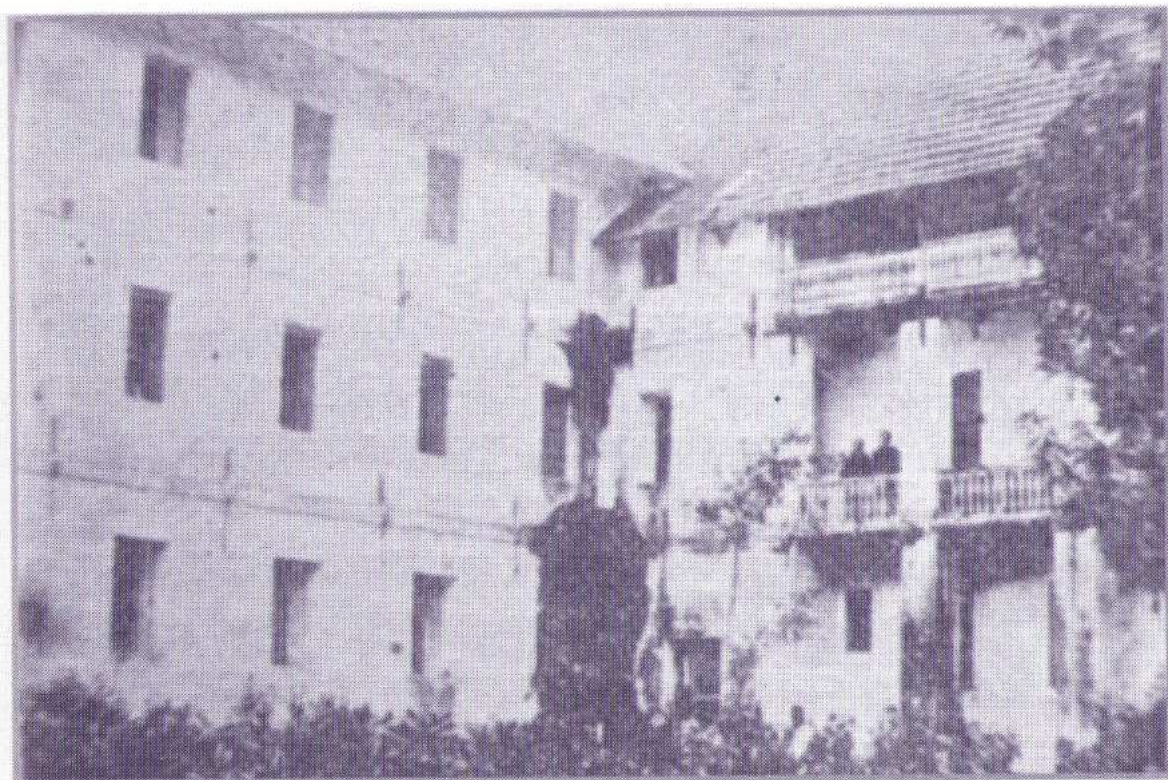
The sanction to start a press, obtained
from the Raja (king) of Travancore
through the British Resident Mr. M. Kallen.



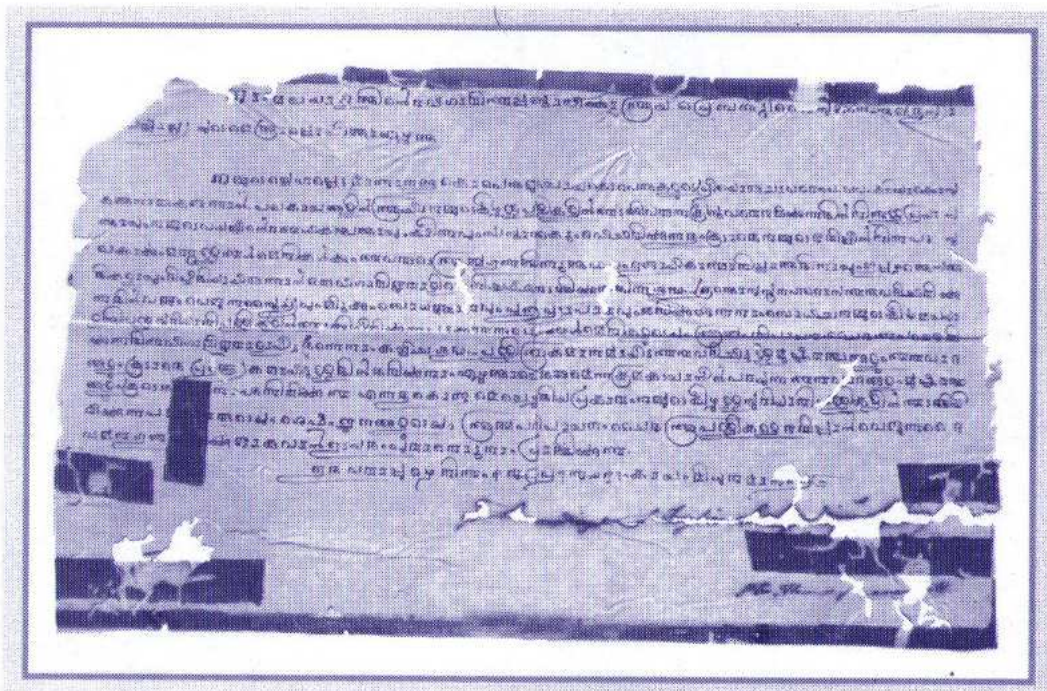
The first sanskrit school started by Blessed Chavara in 1846 at
Mannanam.



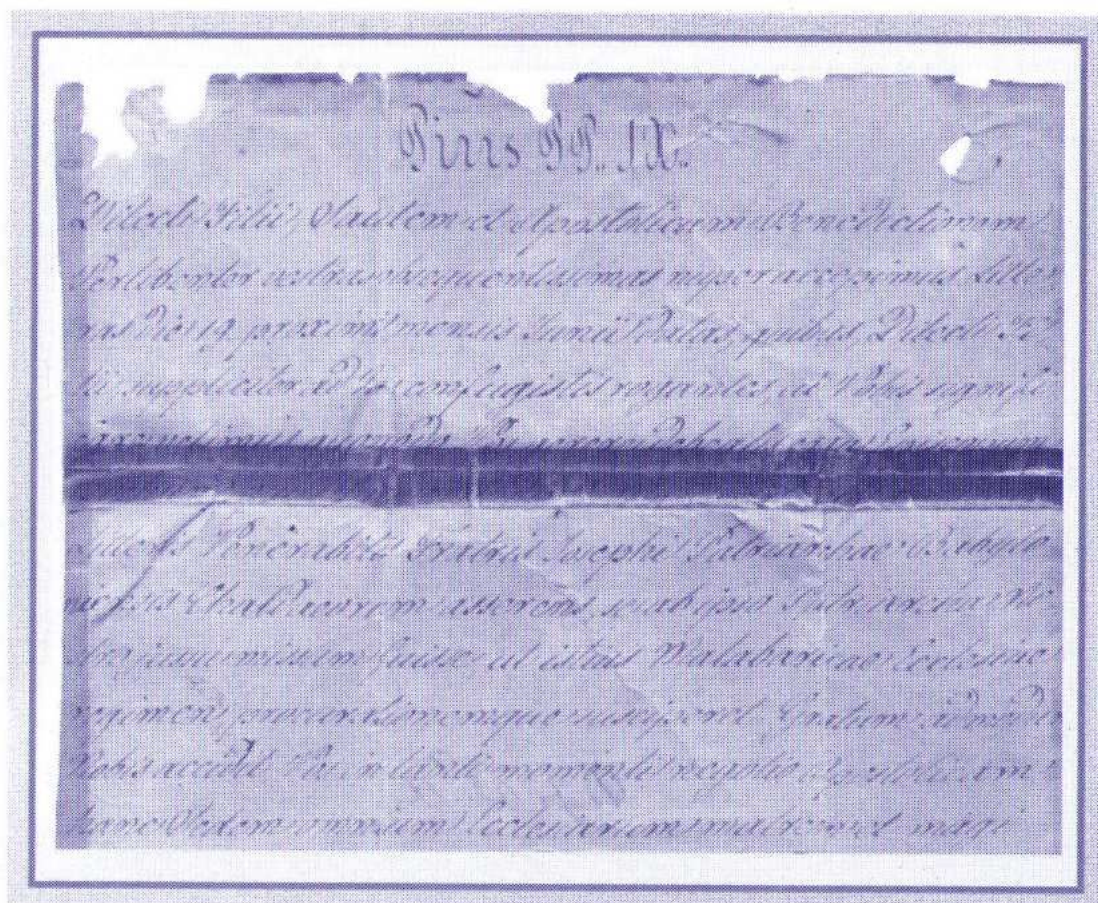
Blessed Chavara, receives the religious vows of the 10 first fathers of the CMI congregation on 8th December at Mannanam.



The first novitiate house of the CMI congregation at Koonammavu where Blessed Chavara lived his last 7 years.



The appointment order given to Blessed Chavara as Vicar General of the Syro-Malabar Church on 8th June 1861.



The letter of Pope Pius IX to Chavara against the intruder bishop Thomas Roccas, banning his activities in India, dated on 5th September 1861.



Founding of the first indigenous religious congregation for women (CMC) at Koonammavu by Blessed Chavara and Fr. Leopold Beccaro OCD, on 13th February 1866.



The Mother House of the CMC congregation at Koonammavu constructed by Blessed Chavara in 1867.



The first Home of Charity started by Blessed Chavara at Kainakary, Kuttanad in 1869.

Chavara's instruction to start the Home of Charity:

“Construct a small house near your chapel with two rooms and a veranda, thaching the roof at least with bamboos. Name it the Home of Charity. Bring there the aged, the orphans or the beggers who are sick and protect them. If you do so, in future, it will be first of its kind in Kerala.”

(Chavara - letters)

Institutions Established by Blessed Chavara



St. Joseph's Asram
Mannanam
1831



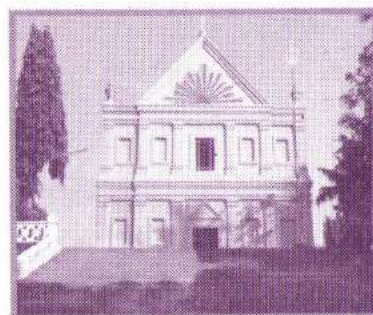
St. Theresa's Convent
Koonammavu
1866



St. Philomina's Asram
Koonammavu
1857



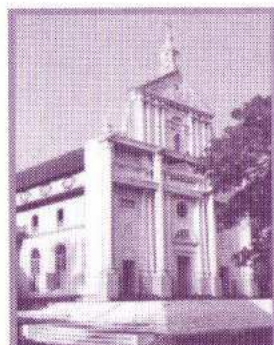
St. Mary's Asram
Elthuruth
1858



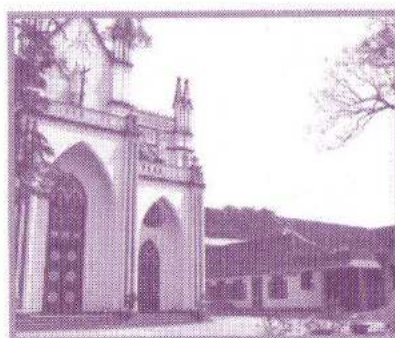
Carmel Asram
Vazhakulam
1859



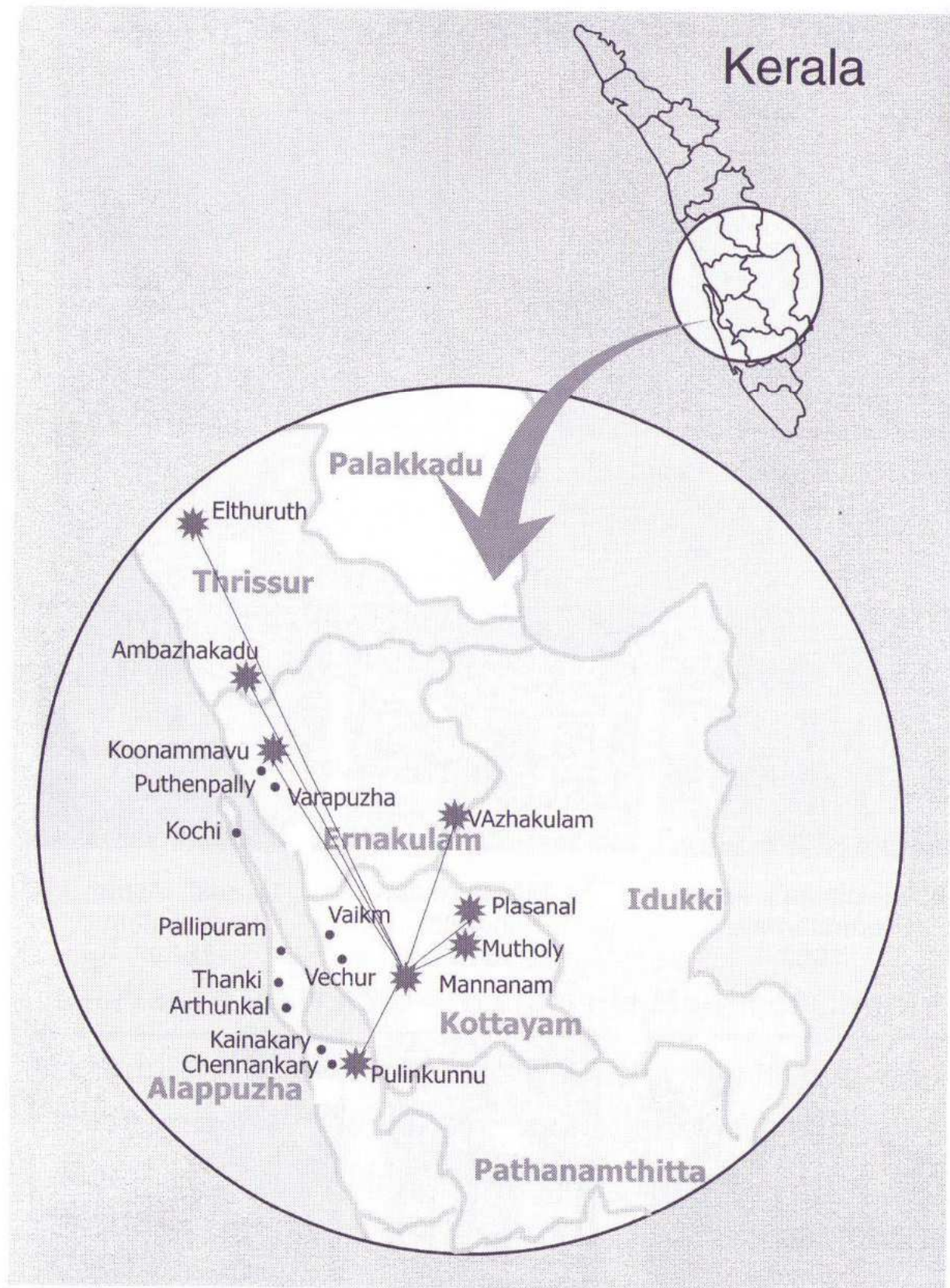
St. Sebastian's Asram
Pulinkunnu
1861



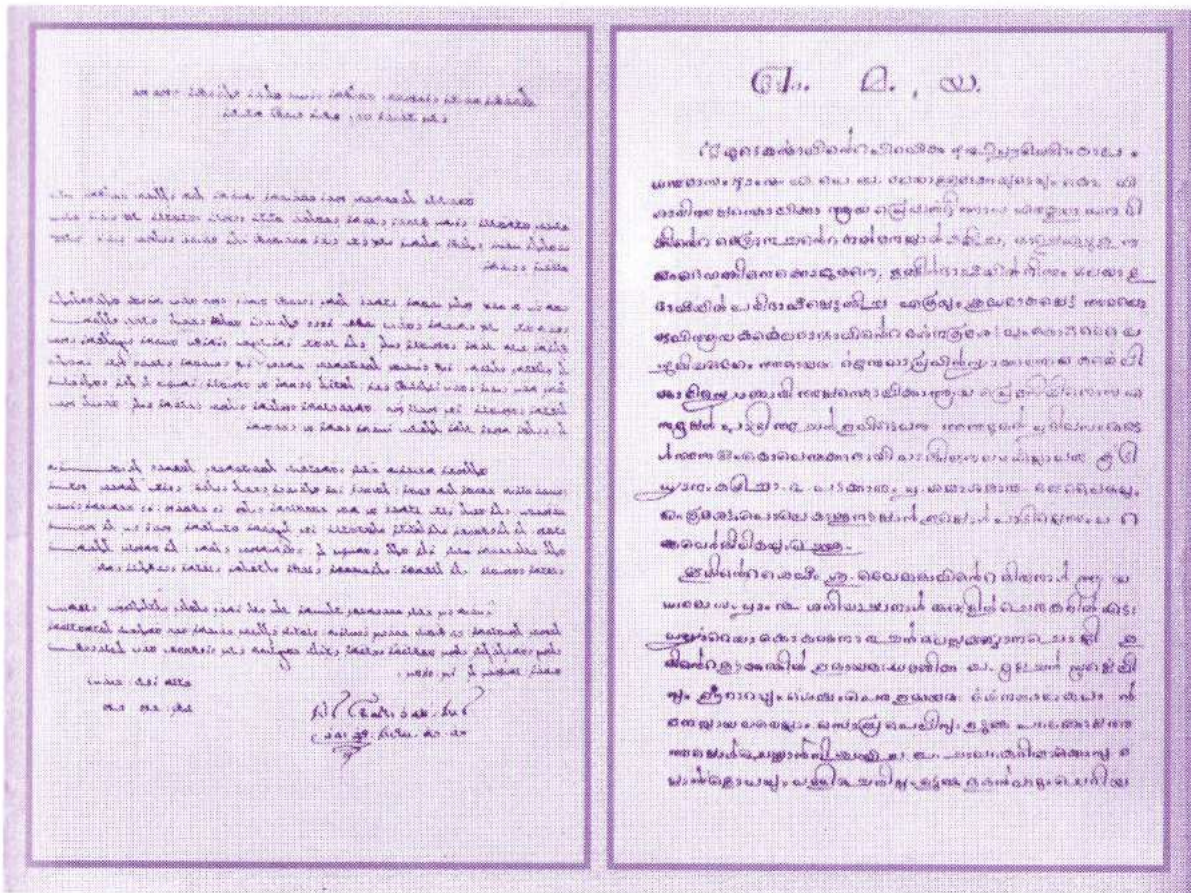
St. Theresa's Asram
Ampazhakdu
1868



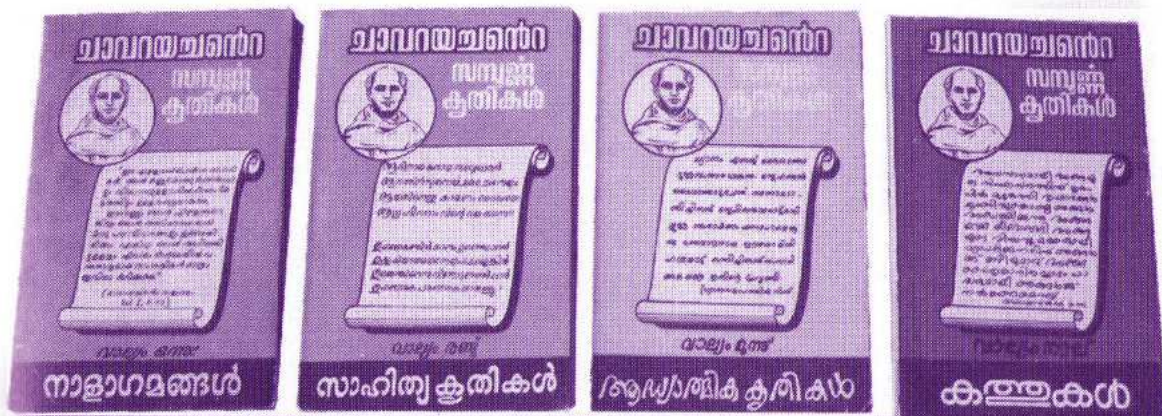
St. John of the Cross
Asram Mutholy
1870



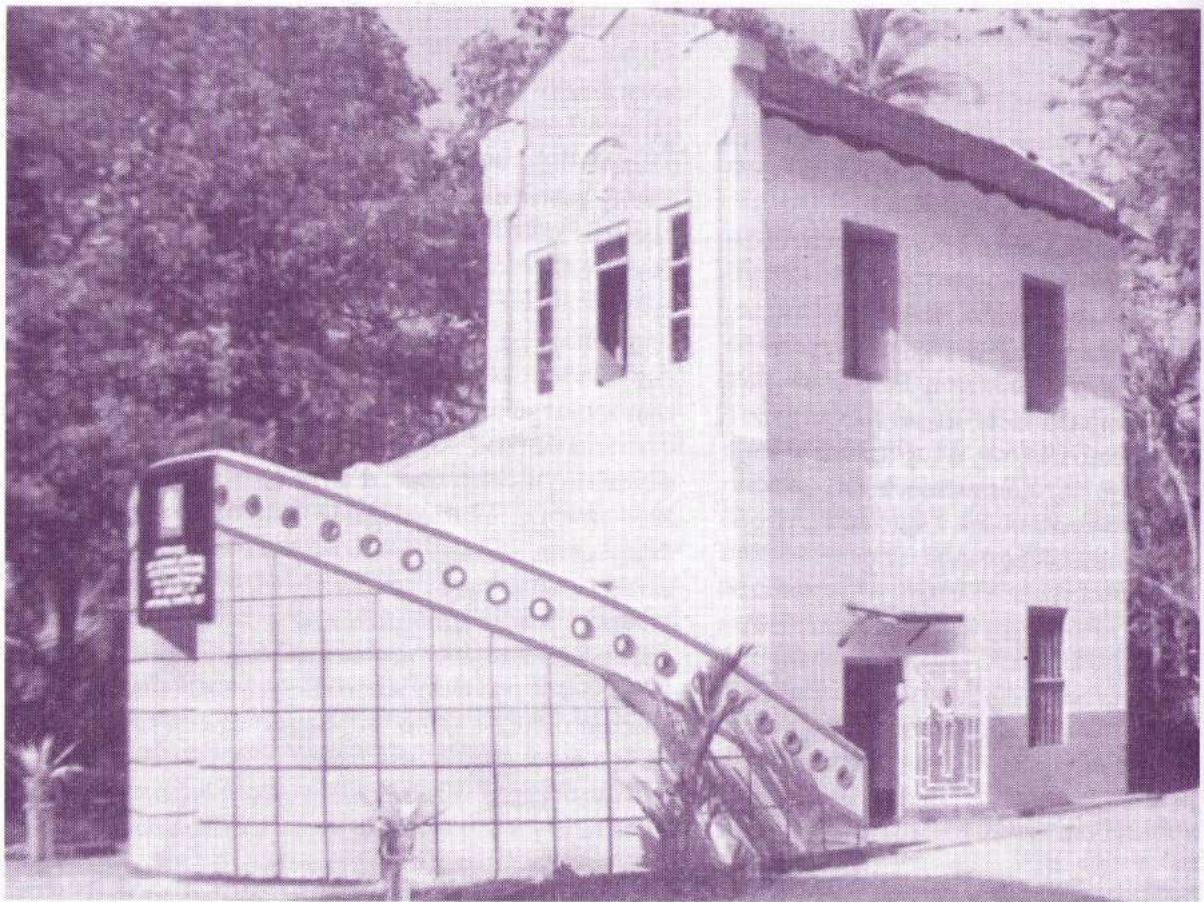
Important places related to Blessed Chavara's life and activities.



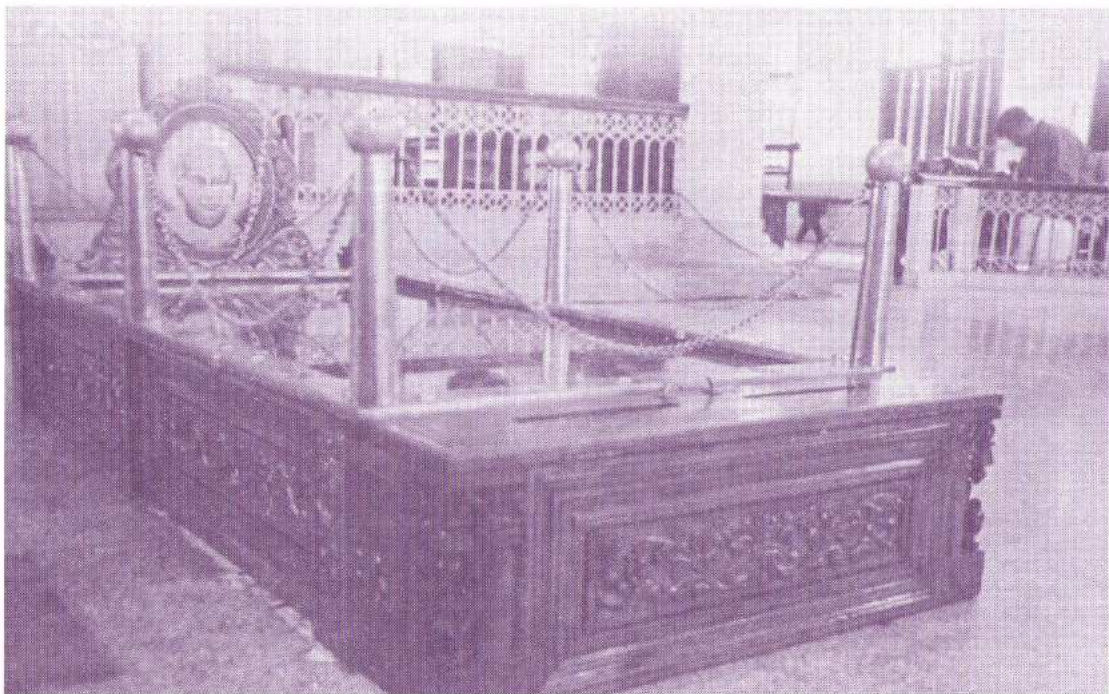
Blessed Chavara's own handwriting in syriac and Malayalam.



Collected works of Blessed Chavara in Malayalam.



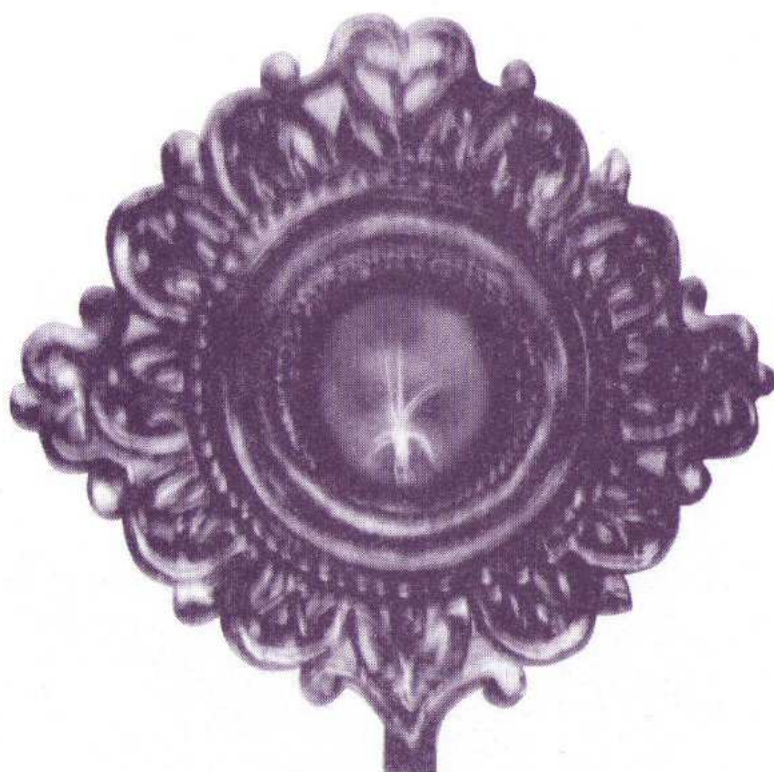
The room Blessed Chavara used during his last 7 years at Koonammavu.



The Mannanam Chapel which enshrines the mortal remains of Blessed Chavara.



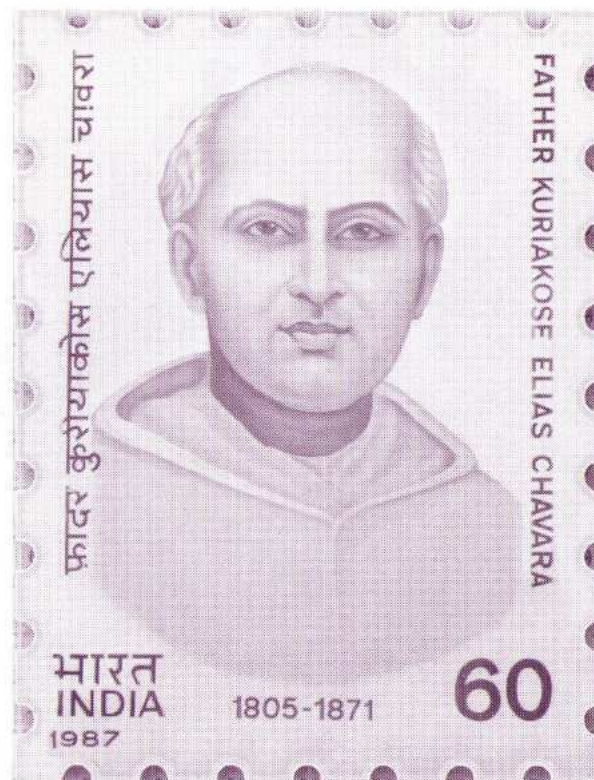
The crucifix which Blessed Chavara was using personally for many years, kept in his tomb, now taken out and preserved its remains at Kainakary, the place of his birth.



A pinch of hair of Blessed Chavara taken from the barbar by a Seminarian, Varkey Muttathupadath at Mannanam, and kept it as a relic for many years, is now preserved in the Mannanam Monastery.



Pope John Paul II declaring Chavara as Blessed at Kottayam in Kerala on 8th February 1986.



The Government of India released a postal stamp in 1987 on Blessed Chavara, considering his humanitarian services for the country.



The Inaugural Function of the Bicentenary Celebration of the Birth of Blessed Chavara at Mannanam on 3rd January 2004



The Concluding Function of the Bicentenary Celebration of the Birth of Blessed Chavara at his birth place, Kainakary on 10th February 2005

BLESSED CHAVARA'S PIONEERING SERVICES

1. With Fathers Thomas Palackal and Thomas Purukara, founded the First Indian Religious Congregation for Men (CMI) - 1831
2. Popularized the Sunday Homilies and Retreats for Priests and Laity in the Kerala Church - 1831
3. Established the First Syro- Malabar Common Seminary at Mannanam which continued up to 1894 and then amalgamated to Puthenpally Seminary - 1833
4. Introduced 'the Way of the Cross' in the Kerala Church from Mannanam - 1833
5. Served as the appointed *Malpan* and examiner of Seminarians and was authorized to give patents to the newly ordained to hear confessions and to preach in the Churches - 1844
6. Founded the First Press and Publishing House of the Syro-Malabar Church at Mannanam - 1846
7. Founded the First School (Sanskrit) in the Kerala Church - 1846

8. Started the First Syro-Malabar Catechumenate at Mannanam - 1853
9. He was the first to give the name 'Mary Immaculate' for his Congregation in the Church after the proclamation of Bl. V. Mary's Immaculate Conception as a doctrine of the Church - 1855
10. The First Vicar General after the time of Archdeacons in the Syro-Malabar Church - 1861
11. Took the leadership in protecting the Syro-Malabar Church from the schism of Bishop Roccas - 1861
12. The author of the First Malayalam Narrative Poem - *Anasthasyaude Rakthasakshyam* - 1862
13. With the help of Bishop Bernardin OCD, popularized the monthly devotion of Blessed Virgin Mary - 1864
14. Implemented the idea 'A School for a Church', in the Kerala Church as Vicar General - 1864
15. Innovator of the Divine Office, Liturgical Rubrics, Calendar etc; in the Malabar Church - 1862 - 1869
16. With Fr. Leopold OCD, an Italian Missionary, founded the First Indian Religious Congregation for Women (CMC) in the Kerala Church - 1866
17. Started the 40 Hours Adoration in the Kerala Church - 1866
18. Started the first boarding house and school for girls at Koonammavu in the Kerala Church - 1868

19. Prepared the first instruction manual, 'A Testament of a Good Father' for the Christian families of Kerala, may be first of its kind in the whole Church- 1868
20. Founded the first lay organization the 'Confraternity of St. Joseph for a Happy Death' - 1869
21. Founded the First Home of Charity - *Upavisala* for the Sick, old and Destitute of Kerala - 1869
22. Initiated the Catholic re-union movement of the 19th century - 1869
- 23 The Church historian of the Kerala Church of the 19th century - 1805- 1871
- 24 The First Indian declared as the Blessed in the Church - 1986
25. Considering his unique services for the country, Government of India released a postal stamp in honour of Bl. Chavara - 1987

A HEROIC SON OF THE CHURCH IN INDIA

Pope John Paul II

“I thank you Father, Lord of heaven and earth,
that you have hidden these things from the wise and
understanding and have revealed them to the little
ones” (Mt. 11:25)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

These are the words of Jesus of Nazareth, and he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit when he uttered them. How full of meaning they are for us today:

“I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to the little ones”. (Mt 11:25)

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

And behold, the Son does reveal these things. At the same time he reveals the Father. The Father is revealed through the Son. And to whom does the Son reveal these things? He reveals them to those whom he chooses: "for such was your gracious will". Jesus tells the Father. He reveals these things to the little ones.

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

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

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

In co-operation with Fathers Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara, Father Kuriakose founded an Indian Religious Congregation for men, now known as the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate. Later, with the help of an Italian missionary, Father Leopold Beccaro, he

started an Indian Religious Congregation for women, the congregation of the Mother of Carmel. These Congregations grew and flourished and religious vocations became better understood and appreciated. Through the common efforts of the members of new religious families, his hopes and works were multiplied many times over.

Father Kuriakose's life, and the lives of these new Religious, were dedicated to the service of the Syro-Malabar Church. Under his leadership or inspiration, a good number of apostolic initiatives were undertaken: the establishment of seminaries for the education and formation of the clergy, the introduction of annual retreats, a publishing house for Catholic works, a house to care for the destitute and dying, schools for general education and programmes for the training of catechumens. He contributed to the Syro-Malabar liturgy and spread devotion to the Holy Eucharist and the Holy Family. In particular, he dedicated himself to encouraging and counselling Christian families, convinced as he was of the fundamental role of the family in the life of society and the Church. But no apostolic cause was dearer to the heart of this great man of faith than that of the unity and harmony within the Church. It was as if he had always before his mind the prayer of Jesus, on the night before his Sacrifice on the Cross: "That they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us" (Jn 17:21). Today the Church solemnly recalls with love and gratitude all his efforts to resist threats of disunity and to encourage the clergy and faithful to unity with the See of Peter and the universal Church. His success in this, as in all his many undertakings, was undoubtedly due to the intense charity and prayer which characterized his daily life, his close communion with Christ on earth.

Both Father Kuriakose and Sister Alphonsa bear witness to the beauty and greatness of the religious vocation. And I would like to take this occasion to direct my thoughts particularly to the men and

women Religious who are present here and to all the Religious in India.

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

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

No matter how you serve, dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, never doubt the value of your consecrated life. Whether your service resembles the great apostolic endeavours of Father Kuriakose, or takes the form of hidden suffering like Sister Alphonsa, whatever it may be it is important in the life of the Church. Remember the words of Saint Paul, in today’s second reading, “We know that in everything God works for good” (Rom 8:28). Even when you feel discouraged or weighed down by personal failures or sin, trust even more in the love

of God for you. Turn to him for mercy, forgiveness and love. For as Saint Paul says in the same reading: “the Lord helps us in our weakness” (Rom 8:26). It is in him that we find our strength, our courage and our joy.

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

And now, I wish to greet all who have come to Kottayam for this celebration. I greet my brother bishops and all the clergy and faithful who have come from the other Dioceses of Kerala. With respect and esteem I thank all the other fellow Christians as well as our Hindu and Muslim brethren and the followers of other religions who honour me today by being here. I am grateful for the presence of the civil authorities and I invoke upon all the people the blessings of joy and peace.

Truly extraordinary is this day in the history of the Church and of Christianity on Indian soil. It is important, too, in the history of the pastoral ministry of the Bishop of Rome, the Successor of Saint Peter. It is the first time that he has had the joy of raising to the glory of the altars a son and a daughter of the Church in India, in their native land.

**(Homily During the Beatification ceremony, Kerala,
Kottayam, 8-2-1986)**

FATHER CHAVARA REPRESENTS INDIAN CHRISTIANITY AT ITS BEST

Mr. R. Venkataraman

Former President of India

I deem it an honour to participate in this function which commemorates the great pioneer in social reforms, Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara. I must congratulate the Department of Posts for having decided to issue a stamp in memory of this great soul.

It is well over a hundred years since Father Chavara left us. And yet he is a living inspiration for thousands and thousands of persons. He is gratefully remembered as a profound scholar, an educationist, a builder of institutions for the underprivileged, the illiterate, the destitute and the needy.

Few people have been able to combine the contemplation of God with the service of man as naturally and creatively as Father Chavara did. There was in fact no dichotomy in his mind between the world of faith and the world of action. Father Chavara represented both. A mystic, he could also be an engine of activity. Capable of withdrawing into his innermost being, Father Chavara was at the same time a

motive force for the establishment of a social order in which every one could live in dignity and faith. It is only appropriate that His Holiness the Pope declared Father Chavara 'Blessed' during the Papal visit to India in 1986.

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

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

were open to members of all communities who sought admission, including Harijans. It was indeed a revolutionary act at that time.

Father Chavara's vision anticipated modern developments in yet another field: the role of women. As early as 1866 Father Chavara laid the foundation for the Indian Congregation for Women, thereby accelerating the great change that has come about in the status of women. Father Chavara thus represented a major manifestation of the Indian Renaissance which was to raise our underprivileged, alleviate distress and infuse our people with a sense of pride in themselves. It was Father Chavara's unique privilege to do so through the great medium of Christianity. The first President of India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad has observed on the antiquity and significance of Christianity in India as follows:

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

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

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

South India offered hospitality to Christianity from the earliest decades of the Christian era. The consolidation of the Syrian Christian Church in Malabar by Mar Thoma and Mar John in the fifteenth

century; of the Latin Catholic Church by St Francis Xavier in the sixteenth century; of the famous Madurai Mission of Jesuits by Fr. Robert de Nobili in the seventeenth century; the Protestant Mission in Tranquebar under Danish inspiration in the 18th century, the London Mission Society in Travancore in the 19th century and a host of other mission and brethren churches in the following decades, bear this out.

But the establishment of these missions all over India by itself would not have held significance were it not for the fact that the initiators of these activities also started schools and colleges under the aegis of these missions. The educational initiatives of Father Chavara take their place in this distinguished tradition.

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

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

The Christian Community in India though small, has always been in the forefront of all national activities, eminent men of this community have adorned many public offices and private institutions. They have always been in the vanguard of social equality and social reform.

Friends, as you are all aware, India has given unto itself a Constitution which, before mentioning the political freedoms- liberty, equality and fraternity- introduced the concept of "Justice", social, economic and political. Justice was to be paramount. The Constitution

also brought into operation the unique Directive Principles of State Policy which, though not justifiable, were to be “fundamental in the governance of the country”. In pursuance three of these principles the country embarked upon an era of planned development.

But if Constitutions and Plans are to work, there has to be harmony among the people. The national movement tapped our underlying unity and gave political shape to our ancient genius for blending and synthesizing, despite diversity. The partition of India in 1947 has essentially to be viewed as a one-time departure from this process: the debris of a departing empire. But we have witnessed these tendencies and others continue to threaten the unity and integrity of the nation and stability of its political edifice.

Whenever external challenges have threatened us, such as in 1962, 1965 and 1971, Indian unity has blazoned. But without such a stimuli we should be able to stand and pull our weight together in the war we are waging against poverty.

The time now calls for the adoption of shared goals, broad political convictions and attitudes that address themselves to the task of raising the socio-economic levels of our people. In this task, the distinguished Christian community which can trace its origins from the times of St Thomas and De Nobili through the work of Blessed Souls such as Father Chavara right upto present times will doubtless play an important role.

I conclude with an expression of thanks to the organisers for the opportunity afforded to me to participate in this pleasant function. May the faithful of all faiths derive inspiration from the stamp that is released today of the Blessed Soul Father Chavara.

(Speech delivered at Thrivananthapuram, on 20th December 1987,
releasing the commemorative stamp)

PASTORAL LETTER ON THE OCCASION OF THE BI CENTENARY OF THE BIRTH OF BLESSED CHAVARA KURIAKOSE ELIAS

Varkey Cardinal Vithayathil,

Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church

VARKEY CARDINAL VITHAYATHIL, by the Grace of God, the Major Archbishop of Ernakulam - Angamaly, to the Archbishops, Bishops, Priests, Men and Women Religious and Lay Faithful of the Syro-Malabar Church, blessings and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ. Venerable Brothers and Beloved Children,

The 200th *Janmajayanthi* of Blessed Elias Chavara, who made unique contributions to the spiritual and social life of the Church in Kerala, is being concluded on 10th February 2005. By raising Father Chavara, Sister Alphonsa and Sister Mariam Thressia to the rank of the Blessed, the Holy Father has filled the lacuna in the Syro-Malabar Church of not having any person raised to such heights of sanctity proposed officially for public veneration, even after twenty centuries of Christian living.

May I use this occasion to make a special appeal to our venerable bishops, reverend priests, consecrated persons and the entire people of God, to make a study of the relevance of Blessed Chavara in our ecclesial life and to assimilate his lifemodel in our personal life and in the life of our community and the society at large. We can be very happy that the Holy Father has declared this year as the Year of the Eucharist when we celebrate the bicentenary of the birth of Blessed Chavara, a great devotee and apostle of the Eucharist.

Our loving God the Father often sends apt persons in crisis situations to solve them. In the 19th century it was Blessed Chavara whom God sent to propose solutions to the religious, social and cultural problems that affected the Church and the society of that time and to give a new vitality to the people by opening up new avenues of growth.

Blessed Chavara's first priority was to equip the priests and religious to give leadership to the people of God. He supervised the training of priests as *malpan* (master) and examiner for about 42 years from 1829. It was mainly the priests trained by him that stood by him and promoted unity in the Church by wiping out the Roccas schism. For remedying the lack of institutes of consecrated life in the Syro-Malabar Church Blessed Chavara and his companions started two indigenous religious Congregations, the CMI and the CMC.

As part of his educational, social and cultural reforms, Blessed Chavara promoted the starting of schools attached to churches, and provided the depressed and backward sections of the society with the opportunity of studying together with the upper class children, by giving them economic aid such as clothes, books, and noon meals. With this same zeal and vision, Blessed Chavara started the publication of prayer books and Christian literature with the help of a wooden printing press, designed in plantain marrow.

Blessed Chavara took the initiative to lead women, confined mostly to the kitchen, through education and job-oriented activities. The lay confraternity called St. Joseph's Society 'for good Health' and the 'House of the Destitute' for the poor and sick were inspired by his motto – 'service through people's participation'. Blessed Chavara was responding to the great demands of the 19th century Church and society also as the Vicar General, with authority over the Syro-Malabar Church. The various methods and projects Blessed Chavara initiated for the financial self-sufficiency of the Church through lay participation such as *Pidiyari*, *nootikanju*, *kettuthengu*, are methods still relevant today.

It was for the renewal of the family, which is the basic unit of the Church that Blessed Chavara gave the greatest emphasis. He tried to renew families through regular Sunday sermons and parish retreats. "The Testament of a Loving Father" of Blessed Chavara is a guiding light for the families even today. Blessed Chavara's definition of the family has five factors: a good Christian family is similar to heaven. It is a community of people joined together by a bond of blood and love, where the members manifest respect and obedience to elders and walk in peace with the Lord and the people, and seek to attain eternal salvation, living peacefully according to his proper state of life. The children are treasures entrusted to the families by God to sanctify their souls with his precious blood, and make them His ministers in this world, and to return them to Him on the day of final judgment.

These were a few works that Blessed Chavara did for the Church and Society. But what made him great was, above all, his holy life. A great devotee of the Holy Eucharist, of the Blessed Mother and St. Joseph, Blessed Chavara was a man of God and attained lofty heights of mystic prayer. Before he died he could say that he had not lost the grace he received at baptism. His '*Compunction of a Soul*'

(*Athmanuthapam*), '*Spiritual Colloquies*' (*Dhyanasallapangal*) and letters are imbued with his deep God experience.

Blessed Chavara who made such great contribution to our Church and society should always remain a model and inspiration for our life. To realize this objective, it would be very helpful to celebrate the bi-centenary of the birth of Blessed Chavara with appropriate programmes in all our archdioceses, dioceses, parishes and institutions and to conduct pilgrimages to the holy places associated with Blessed Chavara, such as Kainakary, Mannanam, and Koonammavu. Let Blessed Chavara intercede for us.

Wishing you the joy and peace of the birth of Jesus and the New Year, I bless you in the name of the Father + and the Son + and the Holy Spirit +.

Given from the Major Archiepiscopal Curia of the Syro-Malabar Church at Mount St. Thomas on 1st January 2005 .

Varkey Cardinal Vithayathil,
Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church.

A RENAISSANCE LEADER WHO WALKED AHEAD OF HIS TIME

Prof. A. Sreedharamenon

Kerala Historian

Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara was a social leader, a great genius, who was born ahead of his time. A holy light that was farsighted and gifted by the nineteenth century. A social reformer to whom Kerala historians have not done justice.

In modern Kerala history the 19th century was an age of renaissance. Among the leaders of renaissance historians give prominence to Hindu social reformers, like Vaikunddaswamikal, Chattampiswamikal, Sree Narayanaguru and Ayyamkali. Vakkom Abdul Khadar has won recognition as a renaissance leader of the Muslim community. Kerala historians, however, have generally neglected Christian social reformers. By this defect in Kerala history, Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara has not received the recognition that he deserves as a renaissance leader.

To understand the greatness of the reforms of Father Chavara, we need to understand the political and social conditions of Travancore during his age.

Kerala of Father Chavara's Age

The age before Father Chavara was born had great political and social importance in the history of Travancore. In the 18th century Marthanda Varma (1729-'58) conquered the kingdoms neighbouring Venad and made Travancore a great military power. He established a central government and gave leadership for many administrative reforms. He initiated the process of modernising the government set-up. His successor, Dharma Raja (1758-1798), speeded up this process.

The 18th century ended, however, in an atmosphere of political disturbances and discords. One of the reasons for this was the threat of invasion by Tippu Sultan.

In the beginning of the 19th century there was also the challenge of the British overlordship, under the leadership of Veluthampi Dalava. In 1809 this mutiny was suppressed. The king of Travancore during this period was the weak Balarama Varma (1798-1810). The following rulers succeeded: Gauri Lakshmi Bai (1810-1815), Parvathi Bai (1815-1829), Swathi Thirunal (1829-1847), Uthramthirunal Marthanda Varma (1847-1860) and Ayillyam Thirunal (1860-1880).

Father Chavara's life and activities were during this period (1805-1871). This was generally a period of progress for Travancore. It was during this period that the western educational system was introduced and many evil social customs were eliminated. The reforms received greater efficiency when the British Resident Colonel Monroe assumed the office of Devan under Rani Lakshmi Bai. The wheels of government were more modernized.

It was during this period that Protestant missionaries came to Travancore and started their activities. Associations like London Mission Society and Church Mission Society introduced western education by starting educational institutions at important centres like

Nagarcovil, Alapuzha and Kottayam. The Kerala Catholic Church was inactive in this field.

In this context we have also to deal with some general characteristics of Kerala society. Some irrational customs based on the caste system were prevalent here. When the higher castes (Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Nairs and so on) were given greater importance, the lower castes had to suffer great negligence. In the Hindu social structure the principles of freedom, equality and fraternity did not have much place. The higher castes subjected the lower castes to many disabilities. The low castes did not have the freedom to enter temples or do worship; the government jobs were closed to them. They were not given admission to public government educational institutions. They did not have even the right to walk freely along public roads. Untouchability and unseeability remained in force giving a bad name to the Hindu society.

Under these circumstances many low caste people were attracted to Christianity and were converted.

We have to understand a few things also about the Christian community of the time. Since there were many groups among Christians there was no unity among them. There was great rivalry between catholics and non-catholics. There were many divisions even among the catholics. Following the process of Latinization under the Portuguese rule, deep divisions appeared. The Syrians were disturbed by the undue importance given to Latin liturgy. The cry for separate arrangements for the two groups became alive. Even among the Latins the existence of the five hundred party and the seven hundred party resulted in open fight.

Educationally all groups were backward. The reason was the absence of systematic educational institutions. In those days the only schools were the village '*kalaries*' conducted by '*asans*'.

It is in the context of these facts that the life and achievements of Father Chavara have to be evaluated.

1. Indianisation: The Christian community in Kerala, though it was subject to many national and international influences following the division during the Portuguese rule, could make many contributions of its own to Kerala society and culture.

Though Christian in faith, in all other respects they were Keralites with a fundamental national vision. The truth is that they were integrated into the social fabric of the land. In recent times all over India there is great fascination for such a life style. It was Father Chavara who initiated this fascination. He was able to bring the Catholic community to the main stream of Kerala society. It was to assimilate the Indian spiritual wealth that he exhorted his followers. For this he gave importance to the study of Sanskrit and for the purpose started a school. He adopted many practices based on customs among the Hindus. Similar to the nama - kirtanam in Hindu families in the evening, he gave leadership and inspiration to prayer-songs based on the life of Christ. The insistence to replace flowers made with cloth and paper with fresh flowers and to sing good songs in the church, were examples of adopting Indian customs. The many customs he introduced to revitalize the spiritual field were Indian. Some examples are the rosary, reading of the Bible, annual retreat of priests, parish retreats, homily during holy *Kurbana*, prostrations. Many among these are Hindu customs. He insisted that the summary of the Gospel that was read in Syriac should be given in Malayalam.

He wrote many devotional books including minor epics (Ghanda Kavyas). He wrote prayer songs on the life of Christ in the style of *Kilipat* by Ezhuthachan.

He strived to bring to the Catholic Church, the powerful non - Catholic groups in Kerala, especially the Jacobite Syrian Christians.

He argued that this was possible by retaining the special features of the Syrians. This was the beginning of the reunion movement which is an important event in Kerala Church history.

Thus Father Chavara initiated the many-fold changes in the Christian community. Therefore Father Chavara could be called the pole-star of the cultural renaissance of Kerala Christians. Father Chavara took these steps at a time when nobody spoke about national integration which is much acclaimed today.

2. Religious Fellowship, Religious Tolerance: Invaluable are the contributions made by Father Chavara for religious fellowship. While starting places of worship he took into consideration the feelings of the people of the place belonging to other religions. It was because he learned from a Muslim that the Hindus of the place had objections in starting the monastery in a place near to the temple site, he changed the location for starting the monastery to Mannanam. He learned that peace among people was more important than places of worship with stone and wood.

The church at Arthungal much revered by Hindus, might have influenced the incomparable religious tolerance of Father Chavara. For the Hindus of Arthungal in the taluk of Cherthala, St. Sebastian in the Catholic Church is known as 'Veluthachan' ("white father"). The pilgrims to Sabarimala come there, make prayer, and fulfil their vows. I have personally experienced this. This church had some Hindu practices like crawling as a vow. It was in this church that Father Chavara was ordained priest in 1829.

3. De-Centralisation of Authority: With the arrival of the Portuguese the Kerala Catholic Church had a centralized authority structure. The faithful were unsatisfied with this arrangement. Father Chavara realized that de-centralisation would give more efficiency to church activities and promote the spiritual growth of the people. This

led to the division of the churches as into four provinces.

With de-centralisation the financial strength of the church also was made good. Sharing methods like *pidiari* and *noottikanju* were introduced. In each christian family from the rice needed for a day a handful of rice should be kept apart. In each parish out of the net income five percent of money should be set apart for the diocese. It was with money thus collected that schools and hospitals were started.

4. Educational and Social Activities: Father Chavara made valuable contributions to remove the educational backwardness of Kerala. He gave strict instructions that schools should be started attached to all churches. Children in all families should be admitted to schools. He also warned that those churches that failed to do this would be deprived of the power to conduct spiritual services. With this the Catholic Church became very active in the educational field.

Father Chavara took the initiative to provide noon meals to poor children in schools. This step of Father Chavara was the inspiration behind starting such a reform in Travancore. In the note submitted by Divan Sir C. P. Ramaswami Ayer to the king on 1936 November 26, recommending the providing of noon meals for children in government schools, there was a reference that this was a practice followed in Christian institutions.

Father Chavara gave admission to all children with out distinction of caste and creed. We have to remember that this was done at a time when even in government schools admission was denied to low caste and dalit children. Father Chavara also took steps to attract dalit children to schools. To prevent them from dropping out from schools text books, clothes and noon meals were freely provided.

Though the Portuguese had started seminaries for the training of priests, when Father Chavara started his activities, priests continued

to be trained by ‘malpans’ (teacher - priests) on guru-kula style. Syriac, Latin and theology were taught here. Father Chavara who was of the opinion that unlearned priests were of no use, expanded and re-established the seminary system. The seminary at Mannanam was developed as a special seminary for the Syrians. This seminary had the largest building then in central Kerala. Other branch- seminaries were established in several other places.

Father Chavara started a printing press at Mannanam in 1846 to make more useful the spiritual and educational activities of the church, St. Joseph’s press competing with the Protestant press in Kottayam, acquired great fame. Besides printing, arrangements were also made for binding. Printing paper had to be imported from France and Spain. The book first printed from this press was the spiritual book called “Janapeeyoosham”. Later “Nazrani Deepika” also was published from this press. The printing activities was a proof of Father Chavara’s missionary foresight. The history of journalism in Malayalam is indebted to this great genius.

5. Social Welfare Activities: Another field that had the imprint of Father Chavara was social welfare activities. He started houses to give shelter to the destitutes. The name given to the house at Kainakari was *Upavisala*, “House of Destitutes of Mutual Love”! Father Chavara was able to convince that the running of the house was the responsibility of all. Therefore collection of resources was not a problem. He strictly exhorted that alms should not be denied to beggars.

6. Just Wages: In Chavara’s time, the dalits were compelled to work. They were not given just wages. This was considered their obligation. Father Chavara objected to this system. He insisted that just wages should be provided. His view that God is with the poor, is similar to *dharidranarayan* concept of Swami Vivekananda. Father Chavara also proclaimed the glory of not possessing anything.

7. Empowerment of Women : Father Chavara strove also to give women their rightful place in society. It was for this purpose that he floated the idea of a religious congregation for women. His plan was to develop a group of women that would strive for the development of all women. He started many programmes to ensure the freedom, equality and self reliance of women.

Through convents besides education, training in tailoring and handicrafts also was provided. The convents of Carmelite sisters took up these activities, even before the convents in Europe started such activities. Father Chavara inspired those innovations.

8. Moral Code of Conduct: The moral code of conduct that Father Chavara gave for Christian life, is relevant for all societies. They are relevant for all times. As the edicts of Asoka more than a summary of Buddhist code of conduct, are considered a universal moral code, so also Chavara's code may be considered universal. The similarity that this has even in language and style to the edicts of Asoka, has surprised me. Religious tolerance is important in Asoka's edicts. Asoka taught that if you belittle other religions with the desire of promoting one's own, your own religion will be brought to disrepute. Father Chavara's religious tolerance also had this greatness. The following instructions are found in Father Chavara's exhortations. There should be purity and order in daily life, alms should be given to beggars; God is to be seen in the poor, all should uphold moral principles, love, humility, thrift, kindness, justice, fear of God; duties towards parents, respect towards elders should be practised; things not belonging to you should be returned to the owner. Father taught that a house that kept stolen goods would be destroyed by fire.

At a time when stories of abuse of children were unheard of Father Chavara gave warnings about this. He reminded much care

should be taken in sending children to the houses of relatives. He recalled that there were situations when children who went to the houses of relatives like angels, returned home like devils.

9. Interest in History: Father Chavara really understood the importance of preserving historical documents. The chronicles that he wrote from 1829 to 1870 are important documents in the history of the church.

It is when we remember that in both ancient India and Kerala there was no interest in history and historical documents and that history consisted of fabricated stories and legends, we understand that the interest Father Chavara had in historical documents, was beyond his age.

10. Conclusion: I feel sorrow for not having been able to study more deeply about Father Chavara whom I have often met in studying and writing about Kerala history. This note is meant at least in part to remove that sorrow.

Historians have failed in evaluating the life and achievements of Father Chavara. The history of the Kerala renaissance used to be limited to certain Hindu associations and reformers. People like Father Chavara should be given the place they deserve.

The message, life and achievements of Father Chavara were not exclusively of the Catholic community. They are relevant for all communities and all ages. Father Chavara was undoubtedly a great man who lived ahead of his time.

(Taken from Chavarayachan (Malayalam), a Deepika Publication, Kottayam, 2004)

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- ²⁸ Sreedhara Menon A., Social and Cultural History of India, Kerala, New Delhi, 1979, p. 281.
- ²⁹ Sreedhara Menon A., Social and Cultural History of India, Kerala, 290.
- ³⁰ Sreedhara Menon A., Social and Cultural History of India, Kerala, 287.
- ³¹ Valerian C. D., Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan, 13.

- ³² Sreedhara Menon A., Social and Cultural History of India, Kerala, 299.
- ³³ Sreedhara Menon A., Social and Cultural History of India, Kerala, 297-299.
- ³⁴ Placid. Bartholomew and Romeo, The Carmelite Congregation of Malabar, Mannanam, 1931, 56.
- ³⁵ Chronicles, CWC, Vol. 1, 162.
- ³⁶ Herald of the East, vol. I, 1992 No.3, CMI PG House, Ernakulam 81-87
- ³⁷ With regard to the date of birth of Blessed Chavara, different dates appear in print. Fr.Chavara himself, in 1864, had given to Fr.Leopold Beccaro ocd. (*then provincial delegate of the Congregation*) a written script of names of the members with their dates of birth (*Chronicle Vol.I, St.Joseph Monastery, Mannanam, p.59*). Accordingly Fr. Leopold has given the necrology of the members in his personal diary, where the date of birth of Chavara is recorded as February 10. We consider this more authentic.
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- ⁴⁰ Literary Works, CWC, vol;. II, verses 88-104
- ⁴¹ *Positio*, CMI Special, Achieves of St. Joseph's Monastery; Mannanam 28, CWC, Vol.II, ch.I, verses 132-140, Mannanam 1981
- ⁴² *Positio*, 50-51
- ⁴³ *Positio*, 57
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- ⁴⁵ CWC, vol. I, 26
- ⁴⁶ See also Brief Biography of Kuriakose Elias Chavara written by Fr.Leopold Beccaro, as an introduction to *Athmanuthapam*, written in 1871, Reprint, Mannanam 1970, 2
- ⁴⁷ Chronicle, St.Joseph Monastery, Mannanam, vol.I, 1-14 written by Bro.Jacob Kanianthara, CWC, Vol. 1, 2, 3
- ⁴⁸ CWC, vol. I, 1. Fr. Chavara while narrating the history of the foundation of the Congregation uses the terms 'Thapasu Bhavanam' and 'Darsana Veedu', which have great significance in the Christian oriental and Indian traditions.
- ⁴⁹ Chronicle, CWC, Vol.1, 3

- 50 Chronicle, CWC, Vol.1, 24-25
- 51 Although history records of indigenous religious institutes started in olden times by Archdeacon George and also Fr. Britto of the Society of Jesus, none of them survived after their death.
- 52 CWC, Vol. I, 208
- 53 CWC, Vol. I, 55, 76
- 54 CWC, Vol. I, 77, 78; Valerian, Chavara Kuriakose Eliasachan, 109.
- 55 Fr Chavara, in the testament writes: "*The Founders of this Congregation, the Rev. Frs Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara were praying and organizing this community on the model of the Order of St. Dominic. So it was that we were wearing the white habit, which was quite uncommon here*"(CWC, vol. IV, letters, Mannanam, 1982, 99)CWC, Vol. I, 130
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- 58 CWC, Vol. I, 84 ff.
- 59 Chronicles, St. Joseph Monastery Mannanam, vol.III; 130; *Positio*, 449, 501
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- 63 CWC, Vol. 1, 177
- 64 CWC, Vol. 1, 196-201; *positio*, 242
- 65 CWC, Vol. 1, 206; *positio*, 201, 243
- 66 Fr. Varkey Parapuram, Chronicles, 1420 ff. *Positio*, 441
- 67 Fr. Leonard Moolayil cmi, The Last Years of Kuriakose Elias Chavara (ms); *Positio*, 548, Varkey Parappuram, 1421
- 68 CWC, Vol. I, 33; Valerian, Kuriakose Eliasachan, 81
- 69 CWC, Vol. I. 46 ; *Positio*, 81
- 70 *Arch diocese of Changanasserry yesterday and today, (ed) Changanassery, 1998. 102*

- 71 *Positio*, 275 ff.;Fr. Bernard of St.Thomas, Brief History of the CMI congregation, (Reprint 1989), 286
- 72 *Sthapaka Pithakanmar*, Mannanam 1905, p.37;
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- 74 Bernard of St.Thomas CMI, P.26; CWC, Vol. 1,44;
- 75 Varkey Parapurath, Chronicle, Mannanam, Vol. 2, 1474
- 76 Chronicle of Mannanam, Vol. 3, 1864-71, 90
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- 79 *Positio*, 200; CWC, Vol. IV, 5-9; 28, 29; 83-85.
- 80 CWC, Vol. IV, 29
- 81 CWC, Vol. 1, 126
- 82 CWC, 126, 127
- 83 CWC, Vol. I, 243.
- 84 CWC, Vol. IV, 153-163
- 85 CWC, Vol. 1, 115 ff; 164
- 86 There was Fr. Gerard Beccaro, the missionary with him.
- 87 CWC. Vol. I, 165, 166
- 88 Fr. Mathai Mariam Palakunnel refers to the letter written to him by Fr. Chavara in this regard, in the former's diary (Diary, pp-70-73.), Manuscript at Dharmaram, Bangalore. See the letter which Fr. Chavara wrote to Fr. Palakunnel in the matter in *Positio*, pp.314-315
- 89 Golden records, CMI Special, Archives of St. Joseph's Monastery, Mannanam.
- 90 Chronicles of St.Joseph Monastery, Mannanam, vol. III,(1864-1871), p. 26; Fr. Placid CMI etc., The Carmelite Congregation of Malabar,(1831-1931)Trichinopoly 1932, p.57; See also *Positio*, 277-278
- 91 CWC, vol. I, 68-70
- 92 CWC, vol. I, 183 ff.
- 93 CWC, Vo. I, 122 ff.
- 94 CWC, vol.IV, Testament of Chavara, 102

- 95 cwc, Vol. II, 5
96 cwc, Vol. I, 236
97 Chronicle of Mannanam Vol. III, 47
98 cwc, Vol. I, 52; Vol. IV, 128
99 cwc, Vol. IV, 153-163
100 cwc, Vol. III, 15,16
101 Leopold M.B., Brief Biography, 11, 3
102 Antonius Petti, Promoter Generala of Faith, Relatio et vota, (Trans), Fr. Lucas Vithuvattickal, Perspectives of a Heroic Christian life, Mannanam, 1988, 98, 99; 119, 120.
103 Fr. Varkey Parapuram, Chronicles, 1421
104 Leopold M.B., Kuriakose Elias Chavara, Mannanam, 1970, 12, 13.
105 Liturgical committee for papal reception, Namakarana Thirukarmangal, Kottayam, 1986, 27, 28.
106 Chavara's writings in 4 volumes called the collected works of Chavara (C.W.C.)
107 *Guru* is the spiritually integrated teacher in the Indian spiritual tradition.
108 Positio, 52, 54, 551
109 cwc, Vol. 111, 19 ff
110 cwc, Vol. 111, 13
111 cwc, Vol. 11, 51(156-160)
112 cwc, Vol. 11, 51-57
113 Maurelius K., Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara, Mannanam, 1970, 29
114 Leopold M. B., Brief Biography, 9
115 Deepika daily, supplement, Kottayam, 8th February 1986,4.

A PEARL TRULY INDIAN

BLESSED KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA

FR. THOMAS PANTHAPLACKAL CMI



"No apostolic cause was dearer to the heart of this great man of faith than that of the unity and harmony within the Church. Today the Church solemnly recalls with love and gratitude all his efforts to resist threats of disunity and to encourage the clergy and faithful to unity with the See of Peter and the universal Church."

Pope John Paul II



"It is well over a hundred years since Father Chavara left us. And yet he is a living inspiration for thousands and thousands of persons. He is gratefully remembered as a profound scholar, an educationist, a builder of institutions for the underprivileged, the illiterate, the destitute and the needy."

Mr. R. Venkataraman - Former President of India



"Our loving God the Father often sends apt persons in crisis situations to solve them. In the 19th century it was Blessed Chavara whom God sent to propose solutions to the religious, social and cultural problems that affected the Church and the society of that time and to give a new vitality to the people by opening up new avenues of growth."

Varkey Cardinal Vithayathil - Major Archbishop of Syro-Malabar Church



"Historians have failed in evaluating the life and achievements of Father Chavara. The history of the Kerala renaissance used to be limited to certain Hindu associations and reformers. People like Father Chavara should be given the place they deserve. Father Chavara was undoubtedly a great man who lived ahead of his time."

Prof. A. Sreedharan - Kerala Historian